When Work Was Fun

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The Emmett, Idaho sawmill, where I worked for a year doing fieldwork during 1999 and 2000, closed after eighty years of operation in June of 2001. A video produced by the Boise Cascade Corporation as a 'memento mori,' a keepsake for its former employees at the sawmill, consists of a series of interviews with soon-to-be-jobless employees about their experiences at the Emmett mill, as well as another mill closing up the road in Cascade, Idaho. Towards the end of the video an odd series of interviews are included, all concerning favorite memories of horseplay. One Emmett worker, Bob, tells of rigging an overhead winch with a bucket of water in order to douse another worker with whom he has been engaged in an interminable water fight. The horseplay described, if it had been observed by a manager, would have gotten him suspended without pay or fired. Horseplay at the mill was considered unsafe by management; all types of horseplay were strictly forbidden.

Why would a company that forbids an act, turn around and implicitly celebrate the same act in a representation of the mill? An answer, perhaps, is that the mill was closing and the formal opposition to horseplay by management was no longer important: an open acknowledgement of the ubiquity of horseplay, and its importance to shopfloor culture, no longer undercut the authority of managers and the ability to punish horseplay when observed on the shopfloor.

But there is another dimension: the corporation is indulging in "nostalgia."[i] The mill is placed in the past and conflict is relegated there as well. In the video you hear nothing but how much everyone loved working there, when a love-hate ambivalence was the norm. A case in point of the nostalgia found in this video are the clips emphasizing the symbiosis of the mill and the surrounding community. While true, the corporation had distanced itself from its community involvement over the past fifteen years for reasons soon to be clear.

I would like today to explore a neglected aspect of work—play—and, in turn, the relation of play to memory when attempting to understand what happens in actual, existing work settings. Play is a type of expressive action.[ii] It was Talcott Parsons who first proposed we distinguish instrumental from expressive social activities; here we will repair this rift, rightfully bringing the two back together, as they usually are found in our lives.

I will begin with an exploration of how work and memory interact on the shopfloor. After discussing horseplay in the mill, I will draw on Connerton's typology of memory and its modes—personal, habitual, and cognitive [Connerton 1989]. I will take Connerton's types and elaborate them through Hayden White's notion of historical tropes [White 1975, 1987], revealing the ways in which memory is emplotted, given a plot, and therefore meaning on the shopfloor.

I will then integrate the discussion of what I observed on the shopfloor at the sawmill, and what I was told concerning the history of changes at the mill, with a short history of the timber industry's political economy in the Western United States after WWII. The institutional changes affecting the timber industry, particularly over the past two decades, will be contrasted with how they were remembered and explained on the shopfloor of the mill. Collective memory on the shopfloor both chronicled events

differently than the order chronicled in the official record, and assigned some events far greater meaning than anyone outside the mill would have given them. As Paul Ricoeur continually reminds us, remembering is ethical work [Ricoeur 1999].

Finally, I will discuss the importance of the rural setting of the mill to an understanding of the mill as a sociocultural milieu. The mill was situated in an agricultural community where honor was attached to an ability to work skillfully manipulating nature into culture. Work upon nature involved what Max Weber called a *style of life* at odd with managerial reason [Weber 1946]. Furthermore, kin relations or family life were inseparable from the mill's relations of conviviality. Management attempted to enforce a separation between work and life (in other words, a separation of instrumental acts or work from expressive or performative acts, which if not work, are then life); such attempts failed in part because of the penetration of social bonds from outside the mill and the mill's social structure. It is hard to fire or even discipline someone with whom you've shared your life, let alone a cousin.

Knot fights at the mill

Attempts to separate work and life aren't just misguided, they set an impossible goal. *The time when work was fun*, remembered as an almost heroic or mythical past, a golden age when reconstructed out of memory by those at the mill, will be shown to have critical implications for how we relate both to our labor, and to nature in the immediate future.

The Plywood mill where I worked employed approximately 150 shopfloor workers (including maintenance—millwrights, electricians et al.) in the spring of 2000 (the mill complex as a whole employed above 250 workers). There were eight to ten managers for the mill, including three women. Mexican-Americans, Basques, and women each made up about 10% of the shopfloor workforce. The mill ran close to twenty-four hours—seven days a week (except during curtailments, usually related to the market for plywood). The mill paid the highest wages in the area mostly because of the union contract: therein grounding a rural middle class. Yet I should note here that this is mostly a story about male behavior and male groups. While the roles of women and gender in general at the mill were important, I will set the issue aside in order to focus on play—almost exclusively a male, or symbolic male occupation at the mill.[iii] Symbolic males being those women like Debbie who at union meetings used the term "brothers" inclusive of herself . As Les put it in a joke about Burns, Oregon, where he grew up and lived till the mill closed there forcing his family to move in search of work: "I grew up where men were men… and women were too."

On most shifts while pulling green chain a fight would break out: everyone would start throwing the knots which fall out of the sheets of veneer at each other like little Frisbees. The fight wasn't a free for all like the pie fights in old Mark Sennett comedies, but a game of strategy where the highest, unofficial score came for bopping someone in the back of the head when he wasn't looking. But like comedies, this was all thought to be riotously funny. After the first knot had been thrown, the rest of the shift could be devoted to this informal contest, with participants trying to find an opening to get a shot back at someone who had nailed them earlier.

All of this was, of course, prohibited by the bosses and getting caught throwing knots could lead to an immediate three day suspension without pay. That a game with no real purpose, ends, or scoring, would persevere in the face of such strict sanctions is remarkable in itself. However there was more going on within this form of play than immediately apparent.

A place to begin is with Bateson's theory of play. The meta-communicative level of discourse, where Bateson places play, is found when "the subject of discourse is the relationship between the speakers" [Bateson 1972]. This is where we should place horseplay if we wish to grasp its uses, and the meanings it communicates within the mill. The 'meta-messages' sent by meta-communicative expressions both frame themselves off from the ongoing flow of acts (i.e. "this is play") and within that space provide room for commentary on everyday social relations. As we shall encounter below, to hit someone on the shoulder means very different things with and without this framing.

When someone pulling green chain throws a knot across the chain at an unexpecting fellow puller, the aggression of the act at the phenomenological level is juxtaposed at the meta-communicative level by the sense of shared opposition the thrower and target share towards the rules, the boss, the monotony of the work setting. In fact, it is exactly when the work is not engaging or demanding that we should expect a knot fight.

As Don Handelman notes, play shares with ritual a liminal dimension [Handelman 1977]. Liminality has been given its fullest treatment by Victor Turner who sees in liminal phases and spaces an opposition to the structure and institutions of everyday social order, where the sameness of participants (community), intersects with an exaggeration of the sacra of the social order (dominant symbols) [Turner 1967, 1974]. This combination of social leveling mixed with an (at times) almost parodic expression of the symbols and values underlying the jural, political, and economic order, serves to expose the shortcomings of where and how we live while reinforcing our understanding commitment to that selfsame order. Liminality is a temporary overturning of order to suture over the tensions and conflicts that rive through social being.

During knot fights not everyone is a target—new guys on the chain are slowly brought into the game. The shared position, or sameness of the group is slow to spread to neophytes. But the eventual definition of a new addition to the group as 'same' is not a uniform process: a comparison of the careers on the chain of Reynaldo and Jose will serve to illustrate. Both men were Mexican, but Jose was fully bilingual whereas Reynaldo had come from south of Mexico City as a young man and, while able to communicate adequately in English (a condition for being hired on at the mill) was difficult to have a conversation with in English, particularly over the din of the mill's machinery.

Jose was a regular participant in knot fights before he quit to try his luck at selling insurance. He had sold insurance before, telling me he quit because "they made you lie to people." While work in the mill paid less, it was for Jose ethical. Yet, he had a family and his wife didn't work, so what could he do? Reynaldo in contrast, participated sporadically in knot fights.

To explain why Reynaldo was slow to enter the knot fights one could make a recourse to a simplistic analysis where the racism of the young rural whites bred a resistance to including an Hispanic. Another explanation is that exactly because

communication with Reynaldo was difficult, it was difficult to ascertain for others on the chain whether he voluntarily accepted the norms and rules of the informal group. When asked why no one threw knots at Reynaldo, one puller offered that he was unsure whether Reynaldo would report him to the boss for harassment: i.e. he was not certain that Reynaldo would see past the communicative (apparent aggression) to the meta-communicative. In fact, the fragmentation of informal groups along axes of race and gender was generally explained as a suspicion that the other wouldn't cooperate in the upholding of the informal rules, and would instead invoke the formal impersonal rules management wanted to dominate the shopfloor— *harassment rules in particular*.

The longest and most intricate knot fights took place when there were a few pullers with at least three or four years at the mill on the chain at once, perhaps because such a group was most at ease with each other, the task of pulling chain, and the rules of the informal group. A game that had only two people participating got boring quickly and fizzled out: it was hard to catch the other participant by surprise and a simple tit for tat grew tedious. Three players made the game interesting. With three players there was the possibility for alliances of sorts. It also left room for surprise attacks and the aforementioned best throw of all: hitting another guy in the back of the head completely unawares.

This returns us to the meta-communicative function of play—what aspect of the social frame shared by green chain pullers could possibly be invoked by whacking someone in the back of the head with a small round of wood? Perhaps it is the boss-worker relationship itself: 'lucky it was me who caught you sleeping with this knot, 'not' the boss'. But simultaneously, it also served to focus you on interactions within the group, encouraging you to pay attention to your immediate workgroup rather than what they're doing in another part of the mill—on the dryers for example. Knot fights didn't focus you on pulling wood per se; they overwhelmingly took place during the unintended breaks in production when no wood was coming down the chain. Knots weren't thrown at someone while they were in the act of pulling in the lead position: such a person is relatively defenseless because busy, not because they are distracted. A final point needs to be made—like most all horseplay, throwing knots was both harmless (incapable of leading to injury) and didn't significantly defer attention away from the production process (hindering productivity). As Jake, a lead man on the green chain said, no one had ever been hurt in a knot fight. If bosses didn't like horseplay, the explanation was not to be found in the realm of economic calculation, but in the social commentary, the meta-communicative functions of such play.

That horseplay was often explicitly, and always implicitly, a commentary on 'bossing' cannot be left out of any explanation for why horseplay was forbidden on the shopfloor. Horseplay is shopfloor theater with two functions: 1) spread the values at the base of the informal group's counter-rationality, and 2) reinforce the group's bonds.

The near-universal split within labor process theory between instrumental and expressive action is a neglected, yet critical dimension of the labor process and its study. Like E.P. Thompson's marking of how work and life became unhinged with the capitalist labor process [Thompson 1966], the separation of instrumental from expressive action is predicated on a split between serious, purposeful acts and frivolous and/or pleasant activity. Instead, Handelman proposes, "instrumental and expressive actions should be

considered as cognate modes of expression whose contrastive realities complement one another to compose a unity of experience" [1976].

On one level this seems like simple common sense (what salesman doesn't have a repertoire of jokes?). Yet in labor process theory there has been an almost complete neglect of expressive action on the shopfloor outside of short works by Roy [1960] and Handelman [1976]. The only book length study of the labor process to devote any room to expressive action is Burawoy's *Manufacturing Consent* [1979] where he makes a completely negative appraisal of the function of games on the shopfloor as part and parcel of the worker's self-negating integration into the labor process.

Play and ritual as forms of expressive behavior

Handelman notes that both play and ritual "are consistent and integral features of a cosmological equation that conceives of society, not only as a social order, but also as a moral one" [Handelman 1977]. Play can creatively adapt, but not ground a social system. Play cannot ground a moral order, or a moral economy, only comment on the extant order's shortcomings: "play doubts the social order" [Handelman 1977]. Nevertheless, in the ongoing commentary of play on the mill's moral economy (or lack thereof) there can be found consistent themes—all of which point to two recurrent topics: 1) the follies of management and 2) the state of the informal group. Bergson claimed comedy was born as a critique of rigidity (Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque makes a similar argument). Play at the mill was used to mock the rigidity of managerial systems, their inability to get the job done or even to know what the job was.

Play and ritual are forms of expressive behavior. Mary Douglas warned against trying to isolate expressive acts from those supposedly without content, claiming expressive behavior saturates social experience: "There is no one moment that can be picked out and said to carry the expressive function on its own" [Douglas 1975]. This is an important rejoinder to anyone (such as myself) attempting to understand the meanings in discrete forms of interaction like play. Like ritual, play exposes, opens up to observation, the texture of the everyday. But it would be going too far to claim that since all behavior has an expressive component, all actions are equally expressive. As two extremes of expressive action, play and ritual are unique in exposing the inner contours of expressivity as it pervades our lives.

Writing of how friendship is embedded in everyday practices (i.e. the habitus of subjects), Douglas finds a "hundred acts of recognition spread over time express the friendship. But it is also true to say that they constitute it. The relationship is non-existent if it never takes any material form" [Douglas 1975]. The friendship isn't an idea the acts of friendship fumble to express, the friendship is in the acts: "The gestures, verbal and other, are constitutive of social reality" [Douglas 1975]. The message is in the medium. By inverting the regular structure of conviviality (play meta-communicatively turns the everyday on its head), the pervasiveness of expressive action in the everyday is highlighted by eruptions of play. But Douglas makes another important point: expressive acts materialize relationships. Barth argues along the same line: "human acts have…material consequences that can be observed—they are also 'understood' by actors and spectators and so must carry essential meanings. In other words, the same acts and

aspects of acts are simultaneously instrumental and communicative, and their form cannot be explained by the analysis of only one of these contexts" [Barth 1981].

However, before going any further a curious feature of work in the mill, constricting and directing the forms of play should be noted. The sensual environs of the mill had an effect in shaping expression: the mill was too loud a place for conversation to take place more than a foot or so apart, so most shopfloor communication relied on pantomime of some sort. A well-developed sign language was used to convey information about the productive process over distances. For example, to say wood was still wet coming out of a dryer, hands were twisted next to each other as if wringing out a piece of laundry. Verbal play was confined to the break room where it was a regular occurrence for all present to focus attention on a single storyteller's performance, usually concerning high jinks at the mill, or a memorable experience hunting, farming, ranching, or fishing. Rather than seeing a natural separation between work and life finding form here, the resistance to separation, the insistence on bringing expression into work should be noted. The difference between shopfloor and break room was like that between silent and sound movies: the silent screen lent itself to slapstick not *bon mots*.

It needs to be mentioned that, by most accounts from the shopfloor, the golden age of horseplay had ended 3-4 years before I arrived when Bonnie (the new mill superintendent) came. Yet even though banned, horseplay forever was intruding upon conversation though memories of legendary horseplay: events from before the fall. Before Bonnie had relabeled horseplay a form of harassment, like sexual harassment, and thereby punishable.

The beginning of the end

To understand the meanings of horseplay, it is necessary to step into the past of the mill, back to a time refereed to in the discourse of the mill as "old school." Old school was the time before the transition of the Western timber industry from monopoly to competitive capitalism led to a transformation of the social labor process from paternal to despotic (I'm loosely adapting the distinctions proposed by Burawoy [1985]). This decline was dated around two events a decade apart: the 1986 strike and Bonnie's arrival as superintendent, 1995. Respectively, the beginning of the end and the first nail in the coffin. During the reign of the old school shopfloor labor was stronger and the distance between boss and worker smaller. Stories from the period included bosses as occasional participants in horseplay.

Jim Holford told a story: one winter night working graveyard he went back behind the dryers to catch a quick nap (as many did at the time). While he was asleep the boss that night came upon him and sat down next to him while he slept. The boss proceeded to offer up a "roast" of Jim—a monologue of jokes about Jim while he slept unawares. By the time Jim woke a good audience had gathered. This story was replicated by others in differing forms all centered around being caught asleep and bosses telling jokes or playing practical jokes on the sleeper. While I was working at the mill getting caught asleep was a three day suspension the first time, termination the third time.

The horseplay that used to take place during the time of the old school was much more in keeping with Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque exemplified by Rabelais' Gargantua. Horseplay at the mill, even in the present, was in large part laughter at and

with the "grotesque body" at the center of Bakhtin's carnivalesque: the ribald farting, pissing, sexing, eating, and sleeping at inappropriate times body. The carnivalesque, its "specific locus (is) the vulnerable, yet superbly shame-free, grotesque body (it) rids both me and my most proximate neighbor of the excessive self-consciousness that keeps us both lonely" [Emerson 1997]. Bakhtin called carnival "a culture of laughter" [Emerson 1997] and the same could be said of most informal groups at the mill: informal groups were the loci where the carnivalesque erupted in the flow of expressive action, marking the passing of time with memorable events.

Repeated stories tell of old practical jokes such as oiling balls where a lube gun was struck down the back of someone's pants, or the fake humping from behind that came every time any male was compelled to bend over while working. Male workers brought themes into social groups using the body as a medium, including using the body as a medium of communication. Before it would have been called harassment, a despised boss (particularly sensitive about his height) was regularly met with effigies consisting of nothing but boots, a hat on top, and two veneer splinters with work gloves on the end for arms: once, he came down from the office to find all the pullers on the green chain pulling on their knees, condensing the boss and the 'little' patience labor had for his leadership.

New recruits were even exposed to a performance of fake felatio (performed on a dildo kept in someone's locker for just such an occasion): if they laughed everything was OK – they were part of the group. This homo-erotic body, just as Freud argued would take place in male groups, was part of the cement holding together said groups [Freud 1959]. It would be a mistake to call this simply faked felatio repressed homosexual behavior. Again, when a new recruit was exposed to the performance of homosexual behavior, the proper response was laughter, not disgust. In fact, displays of disgust were seen as signets of repressed homosexual desire—and that was then made fun of: if it got your goat then your goat was there for the getting. When Jaime, a Filipino, came for the first time to pull chain and witnessed the show, his comment was " I don't like it when you do that—it makes me think you're (all) gay." This was thought to be the best response of all—cutting to the core of the issue enough to be repeated verbatim by a few as an exemplary response to the display.

Fake felatio and other homoretic play weren't so much a repression of homosexuality but a sublimation of such behavior, as Freud argued, into a libidinal bond adhering the group. "If you find pseudo-homosexual behavior disturbing, perhaps you should work elsewhere" was the message (i.e. you repress rather than sublimate homoeroticism). Homoerotic horseplay was isolated into speech acts, such as the ribald joking found in the men's breakroom when women were absent. For months while I worked chain, Rick and Jake had a running joke about a gay porn they had supposedly seen involving Arnold Schwartznegger and the punchline of them saying "pull it ooooouuuutttt" in fake Arnold accents.

During my time at the mill, Bonnie, the mill superintendent, initiated a series of safety meetings where she issued an edict forbidding, in even stronger terms, all types of horseplay. From now on, she said, all physical contact of any kind between employees regardless of gender was to be considered harassment. This, of course, led to horseplay: males lightly slapping each other on the back with the one slapped exclaiming, "Stop harassing me!"

Paul Connerton in his *How Societies Remember* [1989] proposed a tripartite division of memory into types: cognitive, habitual, and personal. I propose to line these types up with three nodes of remembering I witnessed on the shopfloor. Memory and work interacted on the shopfloor through 1) the aforementioned memories of play, 2) the embodied memory found in skills and an ability to work (habitus), and 3) memories of conflict with management. Conflict I will correspond with Connerton's personal memory, habitual with work skills, and play with cognitive memory. Of course, no memory can be said to exist in a pure form, partaking of only one of these modalities of memory; for example skills involve a coordination of cognitive and embodied faculties. Nevertheless, Connerton's types can aid us greatly in understanding the dynamic of body, society, and memory in a work setting. Habit memory is not attached to specific incidents, but is worn in through repetition. Personal memory is what has happened to us personally. Cognitive memory need not have happened to us (we can take the patterns from stories) but what is critical is that cognitive memory structures like a model, memory—what and how we remember.

Habitual memory in the mill was in the skilled motions of the body and recursive interaction with the space. Skills and eccentricities of machines both were habitual memory. Personal memory, because the mill was populated by largely the same people over decades and they shared other bonds of kinship and friendship to be discussed below, was intertwined with collective memory. Particularly since there was no written record of events at the mill, personal memories were double-checked against each other in times of crisis or conflict.

The "Rebecca Effect"

Alvin Gouldner labeled a recurrent feature of labor's discourse about the labor process the "Rebecca Effect" (after the Hitchcock film *Rebecca*): a belief that one's condition is worse today than yesterday as a laborer [Gouldner 1954]. The Rebecca effect shares an idiom, albeit that idiom's verso, with management discourse. While it is management's interest to claim things are always getting better on the shopfloor, to state that you were happier yesterday, as with the Rebecca effect, is to dispute both management's claim and to open up a dialogue about how life on the shopfloor should be. Rather than being mere contrariness towards objective conditions, or the objective reflection of conditions (i.e. whether things have actually gotten worse is usually a moot question) the Rebecca effect is a product of the terrain of conflict between labor and management. The Rebecca effect is a sign of a recurrent pessimism on the part of labor as to the changes being effected by management. But it is also a defense of custom, of patterns of practice handed down, as EP Thompson put it, from "time out of hand" (see Thompson [1993]), which need not be that long ago to be defended as a customary indulgence… experience teaches progress moves one way when it comes to labor.

Everyone at the mill, to the last man, said it was less 'fun' (this was the ineffable quality chosen to measure decline, rather than 'easier' or 'better' or 'we've lost skilled labor') to work at the mill these days than in the past. As will be discussed below the shift of the timber sector of the economy from monopoly to competitive conditions led during the early eighties does seem to have led to a shift from a paternalistic production regime within the mill towards a despotic.

Regardless, the very act of saying things were worse off today than before helped open up a space for discussions about how the labor process *should run.* The "Rebecca effect" was an excuse to muse on what was; it amounted to an act of collective remembering or history of the unwritten sort, as Connerton states: "Groups provide individuals with frameworks within which their memories are localized and memories are localized by a kind of mapping. We situate what we recollect within the mental spaces provided by the group. But these mental spaces….always receive support from and refer back to the material spaces that particular social groups occupy" [Connerton 1989]. The mill was a dense space of counter-memory. Yet what was remembered wasn't business as usual, but (as in all social groups) stories of conflict and resolution, schism and continuity. While remembering an event of twenty years ago storytellers at the mill would often point to another part of the mill to substantiate their story with a place (as do both your average historical marker and the storytelling techniques of the Western Apache as described by Basso [1979]—a narrative is more efficacious if attached to a locus).

The power of collective memory

The collective memory of those working on the shopfloor had no chronicle, no written record, only personal memories. Memory on the shopfloor was a counter memory to that of bosses for a very important reason and one related to the Rebecca effect: collective memory was used to criticize the veracity of bosses claims about the shape of change at the mill. Often when a new policy or rule was announced from upstairs the old-timers would start to compare with each other what that change might signal in light of past such announcements and where they had, in the end, led—what had happened historically. Like senior males and females everywhere the public sphere hasn't usurped the truth effect of localized narratives, the old-timers were a resource of memory looked upon in times of change. This isn't to say that the conclusions they drew weren't often dismissed as the rantings of overly contrary curmudgeons.

Hayden White has distinguished between three ways, of increasing complexity, to describe the past: the annal, the chronicle, and the story [see White 1975]. The first two, annal and chronicle, are sequences of events that have not been woven into a story. For a story, or history proper, on the other hand: "The events must be not only registered within the chronological framework of their original occurrence but narrated as well. That is to say, revealed as possessing a structure, an order of meaning, that they do not possess as mere sequence"[White 1987]. To become history, the events must be narrated, and to be narrated they must be given a plot…the emplotment of memory.

The tropology of a narrative reveals much about the narrator. Memory, particularly when having a collective dimension, goes through this same process of emplotment as history (ask a psychoanalyst). At the mill, labor plotted the history of the mill as tragic comic—an absurdist tale of decline with the loss of conviviality as the motif. Management plotted the history of the mill as one of mechanical progress: every change engineered by management was heralded as new and improved.

With this in mind, let us return to the question of expressive action or play on the shopfloor. Why was play chosen as the master-plot: why was memory emplotted through play more so than other tropes— particularly the union?

Huizinga states that "in acknowledging play you acknowledge mind….From the point of view of a world wholly determined by the operation of blind forces, play would be altogether superfluous. Play only becomes possible, thinkable, and understandable when an influx of mind breaks down the absolute determinism of the cosmos" (Huizinga 1955:3). Play revolted against man the machine qua labor power with the logic of Homo ludens: the nimble—even trickster—persona adapting to the vagaries of changing social and material conditions within the mill. Play, particularly in the form of joking behavior, was the dominant form of social activity within the mill. Play at the mill took a variety of forms: joking behavior, physical horseplay, hiding from bosses, and even occasional tinkering with the machinery (but not the old school sabotage of machinery detailed below—tinkering here was more like turning off someone's machine to confuse them, or rigging a paint gun to squirt on a new hire when he tried to use it).

Two series of memory concerning the mill need to be compared: 1) the collective memory I was told on the shopfloor, unwritten and brought forth through a mix of storytelling and labor; 2) the political economy of timber over the same span of time (the macrological story as narrated by experts and embedded in institutions and policy). The two streams of memory, I propose, can be compared, much as a psychoanalyst looks for the relation of manifest and latent content when attempting to understand. The key is to look at how each narration is troped rather than for which one is 'true'. The information is in how the narration is troped: the unconscious doesn't reside in the content of the latent, but in the structural relation between the two narratives.

Putting memories in context

With social memory, unlike personal memory, the latent isn't (as) nebulous (i.e. social memory isn't a case of Wittgenstein-ian private language). Memories of events can be compared between groups or parties. None of the events in the manifest (political economic) narration were denied in the latent (collective memory of the mill); however all the events were given different significance (i.e. troped differently). We learn something about the fantasy undergirding each stream of narration when we compare them. "What happened" wasn't that important—less interesting, not even disputed—than the meaning of what happened, and meaning is to be found in how a story is told, the tropes dominating the story's narrative.

The managerial narration repressed acknowledgement of the damage to conviviality the past 15 years had brought. The workers at the mill tried to exclude the machinations of institutions and markets spun out of control unlike those they, and their fathers and grandfathers, had partially tamed through ardent unionism. At the mill, the choice in some way was between comedy in the past and tragedy in the present. In other words, a traumatic un-narratable event confronted them. Here is where play fails: confronted with events that required not just a group bound together (qua play) but a group bound towards an end (rituals such as those of the union) play became repetition.

In the early 1980's many factors came together changing the timber industry in the Western United States in profound ways. Among the changes were the Federal Reserve's actions under Volker, unleashing lending interest rates and crushing housing markets; environmentalists learning how to litigate forest plans after the National Forest Management Act of 1976; and an increased penetration of American timber markets by

foreign suppliers (particularly Canada).[iv] The number employed in the Western timber industry (already shrinking due to the substitution of technology for labor in the mills and woods) suffered a devastating shock during the eighties when, as a result of factors such as those listed above, domestic over-capacity was used as leverage to dismantle unions.

On top of this, the Forest Service (which controls three-quarters of Idaho's forests) had begun a shift in its core mandate from modulating the amount of timber cut on federal lands so as to insure the stability of timber towns—a goal labeled "community stability"—to first and foremost protecting the forest as an ecological system. Beginning in the eighties, community stability in the rural west no longer constrained the federal timber program: market forces were going to be allowed to decide which timber communities lived and died.

After WWII in particular, federal timber sales were used in the west like a Keynsian economic instrument, expanding and contracting supply in order to keep the price of timber steady and rural mills running without shutdowns (though this goal remained elusive—boom and bust cycles remained). While this of course did not prevent shutdowns, it did exempt the timber industry from cut throat competition in a sector of the economy highly vulnerable to shifts in markets (lumber is often used in "Economics 101" classes to illustrate how a perfect market works!). It gave room on the bottom line for a paternalistic management style by the large timber corporations who saw community stability around their mills as a plus (try finding scabs in a timber town two hours from anywhere). Unions were strong and dealt with as partners much of the time. The "structural adjustments" applied to the rural west during the Reagan administration are just now coming to fruition in an even more impoverished West—students of international development take note.

Emmett was a union mill. But the Western timber industry is rapidly moving from a sector with high unionization towards smaller, non-union mills. Beginning in the early eighties, the wages of timber workers and the power of the unions have both declined. Non-union mills have been used as a bludgeon to secure concessions from union labor; the claim was that union mills with higher labor costs cannot compete with non-union mills.

In the early eighties the majority of plywood and lumber mills in the West were independents (mostly family owned) paying $5-6/hour. At the time, Boise Cascade paid $8-9/hour in its mills. The head of Lousiana Pacific, Harry Merlo, decided to break the union in the mid eighties; to not run awry of labor laws he shut the mills down for a year, declaring them 'new mills.' As new mills, when reopened they were not subject to union fair bargaining.

Boise Cascade went to its employees in 1986, citing a downturn in wood products prices, and claimed the corporation could not compete with the independents and companies like Louisiana Pacific unless labor accepted a one dollar across the board pay cut. To the negotiators surprise, labor accepted with the understanding that the pay would be restored to previous levels once the market went up. In 1988 the market had recovered and the union went on strike to regain the lost pay after BC said it couldn't yet restore the pay scale. The strike fizzled without getting back the lost dollar and by the early nineties the large producers no longer had to worry about the independents, most of which had been driven out of business by the combination of competition from the now lean and mean corporate sector, log exports, falling prices due to over supply, and

increasing pressure from environmental groups. Ironically, today, the surviving small mills are doing well as some large timber corporations retreat from processing timber (in the West), choosing to focus on the more discrete (and less prone to demonstrations outside of corporate headquarters) business of managing their massive holdings of land. Weyerhaeuser, for one, now sells most timber off its land to others for processing. Insurance companies are currently the largest owners of timberland in the United States.

This decline just described in the Western timber industry was severe enough to be a simply referred to as a before and after situation (life was good, then life was bad). It occupied a central position in the memory of those at the mill, supplemented by the arrival of Bonnie as the new mill complex supervisor in 1996. Another 'memento mori,' marking the mill's first death, could be found in the break room of the mill: the trophy case. The trophy case in the mill's breakroom was like a clock found in an explosion's rubble: full of trophies up until 1986….and then nothing, the end-time of the mill's integration with the surrounding community that no one would realize had happened for another decade. The old paternalism of the mill town fell apart as the 'regime of accumulation' for the Western timber industry shifted towards hegemonic despotism.

Yet the structural market conditions I have just cited never entered conversation at the mill: the presence of a malevolent force in the local relations of production was more often cited, either the company or the bad character of supervisors was cited as the cause for the decline. Most would offer the effect of the environmental debate on the ability to make a profit producing timber products as a supplement to the causes just provided, but the personal whim of the manager and the indifference of the company to the conditions they labored under were marked as the proximate causes of the decline.

Again, why didn't the union take a greater role in narrations of these changes just detailed? Why was play made the central trope? Perhaps because the Union was a ritual space: I was secretly initiated into the union and vowed not to repeat the ceremony. Without the ability to engage in efficacious rituals, leading to power on the shopfloor, the union faded. Such power was dispelled in the late 80's when the now weakened position of labor in the Western timber industry became evident. Expressive action is a way to manipulate and test the structure of social relationships—know their structure better—and play was the only medium left. Furthermore, unlike the union which had its place in the basement of the credit union, play took place on the shopfloor and therefore immediately joined work and life. Play was meta-communicative about practice. When discussing play, that was when the wholesale changes in the actual, practiced labor process were discussed at the mill. Play, even in memory, cognitively brought together the skilled habitus of work and the personal or collective memory of conflict.

Perhaps the crackdown on horseplay and other freedoms, the restriction on expressive action that had really only intensified in the five years since Bonnie had arrived as superintendent, stood in for the intensification of instrumental action (in the wake of deregulation, domestic structural adjustment) in the collective memory of the mill. The decline in wages endured after the eighties strikes was treated fatalistically; but the loss of the medium of expressive action, as more pressure was placed upon the labor process in order to eke out an extra measure of productivity, was a blow to what Weber called the 'style of life' shared by the community: regular judgments as to prestige and honor wound up with the expressive qualities of labor upon nature. Pride taken in labor upon nature, the expressive dimension of such labor, is a regular feature of agrarian life.

By squelching expressive behavior while simultaneously demanding more labor from the mill's workforce, management fused the discourses in the practical eye of shopfloor labor and established them as a key idiom of debate.

Emmett was a mill town. The mill was the single, non-entrepreneurial or professional route to a 'middle class' existence. The mill had offered some rural families a middle class existence without a college education, meaning they could stay and prosper where they lived without any need to move to or study in the city. This is not noted often enough, how a college education forces rural youth away from home, some would say indoctrinating them into a different style of life. Mostly because of the advantages of a union contract, the mill offered jobs desirable enough to encourage an intergenerational workforce: great grandfathers and mothers of current employees had worked in the mill, often resulting in the intertwining of kin relations with the mill's relationships. Work and life were not completely separated as we are led to expect by ethnographies of the urban labor process.

Families key to roles in the mill

Family relationships played a key role in the mill. For Anglos and Basques families extended into the past and spread through the present of the mill. Gus Garcia, a Mexican-American, had brought his brothers up, first to log with him in the mountains above the mill, then to join him in a union job—Gus said "never have I worked so little for so much money." Basques, Anglos, and Mexicans intermarried frequently as well. Moreover, the Anglo, Basque, and Mexican-American paths were coming together: Gus' brother Israel had a son, Moises, working at the mill.

The Wades sat in a group on breaks and father and son alike wanted me to make sure I wrote down how the mill was now run like a prison. The Foruria family is another case in point. Dave Foruria senior was a longtime president of the union. He initiated me. His wife had worked at the mill and her sons, Dave Jr. and Louie worked at the mill too. Dave senior's dad had worked at the mill. The long presence of the mill in a small, rural town had served to enmesh the mill with the life of the community: yet the most adamant critics of the mill were products of the same community. To reduce the inter-penetration of community and industry within the mill to a reflection of the corporation's interests is certainly too much. Jim Holford said to me one night out at the Round Up, a local honky-tonk, that "you have to be careful about the girl you take home in Emmett—it might be your cousin!" That it might be your cousin mattered at the mill too….relations of kin, marriage, and neighbor shaped the internal politics of the mill and the mill's internal labor market; providing them with a footing outside of the mill. Dean was at the Round Up that night too; he and Jim were cousins on both sides.

Memory at the mill was dependent on the long-term stability of the labor force—without the same actors together for thirty years the depth of memory found at the mill would have been impossible (the common work culture shared by a majority of laborers at a McDonalds is never more than a few months old). For most of the mill's history, in fact up until the 1980s, superintendents of the Emmett mill complex started as manual labor on the green end. This was the usual course by which one became superintendent. The community of Emmett and the hierarchy within the mill were co-extensive. The mill's internal labor market included management positions: drawing

together assessments of status outside and inside the mill; again, blurring work and life. This half-century compact between the timber industry, government institutions, and communities began to fall apart in the mid-eighties alongside the failed strikes. The integration of families with the mill started to fall apart too.

Both Marx and Hegel in their way sought to reconcile the subjective and objective dimensions of experience. Hegel called such a reconciliation the birth of absolute spirit: a whole not riven by conflict. Within productive relations—between men and between men and nature—expressive action is a field (including play and ritual) where subject and object are tenuously reconciled. Play has a double sense, 1) the looseness between parts of a structure or machine and 2) as an inter-subjective, ludic dimension of experience. Play stands between chaos and order in the first case (play is how the resistance of matter to the structures we desire to impose upon matter's form are nimbly overcome—as simple as the loosening of two parts from each other so they can move independently); in the latter case, play mediates between the subjective and objective dimensions of experience (play is an aspect of personhood, lying between individual and group and mediating between the two—play is a looseness of identity constantly re-invigorating identity through identity's disruption).

But the necessary looseness of play excludes an ability to push efficiency to its limits: the play between subjects and between subjects and nature is a constraint on the application of systemic rationality—the further refining of systems. A definition of work purified of life/play cannot give anything but a definition of work's goals in terms of outputs (enjoyed while not working), condemning the labor itself to drudgery.

Within the capitalist labor process, the opening up of a space for play, not purifying play from work, is inseparable from the question of time: it is the attempt to squeeze the maximum amount of labor (labor power) from each uniform unit of time (abstract time) that necessitates the exclusion of play in favor of instrumental action. The play between subjective and objective dimensions both guarantees freedom for subjects and the ability to truly respond flexibly to contingencies, the inevitable eruption of unruly events and encounters between subjects and between subjects and nature (it is easier to avoid a deer in headlights doing twenty five than a hundred and twenty five). Play is a dimension where man the maker is not separated from man qua social being—*homo ludens*, when indistinct from *homo faber*, can take ten minute breaks without asking the boss.

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Endnotes

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[i] . This was pointed out to me by Dr. Ivan Karp.

[ii] . I am sidestepping in this paper the relation of expressive action to the concept currently in wide play most closely approximating it—*performance*. Performance is a type of expressive action, yet invoking either concept is an attempt to get around a simplistic, mono-functional notion of communicative action, and acts in general. Action is better thought of as multifunctional: even when considering work, there are questions of style, forms, or aesthetics [Corrine Kratz: private communication]. To adapt the coordinates laid down by J.L. Austin concerning performance (out of many incommensurate definitions proposed): performance is 1) an act or utterance with force (to alter) that 2) unfolds in time (does not simply state a synchronous fact), and 3) that concerns felicity more than true or false facts (i.e. performance rather than stating truth, promises truth) [Austin 1979]. A performance is, as an ideal type, contrasted with a statement of facts or an instrumental act (though, as noted, a distinction between instrumental and expressive acts *qua* practices is untenable). In this broadest of philosophical definitions, performance is a promise of fidelity between subjects unfolding in time. Here the ethical dimension of performative acts becomes clear. Likewise, an instrumental act without an expressive complement exists for the most part in the fantasies of managers' pursuing pure productivity (i.e. a worker devoting all effort to labor).

[iii] . One woman at the mill, Harriet, who had been at the mill since the 1970s lamented the effects of the new emphasis on harassment rules at the mill since the mid 1990s, because it had deprived her of access to the sometimes bawdy (why it was now banned) storytelling of males. Men now shut up as she approached.

[iv] . Canada's timber exports to the United States as a percentage of American consumption doubled between 1975 and 1985 (Robbins 1989). Today Canada provides half our structural lumber.