

Archie Green: AG
Tracie Wilson: TW

Tracie Wilson: Okay, so the question I was going to ask you had to do with aesthetics, since you talked a bit about your taste and what you consider really traditional and what is more, I don't know, copying or derivative of folk music.

Archie Green: Yeah.

TW: So, I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about just general your attitude or philosophy about traditional music or traditionality versus innovation. And I guess I'm wondering about things like, is there a place for someone, where do you place someone like Woody Guthrie? Is he traditional or is he somewhere in between? Or in your mind, is it okay that people, you know, have this innovation, but they shouldn't be calling it folk music then? Or just kind of what your thinking is along those lines.

AG: Well, as a folklorist, I know that the process of change is the only thing that's fixed, changes, goes on all of the time. Changes in demography, in technology, in nationality, in values. There is no pure folk society, and there never was. It's obvious that at one time, peasant society was relatively stable, that is, lasting hundreds of years in face-to-face communities. You know, anthropologists postulate a kind of edenic traditional society of small face-to-face interaction, a kinship, that's very important, maybe 2 or 300 people that are all related in some way to each other, but not so small. The group has to be big enough so that incest doesn't occur. The group can be genetically dispersed, but not so big as to encounter other groups. And that kind of stability will lead to a consistent language and consistent culture. But it changes over time, but it changes slowly. Or most anthropologists will say the change in folk society or traditional society is so slow that it's imperceptible to people in any given generation. But if you study it over hundreds of years, you can study the change.

Now, of course, one of the hallmarks of modernity, at least since the rise of the national state and the Industrial Revolution first in Western Europe and then eventually all over the world, so that with now, even the most primitive societies, using primitive as anthropologists use the term not pejorative, in deepest Africa or in Melanasia or in Borneo, industrialism and mass communication is penetrated. So that anthropologists tell you they go to a village in Borneo and the guy is listening, working a computer, listening to a British Broadcasting Company. So there's a fantastic interpenetration of cultures now.

All right, that's enough academic. So I think of the term folk society as a norm or an ideal. There I would derive from Redfield. Is it Robert Redfield? You know, peasant society in Central America with some stability and some consistency in language and literature. And I don't apply values to it. It isn't good or bad. It just is and it will be changed. And politically or morally, you value some of the change and disvalue or disapprove of other change. For instance, one of my students went to North Africa and the childbirth was very difficult. She studied the women's customs and she was, this anthropologist was unsympathetic to the attitudes and the customs on childbirth in a male-dominated society and so on and so she welcomed change. But there were contradictions. She wanted the villagers in this North Africa to have the best of modern science,

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but she wanted them to retain old language and old literature. You know, there's a contradiction that's very difficult to resolve.

But anyhow, here in America and in terms of my views on folk culture, I recognize that change is inevitable. Change will always occur and there will be a Kingston Trio that will supplant a traditional trio. And that's inevitable. *But* it doesn't mean that I have to like the Kingston Trio. So I can understand intellectually that folk song changes. Before the Kingston Trio, there were popular singers of folk songs, Susan Reed in the 1930s, Burl Ives, you know, folk song has always been popularized. People like it and want it more palatable, but some people dislike it. So in my aesthetic, I opt for the deepest layers of tradition.

I'll illustrate it with a story. Sarah Gunning was invited, or Sarah Gunning traveled to Newport to the Newport Folk Festival. Ralph Rinser invited her one year. And Sarah came back and came to Illinois and I visited with her and I said, "Sarah, how did you like Newport?" I've told this story many times, so it's probably in print someplace and probably in purer form than I can describe it now. And she said she liked Newport. She had a good time. "And did you meet any of the people there?" "Oh, yes. I met Bob Dylan and I met Joan Baez and I met Peter, Paul and Mary." "And what did you think of them?" "Oh, they're fine young people." "And did you have any chance to hear Joan Baez?" "Yes." Sarah was kind of reserved. I said, well, what's, I don't know what I said, but what's happening or what did you think of Joan Baez? And she gave a classic answer. She said, "Well, Joan Baez is a nice young lady, but she doesn't know how to sing." And wow, I was taken aback because Joan Baez was on the cover of Time magazine and 7 million people thought of her as a queen of folk song. And then Sarah said very wisely, "Well, if I had about 3 weeks with Joan Baez, I could teach her how to sing." Meaning she would listen to me, and she could learn the nuances of Appalachian style. So Sarah's ear told her that Joan Baez was something was off, whether it was technical, off key or off balance, but she didn't sound right. So in that sense, I believe that.

That's why I value Mike Seeger more than Pete Seeger. I've told you that. I think that Pete Seeger's is part of the Pete, the Weavers, the Almanac Singers led to the Weavers led to the Kingston Trio. Pete's, it's ironic and it makes Pete unhappy that his ultimate role is to pablumize folk song, to be part of the process of watering down. That's mass culture and he doesn't like that. He wants to be known as a folk singer who taught Americans, you know, which side are you on? Pete prides himself on his radical message. And I think the message in this age has been forgotten and will be forgotten, but Pete's style will contribute to the trivialization and the pablumization of folk music.

But on the other hand, Mike Seeger, who doesn't sing radical lyrics, but Mike Seeger is paying attention to vernacular style or Appalachian style or folk style, traditional style. You know, I use those terms interchangeably, that will persist, that as long as there are minorities in America, as long, until we become a transnational, unified, solidified monoculture, some people would want us to be that. George Bush believes in that, Dick Cheney believes in that, and Dick Dorson believed in that. And they're all phony as far as I'm concerned. Now, as long as we have an

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Appalachian identity, New England identity, Cajun identity, Hmong refugee identity, as long as we have regional differences, economic differences, social differences, then the differences are valued. And if a few people retain, say, Cajun music and can keep that traditional style going and keep some youngsters to learn that style, or let's put the change will be inevitable, but let's put it this way: there's a melting pot that represents change.

What does a melting pot produce? You know, high energy steel? High, pure steel. But in addition, the melting pot produces slag and the slag is discarded. It's waste. What do you do with the slag? They use it on a railway right of way for it to bed down the tracks. And when the train goes by and people use a toilet in the train, all of the excrement and the urine goes onto the slag and it's dissolved in the slag. And the purpose of the slag, it isn't high metal. You don't use it on building the Golden Gate Bridge. You use it for railroad right of way. That's the way mass culture thinks of the minority culture. But so what I want to do, to change, I'm throwing too many metaphors at you, reduce the flame under the melting pot. If I can't do any, I can't stop the watering down or of melting, but I can reduce the flame.

And one way to reduce the flame is to give people in Appalachia or in Cajun land or Mississippi Delta, give cultural minorities access to the printing press, recording apparatus, the computer now. In a plural society, every cultural group's language and literature would be treasured. Say in American Indians. So many Indian languages have been lost. That's a tremendous human loss. The guy that understood that was Del Himes, a big anthropologist, president of the Folklore Society, and he supported the folklore bill. So if you value the particularity or singularity of each of our component plural cultures, then you like the style that goes with those cultures and you value the exponents of those styles. That's my aesthetic. That's why I've often said, like if Bill Oakes or Bob Dylan or Pete Seeger would come and give a free concert in the church across the street, I wouldn't attend but I'd go 1000 miles to hear Sarah Gunning.

Here's how you can tell what I like, because I've issued it on records, not many, but Dorsey Dixon, Babies in the Mill. I want you to listen to those records. Judy has them. Listen to Glenn Orlin, Hellbound Train. Listen to Sarah Gunning. That's a start, and we could develop the list aesthetically in blues, but yesterday I pointed out there was a band of aficionados of old-time music, blues, hillbilly, Cajun, Klezmer, Kaylee bands, you know, Dick Spotswood. He's in Florida now, a discographer. Mike Seeger is a performer. Chris Brackwitz, a record producer, as a record producer in the East, Dick something, Schonecki Records. What's his, you know his name? The guy that had Schonecki Records. I got to look at his name. But Judy McCullough is in that group. I'm in that group. Jarvis is in that group. You know, the folksong club, that was in that group. That group still, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* I don't know the people who produce that. Some guy, T-Bone Walker or something. I don't know the guys. T-Bone Burnett, I don't know him. But the people that, or Gillian Welch sings in that tradition now. This, our group is, we're not dominant. We're not Britney Spears. We don't have a mass audience, but that's okay.

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Now, the difficult, it's easy to recognize Sarah Gunning and Joan Baez, they're platonic exemplars of the traditional singer, the singer, the interpreter coming from the outside. But there are many figures in between that are difficult, and Woody Guthrie happens to be one. Now, what I should refer you to, say you want to study in this area, you want to go back to Charles Seeger, Pete and Mike's father, the great musicologist, probably the greatest musicologist in America. And Charles Seeger was faced with this problem very early. And in his reviews in the JAF, he reviewed some folk records in 1947. He reviewed the Almanac Singers and doing hillbilly songs and so on. And he came up with a formula of a folk, a folk singer, and then hillbilly, which was one step into the watering down process or into mass culture, and citybilly was a next step, and concert was a final step. So on this array of initials, FHBCBC, it could be made into a paradigm, I think you call it a model or template, a vertical ascent, you go from folk to concert, you go up the ladder.

And an example would be Maria Talchi. She was an Indian, probably an Indian gal, and then she became a ballet dancer and she went from tribal customs to a concert in one generation. And then you have like Pete Seeger, who's a Bach and Harvard and well-educated, and he goes down to folk in one generation. But in the sense that he's like Maria, he made it as a folk singer, and she made it as a ballet dancer. But the difference is that Maria Tallchief always genetically retained her Indianness. So even though she became a concert singer, she was still partially an American Indian. But Pete, does that make sense? Well, you don't give up all of your environment or all of your inheritance. But here I'm hitting at the difference that Charles Seeger worked out. That Pete Seeger, when he became a folk singer, or partially a folk singer, he never became an Appalachian native. Genetically, he was always a Harvard student, and he still is. Just as I'm the child of Jewish immigrants from the Ukraine. Along with my genetic genes, I inherited a certain ideology that's still with me, just as Jarvis is an inheritor of an Irish tradition.

Anyhow, when Charles Seeger had the problem of reviewing his The Almanac Singers, he identified his son Pete as a citybilly because Pete could never become a hillbilly or a folk. In other words, the question of identity intersects with the status, where you are and what you are. Now, Woody Guthrie has a special case. Although Woody Guthrie today is a platonic folk singer and worshiped as such and mythologized as such, as a quintessential lonesome traveler and the hobo and the little man and you know, books are written about him as songs. But I take a, I don't take that view.

Now I have two criticisms. I don't want to shock the listeners. I have two criticisms of Woody Guthrie. I don't like his politics because he never was a genuine populist. In 1938 or so, when Woody Guthrie came to California, he fell in with a group of people that wrote for *People's World*, a communist. There was a West Coast equivalent of *The Daily Worker*. And Woody was strongly influenced by a guy on television. I wish the name would come to me. Grandpa, it was Walton. He played Grandpa Walton on television. I wrote about him in my case study of "Let Them Wear Their Watches Fine." He's a guy that brought that from left-wing culture into the folk song revival. Will Gere, Will Gere. Yeah, ever hear of him? Will Gere. Woody Guthrie became influenced. He fell in with that crowd, and they hailed him as a, he was radical, and

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they hailed him as a spokesman of the unwashed proletariat. He was Tom Joad, he was every man, he was Walt Whitmanesque.

Well, actually, Woody Guthrie was a chameleon, and he learned to play, if these people and their values wanted a left-wing folk singer, he was a genius when writing, well then, he would write lyrics that they would accept. When the left discovered Lead Belly and Woody Guthrie, they both used the left, but the difference is that the left never won Lead Belly over, but they won Woody Guthrie over. And Woody Guthrie became a Stalinist in my vocabulary, hook, line, and sinker, and never repudiated the values of Joseph Stalin. That's a hard thing to say. And I've been severe, I admit, I hope you don't use this. I shouldn't, I don't know if I can trust you or not. But anyhow.

TW: If you don't want me to, I can put it somewhere obscure.

AG: No, it's not a matter. Other people have heard me say it. I don't think it would do any good in a program or an article or broadcast because it's so hard to explain and there's let time, time will solve the problem. But anyhow, in his style, here's I've challenged a lot of students to study Woody Guthrie's style.

Now, Woody Guthrie grew up in Oklahoma, and we have other people of the period who grew up in Oklahoma and sang. They made records in the 30s. They had a certain style, and Woody Guthrie doesn't have that style. He has an idiosyncratic, high, lonesome style. It's sort of a whiny style that has later been adopted by Bob Dylan. And it has become the official, if there is an official folk style now that's accepted by the bourgeoisie, it's a Dylan whiny style. It has nothing to do with true Appalach. It's not Dorsey Dixon and Sarah Gunning, but it's Bruce Springsteen, Bob Dylan, and Woody Guthrie and all of their lousy imitators. And I think they're doing a disservice to folk music.

But anyhow, when Woody Guthrie must have sung in that Okie style because in 1935, he appeared at the Texas Centennial. They had a big exposition and there's a photograph of a string band of six or seven musicians lined up. They're in a row. They have their guitars and fiddles. And without having a soundtrack, what I would expect a student to do, to go back to other string band music of that period. And it's a period when the Oklahoma and Texas string bands were moving out of Appalachian string bands into Western swing. It's a transition between, but it had a distinct sound and it wasn't whiny. And Guthrie must have sounded, if he was good enough to play in that string band, he must have sounded like that.

He came to Los Angeles, and he started appearing on a progressive radio station. He had a program and he met a communist from Berkeley and the guy liked Woody Guthrie. And Woody Guthrie started developing his protest style, his unique style that he passed on to Bob Dylan. And that style, I'd say that it's unique because there's no one else in Oklahoma then who sang like that. Now college kids in Oklahoma sing like Woody Guthrie because they think that they're going back to the truth.

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You know what that reminds me of? When I was collecting, I went down to Atlanta and I went to a nightclub and there was a little Kingston Trio type in the nightclub and the guys are singing Tom Dooley and they're imitating, they're just like UCLA students imitating this Appalachian style. And I asked these guys, "Where are you from?" Well, they're born in Atlanta. This was in the intermission. And then I asked them, "Well, don't you know any Atlanta songs?" I said, "Well, name one." And they said, oh, you know, it was on a phonograph record. Damn it, I just, the names, when I had the stroke, it hit the nerve that teaches me names. Oh, it's a blues. It's a Georgia blues. That's traditional around Atlanta. Maybe we'll think of the name. But I asked them if they knew that song. And they became distinctly, they said, "Oh, that's a hillbilly song." And I said, "Well, what do you think that Tom Dooley is?" "Oh, that's a folk song." And in the, see, learning Tom Dooley third hand from the Kingston Trio that got it from Frank Popford in the mountains, that was a folk song. But this blues, this hillbilly blues hadn't yet, "Columbus Stockade Blues," you know that, don't you? Yeah, so, but those distinctions are important, and that's an actual incident. And another guy was with me, he was dead now, Ed Kahn, but-

TW: When was it? I mean more or less.

AG: Oh, I could tell you exactly, it would have been in '61 or '62 when I first. See, when I made the transition to, remember, when I was in San Francisco, I worked because our work was in the summertime. That's where I made a living and I wouldn't take a day off. And I had never been in the East. The first time I went east was when I joined the Navy and I went through the Big Bend Tunnel. I wrote, oh, that was exciting. That was my introduction to Appalachia. But after I went to Illinois, and then it was in '61, '62, '63, every summer I would go down to Apple. I'd take a field trip. And you know, there, oh, I don't know. Where the hell I put it? There's a current magazine, *Old Time Herald*, and it has a picture of me and Jean Earle, Dorsey Dixon. And we're sitting outside of sort of a picnic table. We're collecting from him at the woolen sack, and it's dated '61 or '62. Well, on one of those trips, we were in Atlanta, and that's when we, I think we recorded Jimmy Tarleton, who later came to Illinois.

But my aesthetic, everyone knows what I like and dislike, and I'm not ashamed of it. But I don't try to pretend that it's the whole of vernacular music or even the best of it. I like it. But if I'm a pluralist, I want to be free to enjoy what I like, but not at the expense of driving up. If Woody Guthrie wants to sing, if Phil Oakes wants to sing, if Bob Dylan, they have a right to sing, they can make- this a free society. And Michael Jackson is free to sing, and so is Britney Spears. But don't exclude Sarah Gunning.

Anyhow, my aesthetic was, it was formed a long time ago when I was about six or seven years old listening to the radio. I told you when it started, when I heard Vernon Dalhart, the record of "The Old 97" and "The Prisoner Song." They were a flip songs. They were both sides of a Victor record. By today's standard, they were not, Vernon Dalhart was not deep tradition. But then to a youngster growing up in California and categorizing, you know, when do you begin to categorize music? When you hear the music of your childhood, if that's the only music

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you hear, that's the domain If you're taken to church or parades, but on the radio, now a child can hear world music. But then we heard classical music, big suite bands, Paul Whiteman, jazz. Jazz was white hotel jazz. We didn't hear in 1925 and '26 in California we didn't hear blues. That was in the East.

The market was, and the country music was called cowboy music. So if a guy had a fiddle or a guitar or a string band or came from Oklahoma or Appalachia or actually worked on a ranch, it was cowboy music. And that was a category I used for Vernon Dellhart, Carl Sprague, Haywire Mac, the Carter Family, Bob Wills. It wasn't until I was in college in the '30s that I would go to folksong concerts, and I would hear people like Richard Dyer Bennett, who sang in a high falsetto, he sang "Waltzing Matilda" that he learned in Australia. My ear would tell me that this guy was phony, that this didn't sound like hillbilly music or like folk music. So I've always equated folk music with the deepest layers of tradition.

TW: Was there a time when you were exposed to do Yiddish music at all?

AG: You know, that's a good question because my mother would, later, I would have to recognize that my mother was by any standard a traditional folk singer because she was Yiddish, she grew up in the Ukraine, she was musically illiterate, self-trained, and she had a beautiful voice, really beautiful. And she could sing Russian folk songs and Yiddish folk songs and Ukrainian folk songs. And she learned some songs in English, and I can date when she stopped learning because she knew "Alexander's Ragtime Band" as a ragtime piece. And the latest song in her living repertoire, she sang a song about Charlie Chaplin, King of France, or something "Charlie Chaplin likes to dance." It was a parody of, I think about World War I. But then she stopped learning songs. Now, my mother sang to us as we were kids, and I even know some of the titles. She sang a Ukrainian song that later appeared as a pop song. "Mother, may I go out swimming? Yes, my darling daughter. Hang your clothes on a hickory limb, but don't go near the water." Is that familiar with you? If you can ever locate that song, I bet Judy would know it. It's a mournful, I wish I could sing It's a mournful, sort of a modal, you know, Slavic folk song.

And there was a period when Yiddish and Russian songs were becoming popular in New York, like, oh, the Theo Bekel and Benny Goodman. Benny Goodman would do a, oh, something, a song about when the angel sings or angel dances that was set to a Yiddish tune. Oh, Cab Callaway did a song. This will kill you. Said you know some Yiddish?

TW: Yeah.

AG: Are you, what is your background?

TW: Mostly German.

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AG: Yeah, well, it's low German. There was a Yiddish song, "Ota Zoi Nate Der Taylor," or Schneider. Ota Zoi, in this manner, sews the tailor, or the tailor sews. That's a Yiddish folk song, and Cab Calloway sang it. He turned it into a big band jazz. It's on a record now, and I love to play it.

TW: It's translated to English though, right?

AG: Yeah, in English, but he, no, he was, he sang it in alternate stanzas, Yiddish and English.

TW: Really? Interesting.

AG: Yeah, he was, many black musicians could, were close to the Jewish community because Jews had stores in Harlem County and often the blacks were employed for unorthodox Jews that couldn't work on the Sabbath. They couldn't light a fire, and they would have to hire a servant. So certain black guys got into Jewish life and learned to eat Jewish meals. That was in the days before there was black anti-Semitism or black, you know, anti-Israel that's so prevalent now.

But anyhow, my mother would sing "Vulga Boatman," you know, and the great Russian baritone, no, not Basso, Shalopin, you ever hear of him? He's in the encyclopedia. About 24 or 25, he was still alive and he would come on tour in America and my sisters and I were taken to the concerts. See, the point about Jewish working class life, even though they were poor, you were saying you were cultured or not cultured, the world of culture was open to us. That is, we didn't think there was any contradiction between us being a harness maker's child or a tailor's child. My uncle was a tinsmith, sheet metal worker. We didn't, that's what you did for a living, but if you wanted to go to hear Shelly Appin, or if you wanted to go to the opera or the symphony, you just went. And Shelly Appin would sing this Russian folk song, "Volga boat man," you know, that's the guys going up, pulling the barges up the river.

But anyhow, I didn't know that my mother was a traditional folk singer until I went, after college, when I became, I collected, I listened to hillbilly music and Hall Johnson Choir and collected records. And I didn't begin to study folklore until the '50s. And in the 1950s, that's when I began to compile a whole discography before I arrived in Illinois. And in that period, I somehow began reading enough and I recognized, but my mother was dead by then. And I asked my father about it. He lived to be 96, so my dad was amused. And I said, "Did you know that something was happening to me when I was getting interested in folklore?" He said, "Yeah, I knew about it, but I was just amused." This is my father speaking. I said, "Well, why were you amused?" "Because I knew that it would not lead you any place."

He didn't reject I because he was bourgeois. He didn't care if I made a living or not. He didn't press upon me to be a doctor or lawyer or professor. If I wanted to be a shipwright, that was okay with him. Just as when sometimes David and Derek say, "Well, why are you an electrician? Why aren't you an electrical engineer?" And David would say, "Well, I'm an

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electrician because I became an electrician.” I mean, he doesn't feel that he's inferior. Thank God.

Anyhow, I was asking my dad about folklore and my dad said, yeah, when he was a boy, he used to listen, he used a German term, Gassen singer, like street singer. And I said, “How did you know that term? He said, “Well there were books about it and there were collections of Russian folk songs or street singers.” And I said, “How come you never told me any of that?” He said, well, he said, “I didn't tell you everything that I knew.” And you know, you don't ever learn your parents' complete repertoire. But so I asked my dad, “Did you think of my mother?” That was Rose. “Did you think of Rose as a folk singer?” He said, no, he just took it for granted.

But she knew like “Rozhinke smit Mandlen,” that's Yiddish for raisins and almonds. And she, oh, there were a lot of Jewish folk songs were very sad that dealt with “Mayn Yingele,” that's my little boy. It's a father in a garment industry and he works in a sweatshop from morning till night and it's emotional. And he comes home, his child is asleep.

TW: Yeah, go ahead.

AG: Okay, I was telling you about David Wisnant. He was from Appalachia and he was, he studied a little psychiatry and asked me if I ever had conflict with my parents and I said no, that I thought my dad and mom were okay and he didn't believe me. It's on a tape in North Carolina. But you know, I valued my dad's intellect, and I valued my mother's good heartedness and generosity and cleanliness. Our house was impeccable. She was a, the term is. My mother hated smoking. No one can bring an ashtray into the house. I don't know if this is valuable to you-

TW: No go ahead, just keeping talking.

AG: But maybe it'll be valuable to you somehow. But you want to focus on, if you could let me intervene in your life, you want to write an article on the Campus Folk Song Club. If you interview all the people we've mentioned, you'll have a good paper, good book.

TW: It starts. I don't know, but I think it's fine. Some got it over there. So I don't know if it's the battery. It starts and it just.

AG: It's all right, we can take a little break.

TW: Okay, go ahead.

AG: Well, I'll start again, isn't it? You ought to meet, go down when you go down the chapel. Hello? We'll go on with a Dave Wisnat memory. When Wisnat interviewed me for the archives at North Carolina, it came to the relationship with my parents. And did I, was I disliked? Did I hate them? No. I thought we had a good family and everything was groovy and he couldn't

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believe it. It's impossible. We're, you know, it defies the Freudian laws of human nature, but I said I don't remember any conflict. I don't. Dad never spanked the kids. My mother never spanked us. We were not severely punished, but we were encouraged to believe in good work and honesty and cultural work. And as I said, my mother's house wasn't, the term is balabusta. I think that's a Russian term for a good housewife. And my mother literally, didn't I tell you the anecdote that when we received our first radio, this would have been about 1925, as near as I can tell, it was a battery set. In those days, like an automobile, huge battery was under the console and the battery leaked acid onto the floor, hardwood floor, maybe a pine floor, but it destroyed the shellac or the varnish and my mother was incensed and would have thrown the radio out because the music was fun, but the clean floor was funner. And so that's a memory that I had in childhood and used.

And it's, I think, so until my mother died young, but until her death, her house, she was good, all of the virtues of a Jewish mother without any of the defects in terms of the stereotype of the mother being overbearing or dominant. She sang at her work and she loved to cook and bake. And when I cook now, I cook the same thing she cooked, soups. But anyhow, on the, when I broke up on that memory of "Mayn Yingele," it's a sweat shop worker who comes home, his child is asleep, and he is remorseful because he goes to work in the morning, his child is asleep. And it's against capitalism, the boss, capitalism, free enterprise, George Bush. It's so evil that it denies his child the chance to know his father and the father to know his child. It's a tearjerker, like many hillbilly tearjerkers. And I think Theo Bekell sings it.

But my mother had a huge repertoire. And I'll give these examples of Olga Boatman, Russian and the Ukrainian song, "My Darling Daughter," "Hanger," and Yiddish songs and American English songs, Charlie Chaplin. But growing up, I never made the connection between her songs and cowboy songs. They were both singing. I knew that they were parallel, but I never thought of it. Folk song was not a connecting concept to connect her homegrown, unaccompanied, untutored singing around the household. And the music I heard on the radio, it was exotic in the sense that I was an urban child. I didn't grow up on a ranch. I didn't grow up in Appalachia. I didn't grow up in the mountains. And all of this country music that we now call country music appealed to me.

Now, here's a difficult question for you and any folklorist. Why of the three or four musics I heard, the Yiddish music, the classical music, the hotel big band jazz, and then cowboy music. Why did I like cowboy music aesthetically? Why did it appeal to me? And in all of the years that I've studied folklore, that's the hardest question to answer. I know that children like the music of their family. If they have a good family life, Mexican or Russian or American, but when they begin to hear other musics, and that's only possible in a plural society, 100 years ago, Appalachian children didn't hear any foreign music, but now they can. But anyhow, when you are exposed to foreign music, and in our case it was with the radio, why do you like one over the other? And I don't know if that is an aesthetic question or a political question, if certain music sounds sad and appealing. I know that today when I listen to music on the radio, there's a lot of music I can't understand now in terms of it's too fast or too loud or too jazzy or too

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something. But why, why the propensity to hillbilly music? I can't explain, and maybe you'll get it from other people.

But I want to tell you, this is how it impacted me, because I can still remember the lyrics and the melodies of the early songs. And I'll give you an obscure one. "When they cut down the old pine tree and they hauled it away to the mill, they made a coffin of pine for that sweetheart of mine, oh, they cut down the old pine tree." I don't know if you've ever heard that before, but that has stuck in my memory. At least, I think, as an adult, I asked Bob Pinson, a friend of mine, an archivist in Nashville, to look it up. I think he said 1928. It might have been earlier, it might have been later. But let's take the date. I would have been 10 years old. Now, the rest of the song, the melody isn't forgotten. Look, I want you to think of the significance of that memory.

At that age, I didn't know a pine tree from a palm tree. I had never seen a sawmill. I had never seen a coffin, and I didn't know what a sweetheart was. And why would they be cutting down this old pine tree that must have been some kind of a lonesome pine symbol to make a coffin of pine? Was the sweetheart special that they didn't cut down an ordinary tree, they cut down the old pine tree? And the song had no significance to me then. I didn't ask the questions of the text. I didn't analyze the text, you know, but why did it make an impression? Why do I remember? It must have made an impression so that it's memorable. Why do I remember the prisoner song? Now the other songs were reinforced later, but I don't remember who recorded the pine tree.

And I remember that "She'll be coming around the mountain, she'll be coming, she'll be coming around the mountain, she'll be riding six-way horses, she'll be coming around the mountain when she comes." You know, why did certain, later when I was in the Navy and there was a, we had a little jukebox, you know, we were on a remote island in the Philippines and we, I guess about '44 or '45, one of the songs on the jukebox was, "There'll be smoke on the water on the land and the sea. There'll be smoke on the water when we overtake our enemy and we'll ride Hitler and Hirovito out on a rail." Anyhow, Bob Wills sang it and other country singers sang it. And we played, it became our theme song. And by then I was married and I wrote a letter to Luanne. "Buy that record of 'Smoke on the Water' so when I come home, I can listen to it again." And she did buy it. It was an okay, purple label and 35 cents. And it was a song I treasured. And then when the kids were born, I think we had a babysitter who played our records when we were gone and broke the record. God, I could have strangled the babysitter.

But anyhow, that ability to remember at least portions of songs stayed with me. And again, why those texts were embedded in memory, it's an important question and important process because later when I started to write case studies, and that was my thesis in only a minor, and each case study, I didn't write a case study on a song arbitrarily. I wrote it on songs that were important to me. And it has something to do with the aesthetic or there's something about the text and the tune, different aesthetics, but something that leads both into memory, makes both memorable.

Now, I don't remember pop songs of the period and I don't remember jazz songs of the period, but I remember hillbilly, old cowboy songs.

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TW: That's interesting.

AG: And I told you yesterday when I found the folk song book, *Cowboy Songs* by John Lomax, and I read the text and it was important because the text, I had heard those songs on the radio. I had already heard Willis, "When the Works All Done This Fall," "Streets of Laredo." I heard Bill and Orleans, you know, types of songs on the radio. I remembered the words and I liked the songs. And that was the first folk song book that I was, that's where I started the literature of folk music.

TW: How old were you then?

AG: Well, it was. I graduated from high school in '35, so it was a fall of '34 to '35 was a senior, then '34 to '33 junior and freshman would be around '32 to '33. So in junior high school, there was '29 to '32. And let's arbitrarily say 1930. And that's when I worked in the library for Miss Butterfield. I already told you I learned to barco books. You know what barco was? Not the barcode. Barco was a kind of [shellac?]. And it came in a can. And when a new book came to the library, one of their jobs was to assign the Dewey Decimal number and then the schellac, make it waterproof. We'd barco the book. You're a librarian. Ask, there must be a glossary of library science or look it up in some dictionary. Barco.

TW: With a C or K?

AG: I don't know. And besides, again, that's the interesting thing. Is my memory right? Is there any such a word as barco? Now, I think that answers the aesthetic.

TW: Well, I had a couple other small questions. I was just wondering, were you, I know a couple years ago at AFS, they had some kind of events.

AG: I was supposed to go.

TW: And you didn't go.

AG: Yeah, I think I was not feeling well or it's hard for me to travel nowadays. And I plan to go to the Library of Congress this August, if they have a meeting on labor lore, that brochure I gave you, we've had four, three national conferences, and we're apparently Peggy wants to host our 4th, and I think I'll give a talk if I'm invited. Well, I know I'll be invited, but I think I'll talk on how, like you're interested in how I became interested in the Folksong Club, and she would be interested in how I became interested in the Folklife Center, what led.

It's consistent, the same things that led me to a life of politics and to a belief in the Wobblies and to the folksong club, it also led me to lobby for the Folklife Center. In fact, Neil Rosenberg very astutely pointed out that all of my lobbying experiences was foreshadowed in the campus

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folksong club and the kinds of unity by bringing Lyle Mayfield together with the with Roger Ebert for example or bringing Father Richard Means together with Suzie Levin to and the terrible sad, sad consequences of the breaking of vows and the inability to maintain the love relationship and then the guy cracking up and ending in a psychiatric ward. It's a sad story. So, you know, not all of the folksong club stories ended happily.

But bringing it all together in the club was what I did later on the national scale. And Neil was the first. Neil would come to our concerts. So you've got to interview Neil. You have to get more money and go around without this heavy equipment. Get a little tape recorder that you can put in your backpack and visit all these people.

TW: Well, this thing isn't a very big. It's a microphone.

AG: Get rid of, leave it home. You can put the microphone on a table or desk or hang it from the ceiling. Anyhow, what was your question?

TW: I was asking you because I was there at that AFS and I remember them talking about you and all the nice things they said. In my mind you were there and I guess I forgot you're not being there.

AG: No, the last AFS meeting I attended was a group met at Oakland about 15 years ago, a West Coast meeting, and I could just go across the bay. But I haven't been to. I had worked very hard in the AFS lobbying for 10 years and going to meetings and being involved. And I'm not a bitter person, but if I were to, you could ask why I'm not bitter, because when I finished lobbying and I had no job and the Folklife Center, the job was open, why the Librarian of Congress didn't hire me? That was a norm in government. Whenever someone lobbied for an activity, well, if he wasn't paid to lobby, then his reward would be a job.

But the Librarian of Congress was a famous historian, not Dorson. Again, the problem of the name. He was a right-winger appointed by, I think, Nixon. And he didn't like cultural pluralism. He didn't have any, he was an assimilationist. He was a University of Chicago historian. He was a consensus historian, a melting pot historian who believed that the story of America was the groups coming together and he didn't want to retard the flame under the melting pot. He wanted to increase the flame so that we'd all be melted into stainless steel Americans. And he would have been a supporter of George Bush. Okay. And he was a friend of, he was in this Harvard cabal. He was a friend of Darson and Blitzer.

So the vice president at the vice chairman at the Smithsonian, the head of the Folklore Society. Borsten, Daniel Borsten. Yeah. So they all, or they were hostile to folklore or hostile to public folklore. And this guy Borsten was at the Smithsonian after he left Chicago. He didn't like Ralph Rinzler. And when we lobbied for the folklife bill, he was against it. And then he became librarian of Congress about just when the bill was passed.

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The previous guy knew me and he might have made me an offer, but Borsten, he had an assistant, Betty Keegan, and he sought her advice. And from her perspective, they couldn't say no because Congress passed the bill, and they were the Library of Congress, so they put a good face on it. So she was faced with this problem. We have to have the center. How can we get a director who will be unassertive, who will cause us the least trouble? And I have to say it, he's a good friend of mine. I like him. Alan Jabour became, was conciliatory to these little old ladies who were running the institutions in Washington, was smooth, was friendly, and I'll leave it unsaid. But we stayed friends through the process. And anyhow, Borsten offered the job to Alan. Alan took it. And Alan phoned me because he knew that I deserved the job. And he said he wouldn't take it if I, he was honorable. And I said, no, you were offered the job. Take it because I'm not going to be, Borsten isn't going to offer me the job. You might as well take it. And Alan did. And we kept in touch.

Now later on, a lot of folklorists criticized me because Alan wasn't aggressive and I always defended him. And why did you defend him? And I used to say, "Because I'm loyal to the idea of the Folklife Center." And if you live long enough, you'll outlast Alan. But if we had blasted Alan at the start, that would have hurt. We wouldn't have had a center. And so I said, "We were faced with a reality." So, I'm aware of my contradictions here. I'm radical in my politics, like a Wobbly, but yet I vote for Nancy Pelosi, or yet I go for, I have to work with Dorsten and Worsten, as repugnant as it was.

What the hell can I. You know, I often thought of that. Suppose I had made a stink. They would have put the Center on hold. We might, it's an iffy. We might have won out eventually, but it didn't seem Nixon was president or Gerald Ford or someone, a right-winger was president, a right-winger was in Congress. If they were going to defang our Folklore Center right at the very start, so be it. We would have to outlast them, out lobbying them.

And similarly, Ralph put up a good fight in the Smithsonian against the, you know, the elite. It was an Ivy, they were queens, and they were gays, and they were Ivy Leaguers and art historians and elitists, and they weren't, they were mean, you know, and they didn't like Ralph. I told you yesterday, they thought of the, I use the same figures of speech, they thought of the, in the days of the Roman Empire when Hannibal led his troops on elephants through North Africa, Spain, Gaul, and the Swiss Alps and came down through the Alps down into Italy. He was raping the vestal virgins and burning the sacred groves. And they thought of folklorists as Ralph and Archie and Joe Wilson and Mike Seeger and so on. They thought we were hillbilly, the combination of hillbilly music and communism, that's what they thought of folklore. God, all of us, they lumped us all together. Josh White, Pete Seeger, Roy Acuff, Lead Belly, Archie Green, Ralph Rinzler, Bill Monroe, Doc Watson. To Dorsen, we were debasing the coin of scholarship. To the elitists in art, we were bringing art down to its lowest common denominator, these high, lonesome sounds, these squeaky fiddles, this vulgar music.

And when I use the term vernacular culture and vernacular music, the elitists thought of the. They thought of vernacular in its original meaning. They had high culture in the church was

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Latin and in the scholarship and low culture was the vernacular. That's the language of slaves. And the vernacular tongue was the low tongue. And when we spoke in the vernacular and preached in the vernacular and sang in the vernacular, we were not only debasing the coin of scholarship, because scholarship studies the original art, we were debasing the base of art, fine art, fine culture. And we were really seen as the barbarians at the gate. I think we still are, at least in terms of, you know, Dorsen, he used to fight his mission in life was to get folklore recognized on the campus. And he recognized the deans. And I think Darson used the image once of the, in the medieval castle, they had a crenelated tower. You know what the crenelation? And the bowmen would stand in the visible part, and they'd shoot down at the enemies. And his vision was that the university with its crenelated towers was besieged. And his duty as a professor and a dean, it was to man the bows against the catapults that the barbarians were using.

So he put up a good fight when I told him that his arena was misguided, that the site of the battle wasn't the crenelated tower on campus, it was a crenelated tower on Capitol Hill, that on Capitol Hill, when you passed a bill, you would affect the total society of which the university was a small part. And he wrote about that. In his letter, he was a very slow man, but gradually, when his students began getting jobs in the public sector, he became more tolerant of applied folklore. And he wrote someplace in an essay, Archie Green's site of the battle was misguided, but something like that.

Anyhow, I think that when the Wobblies believe that every worker should make the job a good job wherever he works and that consists at the minimum, clean up the latrine, see that there's toilet paper, quit early, don't have a mean boss. If there's an unsafe tool, break it or destroy it. You know, if you have to work for a living in a hospital or university or a construction site or railroad track or airport, make it a good place to work. And the Wobblies made little stickers. They call them silent agitators. Maybe you've seen some. They take these stickers and they'd paste the stickers on the shovel handle, on the shithouse wall, on the boss's back of his, they paste it on his jacket, they'd creep up to the bottom. The stickers were funny. There are pictures of stickers, like a clock, you know, they dealt with black cat, a lot of symbolism. The black cat is a symbol of sabotage, you know, and...

TW: Is that an international symbol?

AG: Industrial. Don't say international.

TW: I mean, was it internationally recognized?

AG: No, it was mostly in America. They had some branches in Australia and elsewhere, and Seaman Kerry, but it was a Native American organization. I'll show you the book in a minute, but anyhow. So you start by making it a good job if you can't affect the whole process, but then you use a union or collective bargaining to make the whole waterfront have a good job, good conditions. If you go to the university, you try to make your condition tolerable. What did Jarvis

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say? When he was lonely, he found a good social life in the folksong club. So we were not revolutionists to break, to destroy the dean's office, but we tried to make the best of the condition. And then nationally, you use legislation to make the country recognize, I'd say, vernacularity, regional differences, the particularity of social groups to demilitarize and desovereignize the country. I'll give you my last epithet. No sovereign country should be strong enough to fly an airplane beyond its borders. That is, we should not have the physical ability to send armed troops to Baghdad. Instead of Bush saying support the troops, I'd say yeah, support them by bringing them home and grounding the helicopters. That's my message. If you'll shut this, I'll bring you a book.