

If a Text Falls in the Woods...: Intertextuality, Environmental Perception, and the Non- Authored Text

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Abstract

This essay, building upon a disciplinary grounding in folkloristics, spatial theory, and rhetorical study, seeks to extend the discussion of intertextuality first initiated by Julia Kristeva and Mikhail Bakhtin. Looking beyond traditionally examined texts like books, artwork, and films, it suggests that intertextual theory may also apply to cultural and individual readings of locations and spaces in the biophysical environment. Such readings make for a particularly interesting case discussion of textuality and intertextuality, as these environmental objects—though coded with meanings at the vernacular level and through mass media representation—often have no discernible human creator or “author.”

In 2008, while studying narrative depictions of biophysical landscapes in the U.S., I conducted a series of field interviews with wilderness enthusiasts and nature pilgrims in the Pacific Northwest. Seeking to collect stories and personal experience narratives concerned with encounters and emotions in the wilderness environment, I began to notice a peculiar trend in the way my informants framed their individual responses. One informant related how, at an early age, he reveled in wilderness explorations with friends as “*Lord of the Flies*-type stuff.” Another informant compared his journeys into the deep woods and other such

locations as a “Thoreau thing.” A third remarked on what she called “magical” aspects of a particular hiking spot by saying it was “very *Lord of the Rings*.” Two years later, when returning to the area, I hiked through a wooded region outside of town with the children of a good friend of mine. The kids repeatedly compared the environment to the wooded regions depicted by and in a variety of popular media, including the film *Return of the Jedi* and the television program *Lost*.

My initial motivation for collecting wilderness experience narratives grew from an interest in longstanding folk traditions and the expression of magical belief, but, over time, I have come to recognize a separate pattern at play. Every single one of my informants—even those individuals who lived, worked, and spent much of their leisure time in the deep woods environment—had interpreted the wilderness spaces and places through the frame of some other, popular media form. The wooded wilderness, for each of them, undoubtedly held import in its own right (as evidenced by an avowed appreciation for certain sites and repeated, active engagement with the environment itself), yet their experiences of what they called “wilderness” were habitually expressed through evocation of and comparison to traditionally readable texts, including books, films, artwork, and television programs. I began to rethink my position.

Locations and spaces in the physical environment, I realized, may act as texts. At the instant the individual views his or her environment through an interpretive lens, imbuing it with symbolic meaning, it becomes a readable object with

connotative meaning and association. A thick, dark forest might be read to mean mystery, foreboding, adventure, or the unfamiliar. A prominent mountaintop may be read to symbolize achievement, power, or a nearly divine sense of glory. A desert expanse might be read to mean despair, challenge, or, perhaps conversely, tranquility. To those who recount experiences set in and around such environments, the environments have meaning. This meaning may be rooted in physical experience, but as Yi-Fu Tuan, Henri Lefebvre, Kent Ryden, and many others have noted, it is more often culturally developed, through discourse. The environment is indeed a text.

Of course, this initial realization was not a significant surprise for me at the time, but, after reviewing the responses of my many informants over the years, a secondary—or, perhaps, supplementary—offshoot to the environment-as-text argument made so well by Tuan, Lefebvre, Ryden, and others rose to the surface. If environmental spaces and locations may function as texts with interpretable meanings, we, as critics, must wonder how and from whence those meanings are developed. My informants' accounts suggest that, at least to some degree, their readings of such environmental texts are guided and informed by simultaneous and automatic comparison, contrast, and reference, whether immediately conscious or not, to other readable and interpretable objects.

In recognition of this tendency, the reading of the spatial environment becomes an exercise in intertextual perception. That is, environmental texts—like any given text—derive

meaning through their relationships with those other readable objects encountered by or available to the individual or the interpretive community. My fieldwork had led me to an intriguing set of more theoretical questions.

This essay, building upon a disciplinary grounding in folkloristics, spatial theory, and rhetorical study, seeks to answer those questions, and to extend the discussion of intertextuality first initiated by Julia Kristeva and Mikhail Bakhtin. Looking beyond traditionally examined texts, like books, artwork, and films, it suggests that intertextual theory may also apply to our readings of objects less traditionally examined as “texts,” *per se*. Locations and spaces in the biophysical environment, I argue, make for a particularly interesting case discussion of textuality and intertextuality, as these objects, unlike other texts, have no discernible human creator or “author.” How might an object function as a text, it asks, if no discernible author exists? Does environmental perception provide a case study of Roland Barthes's ideal imagined scenario of a text available free from author and interpretive interference, or independent of Michel Foucault's “author-function?” And, if we think of text as an object read to have meaning, when, precisely, does a non-authored object qualify as text? In other, somewhat playful yet wholly earnest words, if an object exists in the woods, and no one is around to read it, does it exist as a text at all?

Ultimately, this essay argues that environmental perceptions, like other texts, derive their meaning through intertextual relationships, demonstrating that intertextual theory, therefore, may

be readily extended into novel fields of investigation. It examines the ways in which non-authored objects in our biophysical spatial environments—such as wilderness, mountains, shoreline, and other places—become coded with meanings through intertextual relationships, both at the vernacular level and through mass media representation. It is through the discourses exchanged in, of, and about the biophysical environment that such non-authored objects and spaces ultimately accrue a textual quality.

To approach this concept, the essay will make two essential movements: first, it will engage in existing intertextual theory and, second, it will apply this theory to environmental case examples. Along the way, it will briefly engage both Barthes's and Foucault's writing on the role of author in the establishment of the concept of a "non-authored" text. While environment-as-text arguments like those of Tuan and Lefebvre apply to all potential environments, this study will limit its primary discussion to biophysical environments and objects, ostensibly (and perceived to be) free from human design—in part due to my own continuing interest in the wooded wilderness space in narrative representation and in part for the unique opportunities such spaces allow in the discussion of text and author. The study also takes its lead from Ryden, in considering intertexts as those objects which "map" any given landscape. While my informant responses from Oregon suggest that more complex, popular media texts like books and movies play prominent roles in the development of environmental meanings, this initial treatment of intertextuality

in the biophysical environment will focus attention on simpler and more proximally relevant intertexts as well, such as signposts and placards placed by visitors within the non-authored environment. By first engaging in intertextual theory and, then, examining the bounds of its potential extension, the paper will show how intertextuality codes the environments in which we live, work, play, learn, and travel.

Intertextuality and the Making of Meaning

Intertextuality refers to the web of relationships between texts and their meanings. An intertextual approach to communication recognizes that any identifiable text is in fact an unstable node within a constantly shifting and evolving web of references, appropriations, influences, and socio-cultural contexts. The presence of one text serves as context for another, influencing potential and available readings. Such relationships and lines of reference permeate all aspects of discourse and communication.

Modern theories of intertextuality begin with the writings Mikhail Bakhtin and Julia Kristeva. Bakhtin's assertion that "any utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances" (1986, 69) and Kristeva's argument that "any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (1980, 66) have found general acceptance in multiple disciplines, including rhetoric, media studies, cultural studies, folklore, literary studies, film, and more. Meanings are understood not to reside innately within a text itself, but to grow and change through the text's connection to, reference to, and juxtaposition

with other meanings. Bakhtin notes, “[E]ach utterance is filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which it is related by the communality of the sphere of speech communication” (1986, 91).

Theories of intertextuality certainly complicate the critical analysis, then, of any available text. They blur the boundaries of where one text ends and another text begins. Intertextuality, at times, allows individual texts to be co-opted for different ideological—or, even, subversive—aims, but it may also reify existing meanings and values in a process of ongoing, mutual reinforcement and interpretive aggregation. Any text that draws from or references another (whether explicitly or only subtly) complicates and expands the existing meanings available for interpretation and, in the end, any conceivable (or perceivable) text becomes, potentially, an intertext—a node of interpretable meaning wrapped up in and contributing to the lingering mental impact of its predecessors and its followers. Through the intertextual web, the task of determining concrete, singular meaning becomes fruitless (indeed, impossible), and is replaced by the task of tracing the web of relationships itself.

Jonathan Gray (2010), building from the work of Gérard Genette, has further distinguished between various aspects of intertextual relationships, including synergy—through which multiple textual platforms contribute to a collectively-produced, greater meaning not communicated by any division of a web’s individual parts—and paratexts—those texts, or readable elements, surrounding another, acting as filters or “first and formative encounters with the

text” (2010, 3). A paratext, Gray writes, is both distinct from and intrinsically part of a text, creating and managing the text while giving it meaning. It is through a single text’s paratexts that readers can make contextual sense of its content and symbolism. Without such paratextual contexts, Gray writes, any text remains ambiguous, intangible, or even nonsensical.

When applied to my fieldwork experiences in the Pacific Northwest, these concepts prompt case examples to immediately jump to mind. I think, for instance, of the words of “Rick,” a 32-year-old hiking enthusiast, when describing what, to him, denotes a “wilderness” space. Wilderness, he said, was a space “far removed from civilization,” and identifiable in this remove by markers, like an “established trailhead,” backpacking permit stands, and, often, “a Port-a-Potty,” each signifying a certain point as the threshold beyond which, in Rick’s words, “civilization ends.” Each of these markers is a paratext for a biophysical location, signaling and encouraging potential meanings. It is through and in reference to these readable objects that the physical environment itself is made readable to Rick in a given way.

Rick and others also spoke of trail maps and signs, installed by the area park service, likewise guiding readings of the environment. Trails marked with warnings for inexperienced hikers or with foreboding names, like “Devil’s Backbone,” were often associated with more rugged, or authentic, “nature” experiences.¹ They functioned paratextually, often highlighting particular aspects of the region or landmarks as distinct or especially

notable while overlooking others. For regions even further removed from the reaches of civilization and human creative forces, a paratext might be a book about biophysical environments in general, or existing photographs of the area. Rick, for instance, spoke of how his understanding of locations he had visited on his wilderness excursions grew from books he'd read in the past, by Barry Lopez, Aldo Leopold, Molly Gloss, and Edward Abbey, as well as from environmental studies courses he had taken in college. Like Rick, any wilderness traveler may read or encounter such paratextual materials prior to his or her excursion into a previously unmapped or unread environment, and these paratexts prepare the traveler for a certain, pre-coded interpretation of the environmental text he or she eventually encounters. Paratexts could potentially include any and all pockets of meaning that surround a text and influence or create the text's meaning prior to actual encounter.

Yet, theoretically, applying the label of "paratext" to any and all readable elements surrounding an environment does pose certain problems. We might, for instance, ask where the critical analyst of textual meaning might draw the line delimiting paratextual influence. If one photograph or trail map or book about the wilderness might serve as paratext, what is to keep all similar photographs, maps, or books—let alone all other encountered texts with some relationship to spatial environments—from acting as paratexts as well? If we consider almost everything to be a paratext, the label of paratext becomes essentially useless. In fact, Genette, who first coined the term,

openly recognized this danger. "[O]ne of the methodological hazards attendant on a subject as multiform and tentacular as the paratext," he writes, "is the imperialist temptation to annex to this subject everything that comes within its reach or seems possibly to pertain to it." He warns, quite vehemently, "Whatever the desire—inherent in any study (in any discourse)—to justify one's subject by magnifying it, to me the sounder and methodologically better course seems to be to react in the reverse way," and to avoid "multiplying 'theoretical objects' unless the reason for doing so is of the utmost importance." Calling the paratext a "transitional zone between text and beyond-text," he stresses that "one must resist the temptation to enlarge this zone by whittling away in both directions," and remain ever wary of "rashly proclaiming that 'all is paratext'" (Genette 1997, 407).

For Genette, the paratext functions "to ensure for the text a destiny consistent with the author's purpose" (*ibid.*). While the paratext surrounds and extends a text, presenting it as something meaningful in the world, he claims it also draws from authorial intention, fundamentally committed to the text it surrounds as a *raison d'être*. Extension of the term "paratext" to all materials guiding reading of a biophysical environment, thus, does indeed strain the bounds of useful theoretical discussion—yet, certainly, intertextual relationships remain at play. While Genette developed the term "paratext" in discussion of meaning in books and literature, it has found ready expansion into analysis of other, more clearly authored texts, like film, theater, material artwork, and song. Would expanding the application

of the term “intertext” to discussion of environmental perceptions and texts without actual authors really represent “imperialist temptation”?

“Intertext” has, over the years, indeed been defined in varying ways. Michael Riffaterre, building from Bakhtin and Kristeva, distinguishes between “intertext”—a text which a reader must know in order to understand the full significance of another—and “intertextuality,” the web of functions constituting and regulating the relationships between the intertexts itself (1990, 56-57). Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott further distinguish “intertextuality” as a *social* organization of texts amongst the specific conditions of reading (1987, 46). Yet regardless of minute differences in definitional groundings, intertextual theory as a whole still relies on a single basic premise, well articulated by Gray in his 2010 book, *Show Sold Separately*: not only do “texts talk back to and revise other texts, either implicitly or explicitly calling for us to connect their meanings to previous texts,” but, also, “we will always make sense of texts partly through the frames offered by other texts” (31). In this way, intertextuality applies readily to our readings of the biophysical environment, regardless of the presence or absence of a discernible author.

The Non-Authored Text

Early discussion of textuality put heavy consideration upon the role of the author. Wordsworth and Shelley, for instance, both celebrated the role of the poet in capturing and filtering meaning for readers. T. S. Eliot pointed to the author’s genius in borrowing from, rearranging,

re-contextualizing, and appropriating existing meanings to create and reveal new levels of aesthetic appreciation. Over time, “text” came to represent a crucial interactive juncture of four key elements: author, work, context (or tradition), and reader.

Identification of the biophysical environment as a text, then, seems at first problematic. At least as far as human actors go, elements in the open biophysical environment—those spaces not explicitly groomed, maintained, or even evidently influenced by human forces—have no author. Still, they may be read. They may have meaning. Readers may, in fact, never see a “poem lovely as a tree.” The text, it seems, may in fact derive merely from interaction of not four but three elements: work, context, and reader. Through this scenario, though, we are left to inquire where the role of author fits. If not essential to the creation of text, does the author represent part of the work itself, part of the context, or part of the reader? And, if not from the author, from whence do available meanings in a text originate?

The latter question, by now, has found a ready answer in the works of Barthes, Iser, Volosinov, and Fish. Meaning is developed in (or by, or along with) the reader—but more on that in a moment. Contemporary discussion of the role of author must first acknowledge the work of Michel Foucault and his concept of the “author-function.”

Foucault argues that the author of a text, as far as the meaning of that text is concerned, is not actually the physically existent individual who oversees the text’s mechanical creation. Rather, he notes, “the author is an ideological

product" (1980, 159). The physical creator of a work perceived as a text (commonly referred to as "author" in vernacular discussion) and the impression of a text's author and its implications for a reader are two distinctly separate things. "The author," he writes, "is not an indefinite source of significations which fill a work; the author does not precede the works, he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses" (*ibid.*). By this definition, the author serves as context, or even as contextual constraint. This constraint, guiding any potential reader's interpretation of a text, is what Foucault calls the "author-function"—itself a kind of intertextual influence. Recognition of the author as author-function, Foucault notes, allows the critic to look beyond concerns over text author and ask more relevant questions, like, "What are the modes of existence of [a] discourse? Where has it been used, how can it circulate, and who can appropriate it for himself? What are the places in it where there is room for possible subjects? Who can assume these various subject-functions?," and, above all, "What difference does it make who is speaking?" (160).

Roland Barthes, in his influential article "The Death of the Author," campaigns for a greater attention to such questions and a dismissal of concern over authorial influence in order to better analyze the function and development of meaning in any given text. Meaning, for Barthes, is produced by the audience in the act of reading a text. The real-world creator of a text, or "author," in his estimation, was comparatively inconsequential, serving merely as a cue to establish legitimacy of a text within a given social circle. The

author, Barthes maintained, was not the locus of meaning-creation but merely a filter for understanding a text in the eyes of the reader. "Linguistically," he wrote, "the author is never more than the instance writing, just as *I* is nothing other than the instance saying *I*" (1977, 145). The text and its meaning, he claimed, developed out of intertextual relationships, referring to text as a "multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture" (146). If communication scholars are to better understand the creation of text and meaning, Barthes wrote, they must "kill" the author and promote the "birth of the reader" (Gray 2010, 108).

Ultimately, Barthes maintained that "[a]s soon as a fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, [a] disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, [and] writing begins" (142). With recognition of this principle, the textual critic can begin to address the questions posed by Foucault, in which "author" is no longer viewed as creator, but as context or intertext. Amending Barthes's dramatic declaration, Foucault notes that the author-function is not so much dead as it is altered in its significance. The author becomes, in many ways, a symbol of his or her own absence. Authors, as Gray notes, are no longer seen as "solely external authorities," but rather as "texts that audiences utilize to make meaning and to situate themselves in relation to other texts" (108). In the absence of

author-as-creator-of-meaning, Foucault argues, communication scholars must locate the space left open by the author's removal, "follow the distribution of gaps and breaches, and watch for the openings that this disappearance uncovers" (145).

Either way, whether following Barthes's or Foucault's lead, the role of the author in the creation of meaning is greatly diminished. The author is the creator of a work, but, as Barthes notes, a work is something different than a text. A text is meaning experienced at the act of consumption—an instance of collaboration between object, intertextual context (including author), and reader. In light of Barthes's and Foucault's arguments against the import of author and in consideration of the ultimate role of reader in text creation, the novel concept of a "non-authored" text loses its potentially problematic connotations.

Of course, some readers may and do, in fact, perceive biophysical environments and other objects not produced by human beings to have a divine or superhuman author, but Barthes's and Foucault's arguments show us that even in these cases, the concept of author is but context for interpretation. Meaning is created in the act and moment of reading. Barthes writes, "[A] text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" (148). Many contemporary scholars and thinkers have echoed and expanded on this sentiment.²

Therefore, in our exploration of meaning-making for spaces and locations in the biophysical environment, we must apply the same principles utilized when examining meaning-making in more traditionally examined texts. Volosinov (1973) notes that many (if not all) non-

authored aspects of the "natural" environment—like the cry of an animal, for instance—do not innately serve as signs, but as soon as they are repeated through discourse, accruing inter-individual significance, they become socially meaningful. Non-authored texts become ideological signs. If those types of biophysical spaces discussed and celebrated by my informants—deep woods, mountaintops, or desert expanses—are perceived as unique and distinguishable from other points on the greater landscape, they are read to have some level of meaning, and that meaning, like all textual meanings, draws from reader engagement with intertextuality. If a certain environment exhibits what Walter Benjamin (1969) calls "aura," a mysterious and palpable significance based in aesthetic or spiritual appreciation, that aura must draw from intertextual and paratextual relationships, framing the reader's encounter with the environmental space; if a place can act as a shared symbol between peoples, it is because interpretive communities have arisen through shared contextual experience; and if a hike in the woods on the mountainous coast of the Pacific Northwest can be described through reference to a popular book or movie, the non-authored environment becomes wrapped up in the ever-expanding web of intertextuality.

Intertextuality, Folkloristics, and the Biophysical Environment

Making the shift from folkloristic to intertextual analysis of my 2008 Pacific Northwest fieldwork provided a remarkably simple and fluid transition. Folkloristics, after all, is a field most

intimately concerned with chains of tradition, appropriation, and, in effect, intertextual reference. The folklorist sees perhaps a wider reach of possibilities for intertextual influence than any other scholar. In the scope of cultural tradition and its development over time, the folklorist asserts that any conceivable (or perceivable) text is, in fact, an intertext, wrapped up in the meanings and the lingering mental impact of its predecessors. These pre-encountered meanings are the “textual ghosts and hauntings” which Julie Sanders identifies in the opening pages of her 2006 book, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (4). Though no longer literally present, these existing meanings speak to and interact with new meanings *as they develop*. The vast majority of folklorists, including myself, would agree with Sanders when she claims that any text that draws from or references another (whether explicitly or only subtly) complicates and expands the existing meanings available for interpretation and that the making of meaning is indeed an ongoing and ever-evolving process (3).

However, the folklorist would likely further argue that the whole of human culture—the entirety of the human expressive experience—is a collaborative production, and that individual authorship of any given text is merely an illusion (or, at the very least, a vast exaggeration), bolstered by the value placed upon individualism and personal agency in the post-Enlightenment Western community. We, as human communicators, tend to think of ourselves as separate entities—and, truly, given the demands of survival within the perceived physical environment, such

interpretation of individual finiteness is a wholly pragmatic and perhaps necessary calculation—but are, in actuality, interconnected nodes of action and experience, constantly affecting and re-directing one another across the bounds of time and space. As we experience the world from a seemingly finite perspective, such interconnectedness is inevitably bound to be a challenge for our understanding, but, in simplest forms, one can still easily step back and recognize that what one person says and another person hears, one person writes and another person reads, affects both parties in multiple ways, both at the moment of communication and ever afterward. The “ghosts” of what others (and ourselves) have said, written, and done do not merely “haunt” our future interpretations, but guide them, inhabit them, and, oftentimes, envelop them.

Such a liberal interpretation of intertextual principles might make Gérard Genette uneasy, as it seems to give in to the “imperialist temptation” against which he cautions his readers, but intertextual appropriation does indeed represent a key driving force in all forms of human expression. In the study of narrative tradition, for instance, and other folklore—communication based upon shared interaction and variation of non-static forms—some degree of appropriation is always already set in place. For instance, the oft-cited example of the myth of the Great Flood may be traced back to an earliest known form, in Middle Eastern tablet scrawlings, then traced down through variations in Greek and Norse and Judeo-Christian traditions, down into the post-apocalyptic films and literature finding popular audiences in

the world today, but it too has previous ancestors, in unrecorded oral forms, and has been colored and “haunted” along the way through interaction and juxtaposition with infinitely many other stories, audience experiences, and cultural contexts. Psychoanalytical readings might point to the existence of an “original” archetype for the tale, and structuralists might point to a supposed initial structure, but neither provide any hard evidence to support such hypothetical propositions. A more traceable and defensible explanation of story forms turns its focus upon the constant process of human and textual interaction—combined quite nicely in the realm of intertextuality.

Folklorists seek to answer questions of why certain forms and texts are found to be important to peoples across geographical, chronological, and cultural boundaries; what ideas and meanings human beings are drawn to re-visit and re-explore; which aspects of a text are altered or omitted when re-interpretation and re-appropriation take place, which stay the same, and why. A focus on intertextuality provides a pathway for approaching these queries.

Stories told about “natural” locations and non-authored spaces reveal not only shared means for interpreting specific locations themselves, but also hold important implications for the larger worldviews of the individuals and communities that tell them. Spatial environment, as Tuan (1977) notes, is a constantly present contextual factor for all human experience. It is for this reason that my research interest was initially drawn to narratives of wilderness encounter. Yet melding a

folkloristic approach with consideration of intertextuality did force at least one startling and notable alteration to my perspective towards the field interviews. In light of intertextual thinking, I realized that the context surrounding a text is really nothing if not a collection of other texts itself. In my study of personal and traditional narrative, I had been focused solely upon other narrative intertexts and had overlooked the influence of surrounding context to produce meaning in the environment for the individual wilderness pilgrim or explorer.

With the last part of this essay, then, I would like to further investigate the implications of intertextuality for perception of environment, moving my own work out of folkloristic field analysis and into theory-building assessment. To explore how environmental context may function as intertext, I will build from the work of museum studies scholars, who have already considered environmental meaning-making in more intentionally-designed atmospheres, before moving into application of this principle to non-authored biophysical locations, including wooded regions, the beach (as discussed by John Fiske), and the “wilderness” described by Rick and my other field informants.

Environmental Meaning and the Exhibition Effect

In recent years, museum and curatorial studies scholars have done fantastic work in recognizing and analyzing the means by which physical environments both take on meanings of their own and contribute to the meanings of ambiguous or non-authored objects set within them. Joan Branham, for instance, has noted that

“the import of any art work is inextricably linked to an audience’s reception and perception of it” (1994/1995, 38). The job of the museum curator is to imbue displayed objects with import by guiding this reception and perception—commanding what Aden et. al., building from Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz, call the “discursive surround”: the features of and around particular spaces that, like elements of de Certeau’s cityscape, attempt to control the experiences of those who navigate them (2009, 317-318). Branham describes what she calls “laudatory efforts to recontextualize and resacralize objects within the museum backdrop.” These attempts to stress the object’s significance, she writes, are “normally lost in decontextualized displays,” but she adds that the museum display atmosphere can achieve a kind of “resonance” when “the viewer is made aware of the historical and social constructs imposed on art objects, as well as the representational practices that negotiate their import” (37). Branham exemplifies how museum curators consider key questions of environmental context, including what happens when the actual space that once surrounded an object is transferred to or reconstructed in a museum, or whether such a space can maintain any of its original character when repositioned within the context of the museum, loaded with its own contextual implications. Positioning objects centrally within a room, cordoning them off with glass cases and velvet ropes, or explicitly highlighting aspects of their meaning (while overlooking or omitting others) with informational placards and museum brochures undoubtedly influences the museum visitor’s experience and

reading. These environmental factors function intertextually.

More explicitly related to space, however, Branham also remarks upon an increasingly common trend among museums in the recreation of particular spaces and environments. She describes the curator’s urge to re-present “sacred space,” similar to what Rachel P. Maines and James J. Glynn call “numinous” places—objects and environments, outside of the museum, preserved and respected for their association with socio-cultural mystique, magic, or aura (1993, 10). In recreating aura for museum-goers, curatorial scholars have discovered firsthand how such environmental context is developed through intertextual markers and framing. The mere act of placing an object on display—whether authored or non-authored—encourages reading of its cultural significance, historical importance, or aesthetic value. In guiding and influencing visitor perceptions, the intertexts of the museum atmosphere create appreciation in what Bettina M. Carbonell has called a kind of “exhibition effect” (2009, 129).³ Carbonell has focused on the means by which object placement and arrangement opens and closes opportunities for viewer engagement and narrative creation. She writes, “When we consider the pragmatic/consequential nature of what it means to make objects visible, to give them a ‘vocal’ platform, and to enter into a personal dialogical relationship with them, the results of the exhibition become ethically significant” (132). Even display without explicit curatorial narration, she argues, encourages the viewer to read exhibition objects as being culturally significant. The mere act of exhibition

or demarcation casts contextual (and intertextual) cues upon the museum visitor's reading, yielding "important perspectives on the relationships between museum labels and/or wall texts and the creation of a visual and/or verbal historical narrative" (135).

I argue that these cues and perspectives—this "exhibition effect"—may be equally relevant outside of the museum walls, as one travels into the non-authored realm of the biophysical environment. Consider, for instance, what happens when the object of exhibition is not an artifact or transplanted part, but a spatial atmosphere as a whole. The same strategies mobilized for the creation of aura in the museum space are utilized in the historical location, the nature preserve, and the national park. The simple act of labeling a space a "wilderness" or "natural"—on a road sign, a map, an outdoor recreation guide—opens the visitor to some readings while closing them to others. It precodes visitors' experiences and interpretations. Such labels, along with trail markers, maps, hiking brochures, field guides, fences, paved areas alongside non-paved areas, and more, may be read by a visitor to the location, and all contribute to the ultimate meaning of the space as a whole.

Imagine, again, Rick's description of the wilderness. The trailhead is marked as such. A kiosk between the parking lot and the trailhead features a map of the area, with wilderness space clearly illustrated and separated from other, non-identified space by a rigid dotted line. Flyers on the kiosk warn visitors of specific threats in the area, like wildlife sightings and poison ivy. State natural resources logos abound. The "Port-

a-Potty," along with refuse bins and a permit stand, calls attention to the trappings of civilization left behind in the "wilderness" space. Such markers stress the differences between the "wilderness" space and the "non-wilderness" spaces which surround it. They do not identify the similarities between this wooded space and the space "outside," do not call attention to the several trappings of civilization that one may still bring along beyond the trailhead (cell phone signals, candy bars, etc.), and do not acknowledge that some aspects of "wilderness"—including wildlife sightings and poison ivy—can just as easily appear in "non-wilderness" locations. The objects at Rick's trailhead confirm and echo the image of "wilderness" described in the books he'd read (the Lopez, the Leopold, the Abbey) and the popular understandings he'd elsewhere encountered.

As Branham writes, the perceived meaning of spaces and of objects "is inherently changeable, depending on a given spatial and temporal perception" (1994/1995, 33), but her discussion does not go so far as to explicitly recognize that such aura and empowerment in the biophysical, non-museal atmosphere is often also the result of carefully and complexly layered contextual cues.⁴

Writing extensively on human perceptions of space and place, Yi-Fu Tuan argues that, ultimately:

What is true of a picture of a place is also true of a real place. The meaning of an actual physical place is the result of a historical and social process, built up over time by large and small happenings (Tuan 1991, 692).

These happenings include historical events, but also the retelling of those events through narrative and memorial and re-enactment. The language used to describe a place and the memories or legends recounted surrounding that place can shape meanings and emotions of the place for an individual and a group in a kind of linguistic place-construction. J. E. Malpas echoes Tuan, writing, "We understand a place and a landscape through the historical and personal narratives that are marked out within it and that give that place a particular unity and establish a particular set [of] possibilities within it" (816). Space is understood as and through the human response to physical surroundings.

While this response is manifested in the paratexts of any given atmosphere—maps, pictures, signs, and brochures, for instance—it is also traceable in the intertexts of personal stories of the place, historical narratives of the place, and even fictional accounts only loosely related to the spot through shared symbolic elements, much like the way my informants described the Pacific Northwest wilderness through reference to *Return of the Jedi* and *The Lord of the Rings*. The intertexts that guide our readings of a biophysical location can be explicit or subtle, but it is through them that the meaning of the space is constructed.

Before exploring environments as place-texts and intertextual reference in my own fieldwork collections, we might briefly consider John Fiske's extended analysis of Western Australia's Cottesloe Beach as a text in his book *Reading the Popular*. Fiske's is a perfect illustration of how meaning may be intertextually

developed in a physical environment without a single or discernible author. The beach, he writes, can be semiotically read as a text, a "signifying construct of potential meanings operating on a number of levels," and he traces these meanings to authored items surrounding the non-authored space of the coastline, including beach-side buildings, changing rooms, lawns, vendors' kiosks, regulatory notices, benches, flags, litter bins, and more. These are items, he writes, "whose foregrounded functional dimensions should not blind us to their signifying ones" (2005, 43). He explains:

Like all texts, beaches have readers. People use beaches to seek out certain kinds of meaning for themselves, meanings that help them come to terms with their off-beach, normal life-style. As with other texts, these meanings are determined partly by the structure of the text itself, partly by the social characteristics and discursive practices of the reader—different people use the beach differently, that is, they find different meanings in it, but there is a core of meanings that all users, from respectable suburban family to long-haired dropout surfer, share to a greater or lesser extent (*ibid.*).

He systematically reads the beach along with and in respect to the position of the bathhouses, novelty postcards sold from nearby gift shops, posted prohibitions and beach rules, as well as tanning lotion and surfboard advertisements to develop meaning for the beach environment as a whole. Yet he also traces meanings to culturally shared symbolism in objects and aspects not generally regarded as "texts," like the presence of long-haired rebels, beat-up vans, and the

geographical opposition between land and water. Though he does not always explicitly say so, the symbolism of these objects rises from knowledge of further intertexts—from films and television programs about hippies and beach bums, or the bottomless cultural cache of myths and stories setting the civilized man of the land against the treacherous threat of the open ocean.

The beach's very identity as "natural," he notes, is a construct built on intertextual reference. As "an anomalous category between land and sea that is neither one nor the other but has characteristics of both" (*ibid.*), the beach space resonates with Lévi-Straussian mythic elements of culture versus nature. "In other words," he states, "the natural is a cultural product," and nature accrues meaning only through and as "a conceptual opposition to culture" (54-55).

Fiske avoids using the terms "intertext" or "intertextuality" explicitly, but his readings of the beach's meaning all trace back to symbols and concepts already established in other, surrounding texts. The meaning of the non-authored environment is contingent upon other, already existing meanings: the implications of a deep tan, the opposition of food to excreta, reality TV programs, experiences and filmed depictions of the drive-in cinema, surfers' journals, shark tales, TV news reports, and more. "Culture," he writes, "is the constant process of producing meanings of and from our social experience" (71) and "the natural" is "a culture's production or reproduction of nature" (51).

When re-assessing my fieldwork transcripts, I repeatedly see evidence of similar phenomena. When asked to

describe the wooded spaces they frequent and revere, my informants invariably mention representations of such spaces in stories, films, photographs, or other media. Their real experiences of an environment are articulated through reference to indirect representations. Rick, for instance, talks about his early fears of being in the woods at night as growing from "the horror movies that [he] had seen" and scary stories he'd heard from other kids. "Tim," a 40-year-old outdoor recreation leader, described similar experiences in deep forest environments by explaining:

Well, I tell you, I get freaked out every once and a while when I think about that *X-Files* episode, with the, uh, human-like creatures that have, like, chameleon-like...skin and can blend in. It's in the Northwest and they were eating hunters or something. Every once and a while, I'm out in the woods and I'm like, "Whoa!"

In another transcript, "Hannah," a 33-year-old avid camper, despite living and recreating in Oregon and Northern California, and despite a wealth of experience along the Cascade range, describes forests and mountains through reference to Alaska and the Himalayas, two places she has never been. When questioned about her own experiences in the wooded mountains, she compares herself explicitly to figures in the film *Into the Wild* and the Discovery Channel program *Everest*. Through such representations, the deep woods or wilderness environment is clearly associated with personal challenge, against fear, against physical limitations, and against unknown, extra-human forces.

It is perhaps no great revelation to note that people like to compare themselves to characters in stories and that associations of one wooded environment with another wooded environment bubble up naturally in casual communication, but this tendency toward intertextual reference also demonstrates the prominence of common representation of environment-types in the available frames for interpretation of actually experienced environments. Horror movies, scary stories, *X-Files*, *Into the Wild*, and *Everest* had all portrayed “wilderness” in specific ways; these specific ways, in combination, contributed to the popular definition of “wilderness” available to Rick, Tim, and Hannah both before they entered certain environments (which they were able to recognize individually as “wilderness” through their adherence to the intertextually developed popular definition) and after they had each had certain experiences (which they were able to retroactively recognize as fitting the “wilderness” frame). The intertexts of and about a kind of biophysical, or “natural,” environment primes subsequent recognitions of that environment-type in other places, reactions to that place-type upon recognition, and reflection of that experience in subsequent representations. That is, “nature,” “wilderness,” “forests,” and other such terms are all human frames, human ideas, created intertextually through discursive circulation of representations (Cronon 1996).

Even for those who regularly frequent a wooded environment, the use of stories and intertextual reference is pervasive. Of course, not every account of wilderness refers explicitly to a film

or television show, but some form of intertextuality seemed, in my fieldwork, to be always at play. I think of “Greg,” a 35-year-old outdoor sports instructor and wilderness rescue volunteer, speaking about his love of “nature” being rooted in books that explore “the human condition through adversity, you know, like *Captains Courageous*, and *The Sea Wolf* by Jack London.” I think of Rick and his association of mountains with superhuman forces, saying, “I have this very biblical idea, you know, and I haven’t studied the Bible and I don’t...I wasn’t even raised in a highly Christian family, but I, you know, I know some of these stories about people going to the top of a mountain and...and speaking to God and, you know, I’ve had...I’ve felt pretty close to whatever it is that’s out there.” I think of “Chris,” a 51-year-old outdoor recreation leader, explaining how he associated nearly every place he’d ever visited with the historical narrative told about it. “I’ve always been interested in some of the history,” he told me, “of the early settlers or the early explorers or people who made their mark on certain areas,” and went on to say:

I’ve always myself felt that people who have established a presence in a certain part of the country, um, especially a country where there hasn’t been... part of the country where there hasn’t been a lot of other human overlay—like there’s...it’s not visited daily by people, that you have to go out of your way to visit somewhere—where people lived for a long period of time or made a certain impact, that I still believe that there’s, um, a spiritualness connected with those people and, um, maybe some of their spirit lingers around places like that.

He told me specifically about a confluence in the Grande Ronde River of Northeastern Oregon, of a boatbuilding folk hero named Buzz Holstrom who died at the spot, and of how he personally tries to feel Holstrom's "presence" each time he visits the area.

In each case, as Tuan asserted, representations of place frame experiences of place. The representations can be in films or books or word-of-mouth tales. They can derive, as they did for Rick, from academic coursework, or from photographs, or from religious symbolism. They can even come in the form of personal experience narratives, told upon reflection on one's own experiences. Chris, Greg, and Tim, especially, described the deep woods through their own stories of personal experiences and encounters. Yet every representation is guided by, informed by, and in interaction with other representations and frames for understanding.

The various reactions to and descriptions of biophysical environments reported by my informants—from reverence to fear to duty towards stewardship—are all primed and guided by intertextuality. In other words, the "aura" of a biophysical, non-authored space grows from the exhibition effect of the readable objects that surround it. The qualities attributed to deep woods locations in the responses of my informants may no longer be said to rise directly from experience with the locations themselves, regardless of how the informants may personally interpret the situation. The non-authored wilderness destination is readable as a space in the same way as the explicitly authored museum display.

Conclusions

These conclusions may sound familiar to geographers and philosophers of space, but, speaking from experience, I suspect they could be reiterated and useful for the folklorist, the rhetorician, and the student of expressive culture. Considering spaces and environments not as mere settings or stages for textual objects but as readable, fluid texts in their own right, interacting with meanings of texts both in and around them, is bound to expand the scope of our analyses, especially when discussing folk and popular interactions with space and place.

Ultimately, the folk associations of a culture are not only *reflected* in the stories people tell, but *perpetuated, spread, and reinforced*. The way in which a community depicts its environment not only reveals the ways in which it perceives that environment, but further promotes such perceptions through narrative repetition until the tale and the place become nearly inseparable ideas. This, I feel, is an important point for the folklorist to consider, and it is highlighted by an incorporation of intertextual theory.

Stories told about an environment (or even, simply, taking place within that environment) create a narrative equivalent to the museal exhibition effect. They encourage the reading of certain meanings and points of import at the expense of others. They function as authored intertexts to the non-authored text of the environment itself.

Recognition that every movie or book set in the wooded wilderness, every poem or song about a mountaintop, every painted image of a desert expanse, and every bit of text readable beside a trailhead might contextualize and

guide the reading of an experience or location certainly makes the critic's, ethnographer's, and analyst's jobs more difficult, but it also unveils the process of meaning-making in ways not previously utilized to their fullest extent. When my informants described the Pacific Northwest wilderness through comparison to environments encountered in books, films, and television programs, they were not simply creating metaphors for descriptive purposes: they were revealing essential elements of their understanding of the Northwest environment as a space. On some level, for the individual readers, the forests of the Cascade Range are synonymous with those of *Lord of the Flies*, *Into the Wild*, and *Lost*, and, on another, they grow directly out of them. On one level, the peak of a certain butte is identified as unique on a trail map or brochure, but, on another, it is made worthy of this identification through that very map or brochure. A non-authored space or object in the woods is made meaningful—is made a text open to reading—through its interaction with intertexts and readers. The densest, most dizzying of forest environments is easily navigable in comparison to the dense and dizzying web of intertextual relationships that surround it, but only through consideration of the intertexts will understanding of the environment itself ever be achieved.

Notes

1 For an excellent and more detailed examination of trail symbolism and authenticity, see Senda-Cook, 2012.

2 See Volosinov 1973, 102; Iser 1980; Fish 1980.

3 Carbonell refers to “exhibition effect” as

“museum effect,” writing that a visitor's concentration upon one object relegates other objects to the periphery.

4 This relationship between exhibition effect and environment is traceable in the work of Helaine Silverman (2004), writing on connotation of pre-Columbian material display, of Harry B. Robinson (1952), describing the historical narrative and meanings encouraged by the paratexts of the Custer Battlefield Museum, and of Barry Mackintosh (1987), explaining the historically interpretive overtones encouraged at U.S. National Park sites during the 1980s.

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Responses

Rooting for the Wolves: Critical Folklore Studies and the Psychoanalytic Wilderness

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I am honored for the opportunity to respond to Casey Schmitt's essay. As a scholar who works at the intersection of critical folklore and rhetorical studies, I would like to consider myself among his target audience. I appreciate the many ways in which his essay revealed my blind spots regarding the wilderness, the environment, and the texts we produce about them, and I would like to offer one possible extension of this work here. But first, I think it would be helpful to recognize that the genre of "academic response" often boils down to a lament that the author did not consider the particular (and often erudite) interests of the responder. Since I am about to commit that offense, I hope my comments will be taken less as intellectual narcissism and more as a spirited urging for folklorists similarly inspired by Schmitt to best equip themselves for critical interventions.

By and large, I agree with Schmitt's assessment about the environment and intertextuality, and I find his challenge to folklorists and rhetoricians to be poignant and necessary. My quibble arises when he writes:

Psychoanalytical readings might point to the existence of an "original" archetype for the tale, and structuralists might point to a supposed initial structure, but neither provide any hard evidence to support such hypothetical propositions. (p. 26)

I realize this might be a throwaway line, and a dismissive sentiment which Schmitt does not hold avidly. In my opinion, however, it is demanding of a pause, as it is consistent with an all-too-easy aversion to psychoanalysis in contemporary folklore studies. As I intend to demonstrate in this response, I consider such rejection a trained incapacity for folklore scholars who intend to bring the insights of intertextuality to bear in the pursuit of social and environmental justice. (I realize that "psychoanalytic" here likely means "Jungian," but the caricaturizing dismissal of psychoanalysis as a whole is telling of a widespread abjection ritual in folklore studies towards much continental and critical social thought, especially psychoanalytic theory.)

I will not speculate here as to the reasons why U.S. American folklore studies has taken this turn away from psychoanalysis. Perhaps it has to do with the emphasis on the interpretable performance event, or perhaps it is because the foremost progenitor of psychoanalytic theory, Alan Dundes, did a disservice by being a more orthodox Freudian than Freud himself. What I will note with curiosity is that Schmitt precludes conversation with psychoanalytic theory within a detailed discussion of intertextuality and hauntings, two concepts that owe as much to psychoanalysis for their origins and propagation as to deconstruction and literary theory (e.g., Derrida 1994; Derrida 1998; Gunn 2004; Rickert 2007). What is a subject itself in both psychoanalytic and deconstructive terms except an amalgamation, an assemblage of fragments, and an intertext of desires and memories? Why would we overlook this issue, especially when we folklorists

pride ourselves on looking over the overlooked?

I think much will be lost if the rising generation of folklorists and rhetoricians such as Schmitt ignore the contributions of psychoanalytic and post-psychoanalytic theory, and especially so if we treat such theory as monolithic. Said otherwise, why should we draw upon the work of Julia Kristeva the semiotician, but ignore the work of Julia Kristeva the psychoanalyst (and feminist critic of Freud)? Schmitt approvingly cites passages on intertextuality from her *Desire in Language*, and I applaud him for doing so. I also hope that in the future, we folklorists would draw equally on her discussions of phenotext and genotext in the same work, and in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, as they speak to our further development as a critical field.

For Kristeva, the genotext and the phenotext are related aspects of the signifying process. The former refers to the non-linguistic process, which she further associates with the *semiotic*, whereas the latter refers to a structured communication that correlates to the *symbolic*. As Timothy Morton notes in his commentary on deconstruction and ecology, the genotext may be conceptualized as the "genome" of any text, the factors and ecological environment that produces such texts (and for Morton, as for Schmitt, no text is isolated from others, since all "texts are other texts," p. 2). In Kristeva's psychoanalytic approach to texts and intertexts, the genotext includes unconscious drives that are not immediately accessible to the authors or the audiences.

And although the notion of a genotext and phenotext elides with her notion of

intertextuality, they also underscore the social concerns that inform her feminism and political activism, as the syntactic and semantic rules of a given society that render the phenotext salient may also limit the possible expressions of the genotext. In other words, Kristeva both recognizes the unconscious in the creation of texts and intertexts, and advises close attention to the social limits and structures of power that check those unconscious drives and their expressions in alternative discourses.

In commending Schmitt for drawing attention to intertextuality and the environment in ways often ignored by folklorists and rhetoricians, I am also asking that we follow his path more deeply into the wilderness of Kristeva's psychoanalytic approach to signification. If we, as critics, are to agree that there is good reason not only to consider the environment as an intertext, but also to consider all texts as environments for thinking, then we readily may stress the importance of interrelations and coexistence between people, and between people and the biophysical environment. It would be foolhardy, therefore, to neglect revisions of psychoanalysis, especially those that emphasize the relationship between the psyche and social performativity (such as Judith Butler) or between the psyche and the plastic world of the neuron (such as Catherine Malabou).

Let me be clear: I am not suggesting that Schmitt should have included such discussion in his essay here. I am instead offering a fraternal recommendation that future work ought to include it, but to do so necessitates breaking the prohibition on psychoanalysis in contemporary

folklore studies--a breaking of a taboo that I hope his critical research will engender in the field. And there is an added benefit for folklorists who engage classical psychoanalytic practice: having given it serious attention, they may then go beyond it in more productive ways than avoidance. The "schizoanalysis" of Félix Guattari (and Gilles Deleuze)--itself a radical critique and revision of psychoanalysis' reactionary service to capitalism--rarely appears in U.S. American folklore studies. This does not surprise me, since to draw upon them one must know well the psychoanalytic theory which they rail against, but I also think that such absence is another intellectual shortcoming, as they are apt interlocutors with folklore scholars who aim for critical interventions.

Guattari's slim volume *The Three Ecologies* is, for example, quite relevant to an extension of Schmitt's contribution. In this work, Guattari identifies the (biophysical) environment, social relations, and human subjectivity (or otherwise, nature, socius, and psyche) as three interrelated but separable ecological registers. He further sees all of them threatened by the encroachment and colonization of post-industrial capitalism, or what he calls the IWC (Integrated World Capitalism). IWC is itself perpetuated by the "sedative" discourses of mass media--which he compares to a monstrous algae (p. 28)--and the "entropic rise of a dominant subjectivity" (p. 45). The problem that humanity and the Earth face, stated bluntly, is a "nagging paradox" that there exists on the one hand, the continuous development of new techno-scientific means to potentially resolve the

dominant ecological issues and reinstate socially useful activities on the surface of the planet, and, on the other hand, the inability of organized social forces and constituted subject formations to take hold of these resources in order to make them work (p. 22).

We folklorists may take umbrage with Guattari's rejection of certain cultural expressions (such as rock music) and admonitions against television itself, but might admire his "ecosophic" solution in advocating, via recourse to Walter Benjamin, a new emphasis on storytelling in the emancipation of all three ecologies, and the promotion of the phantasm so as to "reevaluate the purpose and work of human activities according to different criteria than those of profit and yield" (p. 38).

Such a (re)turn to storytelling, coupled with the emphasis on the psychoanalytic and schizoanalytic practices of Kristeva and Guattari, point to a new means for critical research in folklore studies. If we are to assume, as Schmitt rightly asks to do, that the environment and the wilderness are concepts constituted through discourse, we may also then see how those intertexts in turn influence the constitution of our social relations and subjectivities--to state it otherwise, how the non-authored environment authors us and influences us both rhetorically and literally through our genes. A critical folklore studies of the environment, then, might examine several discursive scripts where flows of desire interweave the three ecologies, or collide with dominant and systemic attempts to colonize their interrelation.

Consider, for example, those committed wilderness enthusiasts who

take recourse in mass media texts in order to understand the natural world. Schmitt, following the best practices of folklore studies, seeks to understand these intertextual weavings as important constituents of their experience. Although he claims the status of a critic early on in his essay, he seems reticent to judge the integrity, value, and implications of those mass media texts that direct those enthusiasts' perceptions, or to see in their commonality the potential colonization by IWC of all three ecologies invoked in those discourses. If I could ask Schmitt one question, I would ask him if he thinks it might be a problem as people increasingly experience the environment only in relation to commercial media, since such media constitutes consciousness in sorely limited ways.

I have no qualms with the particular texts that Schmitt's enthusiasts cite, but I do think that any invoked media could be a useful locus for critical examination. Someone who accepts the framing of the wilderness as depicted in, say, *The Evil Dead* is likely to act quite differently towards that environment than one who accepts the framing in the "Camping" episode of *Parks and Recreation*; similarly, the cityscapes and towns in the novels of Thomas Pynchon provide an orientation to the wilderness as robustly as does the poetry of Mary Oliver, albeit in very different attitudinal directions. The conventional folklorist may wonder why people choose certain media as the representative anecdote and intertexts for their understanding of the wilderness, but the critical folklorist would also ask how those texts influence actions towards the environment and the constitution of subjectivity--and then call into crisis

those texts judged to be problematically in the service of IWC or patriarchy or other pernicious colonizing forces.

It is nothing new to suggest that the ancient--and invented--tension between civilization and nature (which Schmitt associates with the work of Lévi-Strauss) holds dangerous implications for those Others tossed off with the latter category. A critic-folklorist might, however, further suggest a dissolution of the dominant colonization of those ecologies by advocating ironic readings and mis-readings of intertexts. For example, what if we read the film *The Grey* from the wolves' perspective--should we not then root for those historically maligned animals, and see them as finally doing something against the unending incursion of Indo-Europeans into their lands? Hero and survival narratives are the stock of IWC's media wing, and they are hardly innocent in their ritualized celebration of the conquest of the environment, so it falls upon us critics to show how such narratives also promote the conquest of our social relations and mental states.

Finally, the critical folklorist might consider how, despite the polyvalent nature of texts, it sometimes serves the tactical purpose of social justice to imply authorship and thereby to limit limitless intertextuality (even as this runs the risk of replicating the colonizing practices of IWC). The town of Lyme, Connecticut, where I live, is perhaps internationally known for its tiny arachnid, the deer tick, and the painful bacterial disease it often bears. Locally, the inhabitants are well-known for an abiding commitment to environmentalism and to the protection of the natural habitats that span the landscape. Lyme is a small community

of only two thousand people, but has extremely active land and watershed conservation programs. Republicans, Democrats, Greens, and Independents alike take pride and solidarity in this active protection of the environment, and often link stories of contemporary preservation with the admiration of the landscape by numerous American Impressionist painters in the early 20th Century. That so many citizens here regard themselves as *authors* of the environment rather than strictly audiences to it is a phenomenon worthy not only of observation, but perhaps of replication in similar locales. By suturing the three ecologies, such identification practices may promote critical action, thereby befitting an environmentalism antagonistic to the market demands of IWC.

In summary, I applaud Schmitt's call for critics in folklore and rhetorical studies to reconsider the wilderness and the environment not merely as a "there," but as a constituted assemblage of intertexts, including contemporary mass media. Inspired by his work, I would further suggest that our constitution of the environment equally constitutes our social relations and subjectivity. This observation in turn invites critics to render judgments about the dominant texts that attempt to colonize all three ecologies, and to offer alternative (and subversive) readings when necessary to promote more environmentally sound and socially just formations. To follow the rhizomatic metaphor of Guattari and Deleuze, critical folklorists should point to and advocate for *roots* not taken, in order to care for the environment--and for our social and mental wildernesses as well.

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Flexibility, Politics, and Practice in the Interpretation of Texts

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The issues of meaning, agency, and context that Schmitt engages in this piece are central ones for folklorists or any other scholar interested in the interpretation of expressive culture. Schmitt engages the work by a range of French thinkers popular in the 1980s (Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Julia Kristeva), Mikhail Bakhtin, and contemporary writers on space and place to encourage folklorists go beyond naive, undertheorized visions of meaning making. The project is a significant one. For Schmitt and the constellation of theorists that he has assembled, textual meaning is far more than authorial intention, texts are inextricably tied to the set of intertexts and broader discursive context from which they emerge, and any entity in lived experience that we imbue with significance can be treated as a text (and is thus made meaningful by reference to the intertextual, discursive space in which it is embedded). Understood in this way, nature preserves, parks, and wilderness areas are not merely physical spaces that contain biological life; they are texts made meaningful by the people that engage them, and representations of nature in expressive culture become the intertexts that inform those peoples' interpretations. That these geographic spaces have no author does not prevent them from being texts richly imbued with meaning, as it is the interpretive acts of the people that care about such spaces

(hikers and campers, but also parks and forest service workers, biologists, travel writers, naturalists, and any fiction writer who has worked to explore the meaning of nature) that make the natural world meaningful.¹

For a very long time, the notion of an unauthored text was a fundamental concept in folklore studies. While pre-1960s folkloristics had very different theoretical foundations from those of Barthes, Foucault, and the other critics of authorial intent that Schmitt engages, pre-performance folklorists often viewed folklore as those forms of expressive culture that emerge anonymously from traditional sources. In practice, such a view operated as a kind of quasi-functionalist anti-humanism (in the sense that folklore texts or repertoires were the product of large-scale cultural forces or super-organic entities like "tradition," rather than specific social actors), and it was the work of Carl Wilhelm von Sydow (1948) and, later, the performance school of folklore scholarship that sought to recognize the agency of tradition bearers in constructing texts and actively adapting them to their situated context of use. Viewed in this light, it may seem ironic for a folklorist to draw on semiotics and literary theory in theorizing the authorless text, but Schmitt does so to emphasize the interpretive agency of *audiences*; he thus shares some of the performance school's intellectual program, though he locates interpretive agency in reception rather than production, as the initial statements of performance theory had.

In many ways, the themes Schmitt finds in French semiotics and discourse theory, the contemporary scholarship on space, and ecocriticism are ones

that span a wide range of intellectual traditions in twentieth century thought. For example, Schmitt quite appropriately uses Barthes, Foucault, and the varied research on intertextuality to arrive at the idea that any entity made meaningful in experience can be understood as a text, but C.S. Peirce's semiotics could have been employed to the same end. Schmitt draws on Levi-Strauss to emphasize that the biological and physical world has no inherent meaning but is, rather, something made meaningful by agents operating within particular cultural contexts. But it is not just nature that is actively imbued with meaning, of course, and thinkers in the existential tradition of continental European philosophy from Nietzsche and Kierkegaard to Heidegger and Sartre argued that the meanings we find in all elements of our world—from social reality, to history, death, or being itself—are socially constructed.

Drawing attention to the potentially infinite range that intertextual connections may have, as well as the dynamic quality of those discursive links, Schmitt repeatedly emphasizes the flexible, open-ended nature of texts, and he encourages folklorists to treat the landscape as a set of signs that can be read in an endless range of ways. Schmitt's argument here draws on Foucault, but I would highlight another theme in the seminal French thinker's work: *power*. For Foucault, particularly his later writings (e.g., 1988), there is certainly agency in interpretive processes, but discourse is not understood merely as an arena of infinite flexibility and unconstrained variation. On the contrary, it is shaped through and through by power relations. Discourse is, for him, fundamentally

political, and politics is fundamentally discursive. The discursive domain that Schmitt takes as his case study includes terms such as *wilderness* and *nature*, and the political dimensions of these concepts are substantial. In contexts as different from one another as the ethnic nationalism of Nazi Germany and the civic nationalism of nineteenth century Switzerland,² for example, a "national character" is posited as emerging from particular qualities attributed to the environment, and a complex politics of identity proceeds from these discourses. In a variety of colonial and post-colonial contexts, "the land" is gendered female and masculinist projects of taming and conquering emerge as the defining elements of empire building. In the romantic tradition, wilderness, the feminine, and the primitive other may be transvalued, but often the same colonialist assumptions are left in tact. Similar dynamics play out in discourses of science and technology, in the cosmologies of patriarchal religions, in ideologies of the rural and the urban, and, of course, in constructions of race. Viewing discourse as the medium of power does not require us to take a Hobbesian view of social life or neglect the flexible and emergent qualities of interpretation because politics enables as well as constrains meaning making and because discourse is the space for both domination and resistance. Understood in this way, a Foucauldian emphasis on power need not be reductive, and if we fail to attend to the politics of interpretation, we miss something essential about the texts we wish to study.

Treating the land as text in the manner of Schmitt's intertextual orientation

allows us to see the ways that our understanding of places are tied to large discursive contexts. But like many forms of semiotics, this kind of emphasis on intertextuality tends to draw attention away from other forms of meaning making, such as embodied practices of perception and co-present action with others. Space is not only made meaningful in discourse; it is bodily practice that *constitutes* space as place, establishing a volume of air and soil as a situation where social life of a particular character has occurred. While bodily practice is textual in the sense that individual gestures, actions, and forms of conduct can be taken as signifiers and drawn into intertextual relations, we cannot forget, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty so richly showed ([1945] 1989), that the very emergence into consciousness of any phenomena depends on a ground of bodily engagement with the world that establishes the field of experience. Indeed, that field of experience is the ontologically prior background which allows any given focal sign to exist for us at all. While the physical landscape must be made meaningful, it is also a mind-independent reality which provides affordances in J.J. Gibson's sense of the term (1979). When we see a rugged mountain vista, we may read it as a challenge to our survival skills or a site of natural beauty, and these interpretive choices are certainly shaped by the intertextual, discursive context in which we are bathed. However, the physical strictures of climbing or landscape painting are not a blank canvas on which any meaning can be imposed. Frigid air and aching limbs may be read as a challenge to a hiker's stamina or a distraction from the painter's craft, for example, but

they can not merely be dissolved as an arbitrary signifier to which meaning is attached. Pierre Bourdieu's notion of habitus (1977) nicely captures the ways in which bodily practice such as these have distinctive meanings shaped by larger cultural contexts but are nevertheless inextricably tied to the physicality of our bodies in action. Viewed in this way, the embodied practices with which we engage the landscape can be sites for intertextual meaning making without becoming arbitrary signs disengaged from our material reality.³ Attending to the politics of discourse and seeing how meaning emerges from the interactions of intertextuality and bodily practice can extend the kinds of very useful perspectives that Schmitt offers in this stimulating article.

Notes

1 For a case study focusing on the reverse phenomena—the ways in which everyday experiences of the landscape shape intertextual relationships in narrative and painting—see Davis (2008).

2 On the Swiss case, see Hartley-Moore (2007:209).

3 For an approach to the meaning of space which engages both discourse analysis and embodied practice in everyday life, see Gabbert (2007).

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