

# CULTURAL ANALYSIS

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY FORUM ON FOLKLORE AND POPULAR CULTURE

## Volume II

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# Ascetic Hedonism: Self and Sexual Conquest in the Seduction Community

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## Abstract

*Much of contemporary self-help discourse and practice revolves around a peculiar intertwining of hedonistic goals and diffused forms of innerworldly asceticism. To illustrate, the present paper will uncover the ascetic tendencies of a particularly "hedonistic" self-help movement: the so-called Seduction Community. In the Seduction Community, dating coaches teach men how to attract and seduce sexually attractive women. This paper argues that in spite of the manifestly hedonistic goal of sexual conquest, disciplinarian and ascetic values permeate the discourses and practices of the Seduction Community. Before us is the work ethic famously described by Max Weber; albeit in a form that is diffused, fragmented, and "applied" to twenty-first century dating.*

## Introduction

In the early twenty-first century, the international self-help movement seems more wide-reaching than ever before. The self-help movie *The Secret* reached millions of people, first through the cinema and then through a globally-distributed DVD. It stands in a long line of international self-help blockbusters, spanning from Samuel Smiles's foundational 1859-book *Self-Help* and Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1936) to Spencer Johnson's *Who Moved My Cheese?* (1998) and *The Secret*

(2006). Over the course of its history, the self-help movement also expanded its thematic outreach. While late nineteenth-century self-help predominantly offered career advice, idolizing the figure of the so-called self-made man, contemporary self-help covers everything from advice on career advancement, relationships, happiness and spiritual growth to more specific topics such as dieting and dating. The result is a diverse jumble of self-help products and gurus—some of which claim to have uncovered the fundamental law of the universe, while others merely offer practical tips for solving specific problems. The accompanying self-help groups and movements range from secular fan clubs to (semi-)religious cults; and from peer-to-peer mutual-aid groups to loosely knit movements revolving around a charismatic self-help guru, a bestselling publication, or a popular advice blog.

Though contemporary self-help is thus highly heterogeneous, there are a couple of elements or general themes that loosely bind the unending mass of self-help discourses and practices together. These are as follows:

1. The attempt to cultivate a "positive attitude"; or more generally, a therapeutic or psychological approach to life
2. A focus on the problems and opportunities of the atomistic individual, frequently at the expense of a critical stance towards collective social issues (McGee 2005)
3. the value put on self-discipline and critical self-observation
4. the idea that people can and should radically transform themselves

That last point—the belief in self-transformation—in fact constitutes the fundamental premise of all self-help teachings and is that at which all self-help practices are ultimately aimed. You help yourself by transforming yourself into something better: a more socially skilled, spiritually enriched, financially successful, or sexually satisfied person. Self-help books, DVDs, and training programs promise to assist their readers, viewers and clients in effecting a transformation of the self; and they usually suggest—at least initially, on the marketing level—that this transformation will be spectacular, extensive and relatively abrupt.

In recent years, there has been an increased scholarly interest in self-help narratives and teachings, as well as in their broader social and cultural impact. Recent works on the topic include Sandra Dolby's folkloristic study *Self-Help Books*, Micki McGee's critical analysis *Self-Help, Inc.* and Eva Illouz's broader sociological research *Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help*. What these researches show is that self-help narratives and teachings not only help, or fail to help, individual self-helpers with tackling specific (perceived) personal challenges, but that they also encourage self-helpers to adopt a particular way of describing and perceiving their social life and overall identity. As Eva Illouz points out, the importance of self-help literature is its role "in providing a vocabulary for the self and in guiding the perceptions of one's social relations..." (Illouz 2008, 53)

The basic idea here is that self-help can and frequently does change people and social groups by altering the way they view themselves, society, and their

place within it. Self-help can thus exert a socio-cultural influence irrespective of whether or not it actually changes people in the way it initially promised them; that is, irrespective of whether it actually helps self-helpers to become happy or successful. So, even if a certain self-help teaching or product is in fact not delivering on its promises—or if self-help in general simply "doesn't work" or "doesn't help," as many public critics contend—it is still valuable to study its impact on people's social and cultural identities.

To that end, the present research shows how self-help, in spite of its often inflated promises of a "quick-fix," can cause people to adopt a new self-understanding and lifestyle that centers on an ideal of self-improvement through self-discipline. Interestingly, in the case of the most dedicated self-helpers, the initial promise of (quick) results and the real identity changes self-helpers undergo often come to intertwine in a highly complex fashion. Along the road to change, small groups of dedicated self-helpers may partially or completely reinterpret what it means to be "helped," as they partly or completely distance themselves from their initial search for quick fixes to particular personal challenges and begin to see their disciplined quest for self-improvement as constituting a goal in itself. The result is a curious interplay between hedonism and an ascetic focus on self-discipline: the hedonistic attainment of financial, social, erotic or romantic success no longer constitutes the only envisioned end goal, but rather become part of a larger attempt to reach a state of empowerment and excellence through an ascetic focus on self-discipline.

This subtle interaction between the secular ascetic practices and the hedonistic promises of modern self-help is central to one of self-help's major branches: the Seduction Community. Although not representative of modern self-help as a whole, the Seduction Community, an international self-help movement in which men are taught how to attract and seduce women, shares much of its conceptual terrain with other self-help movements.

In the Seduction Community, dating coaches or seduction gurus teach their all-male students conversation skills and body language techniques, as well as psychological strategies that are meant to produce an inner state of self-confidence. The gurus furthermore advocate values, lifestyles and worldviews that they consider useful when it comes to transforming oneself into an enormously attractive and seductive individual: a womanizer, a "pickup artist," a master of the "Venusian arts."

At first the Seduction Community appears to be a purely hedonistic movement in which all moral considerations are set aside. The direct goal seems quite clear: sexual intercourse with a large number of attractive women. Equally clear is the commercial character of the seduction community: the schools are companies, the gurus businessmen, the students consumers. However, there is also a strong ascetic component to the Seduction Community which has remained hidden from view to outsiders, if not also to many insiders. In this asceticism, the means take priority over the end; the self-discipline needed to strategically attract and seduce women takes priority over the sex, or at least forms an important end in addition to

the sex.

In the Seduction Community, we find a diffused, fragmented expression of the work ethic described by Weber. This work ethic—instrumental to what Weber calls "the spirit of capitalism"—is rooted in a secularized and inner-worldly expression of asceticism. This ascetic work ethic drives the hedonism of the Seduction Community and vice versa. Thus, rather than asceticism and hedonism being two opposed forces keeping each other in check in the movement, they seem to strengthen each other. The search for sexual enjoyment intertwines with the quest for self-perfection and empowerment through self-discipline and voluntary suffering.

### **The Seduction Community**

There is a long history of advice literature on seducing women, of which Ovid's poem "The Art of Love" (*Ars Amatoria*) is perhaps the most artistic product. This longer history should not be equated with the Seduction Community. The Seduction Community is a specific set of related schools in Western popular culture. These schools originally formed an underground movement in Los Angeles in the late nineties, but they then rose to mainstream prominence in the first decade of the twenty-first century after the publication of Neil Strauss' bestselling book *The Game* in 2005 and the reality television series *The Pickup Artist* on the American VH1 channel in 2007 and 2008. What sets the dating schools of the Seduction Community apart is their highly systematic approach to dating and their largely shared technical vocabulary—a kind of idiosyncratic community "language."

The main contributors to this vocabulary and the community's body of dating knowledge are as follows:

1. the neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) and hypnosis-based school rooted in Ross Jefferies' Speed Seduction method
2. The Mystery Method school built on Mystery's somewhat mechanistic step-by-step method
3. The "natural game" or identity-oriented school, represented by Tyler Durden and other coaches connected to the dating advice company Real Social Dynamics

Besides these larger schools and the dating advice companies associated with them, there are all kinds of less distinct seduction schools and methods, many smaller dating advice companies, and a number of celebrated freelance dating coaches such as Sasha Daygame, Asian Playboy or Badboy.

A distinctive feature of the community is the use of special pseudonyms (e.g. Ross Jefferies, Mystery, Tyler Durden, Sasha Daygame, Asian Playboy, Badboy). Most gurus and students use a pseudonym: a special seduction nickname by which they are known within the Seduction Community. This signals both their determination to become a new person and their wish to be part of an exciting "underground" movement; but often it is also simply a way to post on seduction without one's real name being linked to a controversial self-help movement on Internet search engines. However, as the movement entered the mainstream media and subsequently became a steady source of income to a number of top dating coaches linked to a handful of larger dating advice companies, some

dating coaches began to use their real names again. For example, the prominent coaches Jlaix and Tyler Durden once again became Jeff Allen and Owen Cook.

Despite the dominance of a handful of larger companies, the Seduction Community is not only organized around the top-down dissemination of products and teachings, but also by the horizontal sharing of dating knowledge between non-professionals. Horizontal exchanges between students are typically non-commercial in character and take place in special online discussion fora and in local student meetings in numerous cities worldwide. In these meetings, known as "lair meetings", groups of seduction students not only discuss topics pertaining to womanizing, but also team up for approaching women—perfect strangers—in "the field". You can find seduction students roaming around in nightclubs and bars, on streets and in parks, from Los Angeles to Tokyo.

The ideas and approaches propagated by members of the Seduction Community vary widely. Some gurus and schools encourage the use of "canned material"—that is, rehearsed, status-conveying stories that are thrown into conversations to make a strong impression—whereas others advocate "natural game," which involves a more spontaneous way of interacting. Some put the emphasis on learning specific strategies, whereas others stress the value of enhancing one's psychological strength or "inner game," arguing that attractive behavior flows naturally from a state of self-confidence and emotional stability.

However, these disagreements do not run deep enough to result in sectarian divisions; there is clearly one Seduction

Community. The movement develops its unitary identity, in part, through a vocabulary that is to a great degree shared and which produces common values and outlooks on life. Though each of the seduction schools attempts to distinguish itself by developing novel concepts and metaphors, these merely overlaid onto the movement's larger shared vocabulary. Moreover, the students active in the Seduction Community are usually not completely loyal to any particular school but, rather, mix different metaphors and concepts in their communication with other students.

Lair meeting discussions and Internet fora are dominated by a number of widespread terms and metaphors. These include terms such as: "set" (a group of friends in a social gathering), "approach anxiety" (fear of initiating conversations with attractive women), "routine" (canned story for impressing women), "kino escalation" (the establishing of physical intimacy), "alpha male" (the attractive, high-status male), "social proof" (a way of signaling high status), "frame" (based on Goffman's theory of dramaturgical social frames), "wingman" (one's in-field assistant), "plowing" (the act of slowly breaking through a woman's standoffishness), "field report" (an online report on events in the field), "shit test" or "congruence test" (a provocation by means of which a woman tests a man's strength and authenticity), "sarging" (going to social gatherings with the purpose of seducing women), and "game."

Of these terms and metaphors, the most important one is "game." By means of the game metaphor, traditional moral considerations are swiftly brushed aside.

In the spirit of the familiar English sayings "Love is a game" and "It's all part of the game," the community establishes that seduction is ethically permissible. Moreover, conceiving of seduction as a game may also help the student to desensitize himself to rejections by many women, which, most gurus insist, is an inevitable component of becoming a skilled womanizer. The game metaphor pops up everywhere: there is "night game" and "day game," "club game" and "street game," "inner game" (the psychological dimension of being an attractive male) and "outer game" (the behavioral dimension of being an attractive male). Most importantly, becoming a successful womanizer requires that you "work on your game."

My experience with the concept of "working on your game" began with my visits to local lair meetings, and my participation in a weekend "bootcamp" in Frankfurt led by an international team of dating coaches. Most of the lair meetings I attended took place in Mannheim and Heidelberg, though I have also attended meetings in the Netherlands and the United States. The local lairs in Mannheim and Heidelberg are so-called "street lairs"; rather than assembling at night for "club game," they assemble on Saturday afternoons, and participating students are given the opportunity to approach young women on busy streets. New participants learn about these meetings either through word of mouth or through announcements on a German seduction website. Usually about four to ten people—some familiar faces, some surprise guests—show up for each meeting.

The first time I showed up for the Heidelberg lair meeting, I was called to introduce myself to the other participants by the local lair organizer, a young German man who, despite his slightly timid appearance, posts on German seduction websites under the name of Aphantier (alpha animal). Aphantier then directed us to split up into smaller teams of two or three participants and to spread out across Heidelberg's main shopping street to begin our seduction practice. At lair meetings, there are often a few participants who, despite being pressured into taking action, remain passive. But most participants are able to at least initiate a couple of flirtatious conversations and get one or two phone numbers. Occasionally, a student manages to immediately take one of the approached women on an "instant date" to a nearby café or ice cream stand. At the end of each lair meeting, the entire group typically reassembles for a "debriefing" in which the participants report and reflect on the day's results and lessons. During my first debriefing in Heidelberg I also received advice from more senior participants, who had already been "in the game" for a number of years.

In contrast to the informally organized lair meeting, a bootcamp is a commercial event led by professional or semi-professional dating coaches, with prices ranging from several hundred to several thousand dollars for a weekend or full week of field training. The bootcamp I went through in Frankfurt, Germany was organized by the Los Angeles-based dating advice company Real Social Dynamics (RSD), one of the largest companies on the international bootcamp market. Three well-known

international dating coaches and their assistants trained nine students including myself over the course of three consecutive evenings and nights. The three coaches each paid special attention to three students. My assigned coach was the twenty-four-year-old Julien, a Swiss American who had made a name for himself in the Seduction Community as the wingman of RSD head coach Owen Cook.

The bootcamp began with Julien's repeated admonition: "You always do what your coach tells you to do." In practice, this meant that a student must follow the instructions of his coach and approach a woman or group of women when ordered to do so. This emphasis on obedience stems from the explicit purpose of a bootcamp: to drill the student out of his "comfort zone" and acquaint him with behavior that runs counter to his "social conditioning." On three consecutive nights in Frankfurt nightclubs, Julien demonstrated his womanizing skills to his students, while observing and commenting on our efforts. Though the general atmosphere among the coaches, assistants, and students was animated and playful, the bootcamp—as the military metaphor already implies—also had a strong disciplinarian component. This content reflects the diffused ascetic values hidden behind the hedonism of the Seduction Community.

### **The Hidden Asceticism of the Seduction Community**

There is a discrepancy between much of the marketing of the Seduction Community and its actual teachings and practices. In the marketing of the different seduction schools, the teachings are presented as

a quick-fix, as an easy and fast way of obtaining the skills necessary to attract and seduce beautiful women. However, as soon as the student digs into his newly acquired book or DVD, he will discover that a good deal of self-discipline and hard work are required; there are sacrifices to be made. Underneath a surface layer of marketing, the teachings of the Seduction Community revolve around endurance, sober abstinence from naïve romanticism, critical self-observation, never-ending development of the self, and a tremendous rationalization of social life and intimacy. If the student eventually manages to master the Venusian arts, he will be able to have sex with many attractive women. However, the relation between means and goal becomes a complicated one. The more involved he becomes with the Seduction Community, the more a student's system of self-discipline will take priority in his practice. The reason for this shift is that adhering to a system of self-discipline is intimately connected to the formation of a certain lifestyle, self-understanding and worldview that is often purported to effect an empowering transformation of the self.

The asceticism of the Seduction Community consists of its members orienting their lives towards a system of self-discipline—a system that creates a peculiar kind of meaningful, identity-shaping suffering. This system of self-discipline is neither religious nor aimed at otherworldly rewards, as are the ascetic traditions of many religions. The self-inflicted suffering of the dedicated practitioner of the Venusian arts can nevertheless be seen as an ascetic practice because, to him, it is part of a systematic

effort to achieve a transformation of the self. This transformation, like all ascetic transformations, involves a total remaking of a person's lifestyle, self-understanding, and worldview in order to achieve a more empowered and enlightened way of being.

The suffering of the Venusian artist derives from his need to rationalize and objectify his social interactions and intimate relationships, and to constantly place himself in stressful and challenging situations "outside of his comfort zone." All this causes the boundary between recreational socializing and work to blur, especially in the case of socializing in nightclubs and bars. Those who practice the Venusian arts perceive nightlife as a means towards rational gain maximization, so that it loses much of its recreational function and can instead even become a scene of hard labor.

It first might seem strange to speak of suffering in this context, for nightclubs and bars are usually seen as revolving around fun and pleasurable social interaction. However, in these settings, the man who fully embraces the Venusian arts feels obliged to convey status, to employ his techniques, to constantly examine himself critically, and to harden himself to countless harsh rejections by women—all while not falling back on the "liquid courage" offered by drinking alcoholic beverages. The Venusian artist therefore requires a high work ethic. As dating coach DJ Fuji explains at an international dating conference: "The more difficult the task, the higher your work ethic has to be." (2007) According to Mystery, a founding figure of the Seduction Community, the direct purpose of going to bars and nightclubs

is to systematically improve one's "social calibration" and internalize one's "skill set":

A Venusian artist goes into the field [bars and nightclubs] night after night primarily to improve his calibration and to internalize his skill set. You're not trying to 'get this one girl' or even 'get laid tonight.' Rather, you practice with the long-term goal of having a powerful social skill set in the future... (Mystery 2007, 42)

Notice two things: First, the rewards are moved to the future while the present becomes a scene of labor. Second, the student is advised to emotionally disconnect from direct and immediate successes (getting laid tonight) and rejections, as well as from a fascination with this or that special woman. Direct successes, the pains of rejection, and love for one specific woman: these are exactly the matters men would normally care about most, but obsessing over them is seen as an obstacle when the goal is to systematically improve one's skills set so as to seduce large numbers of women over a long period of time. In his online video blog, Owen Cook explains that the practitioner needs to "live drama free," indifferent to the low, earthly distractions that occupy the petty emotional lives of "the masses" (Cook 2012a). Also, practically speaking, emotionally detaching oneself from the outcome of any specific interaction with any specific woman is a vital component of being an effective Venusian artist:

If the outcome of any specific approach becomes important to you, it'll have subtle, insidious effects on your game and compromise your win. You really do have to not care. (Mystery 2007, 42)

Despite sharing this general insistence on the importance of emotional indifference and a strong work ethic, the central schools and doctrines of the Seduction Community differ somewhat in the ways in which their most devoted adherents discipline themselves. On one side of the spectrum, the adherents of the Mystery Method mechanically execute a step-by-step method, which involves them memorizing, rehearsing and eventually telling hours and hours of prefabricated stories ("routines") to women. On the opposite side of the spectrum, there are the "natural game" schools which teach students to interact in a more natural, spontaneous fashion. They contend that tricks do not work and that you actually need to transform yourself in an authentically attractive person. These different approaches to the Venusian arts entail students undergoing slightly different forms of suffering.

The greatest discomfort that adherents of the Mystery Method face is their increasing difficulty in interacting with others in an unpremeditated or natural way. Therefore, as the student becomes more skilled, his mastery of preplanned routines of interaction also disconnects him from all the non-practitioners, which often exacerbates a sense of loneliness. As part of their practice, students of this school will likely spend more and more time socializing, only to find themselves increasingly disconnected from the people in their surroundings. Groups of people become "sets"; attractive women become "targets"; their friends "obstacles." This also entails an objectification and thorough rationalization of social life. In this vein, the occasional feminist criticism that the Seduction Community

objectifies women (Johnson 2005) misses the broader pattern: members of the Seduction Community not only objectify women, but also other men—and they first and foremost objectify themselves. Described by Mystery as “biological machines” (2007, 15-16), these men thoroughly rationalize their emotional and intimate life in order to become the object of female desire.

Whereas the most devoted practitioners of the Mystery Method suffer because they systematize, mechanize and routinize their conduct, the practitioners of natural game-oriented schools suffer in a different fashion. Real Social Dynamics (RSD), the largest dating advice company representing the natural game philosophy, advises practitioners to undergo a “deep identity-level change.” It does not call upon practitioners to painstakingly systematize, mechanize and routinize their conduct; however, its gurus and devoted students are perhaps even more ascetic, because they conceive of their practice as a laborious and never-ending “quest” for personal growth. Such a quest requires practitioners to constantly break out of their “comfort zones” in order to gradually expand them, thereby pushing themselves to greater personal heights.

Breaking out of your “comfort zone” is, of course, uncomfortable, potentially humiliating, and even painful, but it is essential to your growth as a confident womanizer. “I believe in pain,” RSD coach Ozzie explained to an audience of students in 2012 in Las Vegas. Only undergoing pain, he argued, can lead to growth because “there is no growth inside of your comfort zone.” According to this logic, staying comfortable—that is,

not seeking out challenges, not exposing yourself to humiliation, rejection and pain—equals stagnation in life and should be avoided at all costs. Julien, my bootcamp coach, regularly compared comfortable stagnation to a slow death. In a similar vein, RSD head coach Owen Cook has expressed his disgust for “the masses” that give in to their biological inclination to settle for a comfortable life that allows them to avoid investing time and effort in personal growth (Cook 2012b).

Ironically, perhaps, those same RSD coaches also teach that it is much easier to seduce women when you are not in pain but are actually enjoying yourself in social settings. During the bootcamp I participated in, Julien repeatedly instructed me to have fun, beam with joy, and avoid a serious state of mind. He frequently reminded everyone that “pickup is fun,” providing visual testimony to this statement by cheerfully jumping up and down in the nightclub. In the same breath, however, he would stress the importance of being willing to undergo suffering and pain. The idea here is that it is strategically advantageous to have fun and project joy while interacting with women, but that if, for whatever reason, you are not enjoying yourself in any particular situation or moment—the most important thing is that you keep on working. Owen Cook has frequently described situations in which he felt miserable, sleep deprived, and hungry, and has wanted nothing more than to leave the nightclub, eat, and go to bed. However, true to the ideal of asceticism, he claims that he punishes “his brain” in those unhappy situations, and “hammers it out until the bitter fucking end.” He

recommends giving up only after “every last damned girl has gone home and there’s nothing left” (Cook 2012c).

All the different forms of voluntary suffering described above are meaningful to those practitioners who see in them a means to a full transformation of the self. Those active in the Seduction Community frequently remind each other that there is more to the Venusian arts than having sex with women. The Venusian arts, they argue, also offer a new way of living, a road to true manliness, a key to extending one’s control over one’s destiny. And perhaps such statements are less absurd than they might seem at first, for what the seduction schools offer are various “technologies of the self” (Foucault 1988). In other words, they provide the self-helpers with tools to transform themselves into a new type of subject—one that more closely approximates a particular ideal of empowerment and perfection, a state embodied by the quasi-holy master of the Venusian arts.

Those determined to master the Venusian arts create for themselves a lifestyle that centers on self-improvement through the systematic seduction of women. They furthermore see themselves as creating a new way of relating to their social surroundings by attempting to convey superior status in all social gatherings. Furthermore, they tend to adopt an outlook that centers on sociobiological and evolutionary psychology-based understandings of the human condition. In his book *The Mystery Method*, Mystery devotes one chapter—fittingly titled “The Ultimate Purpose of Life”—to outlining his “Darwinian” theory on the purpose of human existence (2007, 10-24).

Despite the insistent focus in all sections of the community on the transformative potentials of their practice, there is a debate about whether the path of transformation itself should be seen as the practitioner’s highest goal. Is the path or journey of self-discipline, empowerment and personal growth the ultimate goal? Or are enhanced self-discipline, personal growth and empowerment merely a useful side effect of learning how to seduce women? Owen Cook seems to believe the former; that the path itself is the ultimate goal. He argues that “the journey of success with women” is ultimately more important than the direct results (i.e. sexual intercourse with many women) because it is that “powerful journey” that “changes the person you become...on a core level” (Cook 2012b). He explains that when you are involved in “pickup” for a longer period of time, you tend to change what “you’re in it for,” moving away from hoping to accomplish the “petty goal” of effortless sexual successes (Cook 2012b). In contrast, a senior member of his team of coaches at RSD, Jeff Allen believes that disciplined personal growth and empowerment are only a “happy side effect” of becoming successful with women and not an independent goal on itself:

The guys who get good want to FUCK, plain and simple. For me this has always been about getting laid; the self-actualization and all that shit was a happy side effect. (Allen 2012a)

Finally, to understand the asceticism of the Seduction Community, and modern self-help in general, it is important to realize that—as with traditional religious

asceticism—it belongs to a tiny yet potentially influential elite of devotees and virtuosi. Serious attempts to closely imitate the, supposedly exemplary, identity transformation of a seduction guru such as Owen Cook are rare. Thus, it is certainly not the case that all practitioners of the Venusian arts are ascetic to the same degree. There are perhaps a few million people worldwide who have come across a DVD, book, or television program produced by the Seduction Community. Of this gigantic mass of predominantly passive consumers, only a minuscule part is or has been actively engaged with the community. Furthermore, engagement with the community takes many forms, ranging from participation in Internet discussions or attendance at public lectures, to live practice sessions in bars or nightclubs. Generally speaking, these varying levels of engagement in the community are connected to varying degrees of commitment to the ascetic-hedonistic values of the Seduction Community.

For instance, it is clear that students attending lair meetings are, on average, much less committed to the distinctive values of the Seduction Community than the students participating in an expensive bootcamp, let alone than the professional bootcamp coaches and their advanced assistants. Many students at lair meetings profess that they are simply looking for a steady girlfriend, and they usually immediately leave the seduction scene as soon as they meet a woman willing to fulfill that role. Among elite circles, this kind of attitude is looked down upon, since it conflicts with the ideal of continued growth and

a disciplined long-term commitment to the playboy lifestyle. An experience from my fieldwork illustrates this point. At the end of my bootcamp training weekend, I jokingly suggested in front of the entire group of participants that I might immediately find a girlfriend and settle down. One of Julien's assistants quickly admonished me on the necessity of avoiding relationships from interfering with one's learning process.

This same uncompromising ascetic spirit also is also expressed in a video message by Jeff Allen on RSD's online forum. He calls on fellow pickup devotees to ridicule, berate, or ignore every online post that addresses "nooby" issues such as how to win over any particular special girl, how to find true love, how to avoid having to go out constantly, how to avoid having to change one's personality, etc. These kinds of posts, he explains, betray "an inner resistance to the player lifestyle." It is important, Allen adds, not to further reinforce a nooby's inner resistance with positive or polite responses that will ultimately hurt him by allowing him to slide back into the comfortable passivity of his familiar life. Instead he must become aware that he needs to "get more girls" by remaining active and taking constant risks (Allen 2012b). In other words, there is work to be done and hedonistic rewards to be earned.

### **The Asceticism of the Larger Self-Help Movement**

Although the Seduction Community is dominated by discourses drawn from socio-biology and evolutionary theory, much of its conceptual content exists in relationship with a longer historical

tradition of self-help asceticism as well. Through this longer self-help tradition—as well as, more generally, through the ascetic work ethic incorporated in “the spirit of capitalism”—the Seduction Community ultimately connects to the inner-worldly asceticism that sprang from a particular psychological reaction to the Protestant Reformation. Weber argues that the inner-worldly asceticism of the early Protestants gradually detached itself from religion (Weber 2003). In its secularized form, this asceticism—the work ethic—fuels capitalism, taking hold wherever capitalism has spread. Throughout the twentieth century, that ascetic work ethic diffused further, spreading out over many new cultural fields while becoming harder to recognize (Gorski 2003, 172). Among the most important of these fields are the modern self-help movements, including the Seduction Community.

An inner-worldly asceticism permeates every circle of virtuosi within the self-help movement. It is hard to find examples of self-help discourses and movements that lack the ideal of self-improvement through an ascetic focus on self-discipline. Even a simplistic and seemingly discipline-undermining movie such as *The Secret* has strong ascetic tendencies. The various self-help gurus featured in the 2006-movie argue that the universe simply fulfills all your wishes if only you have a positive mental attitude. “The Secret” turns out to be the “law of attraction” which states that everything that comes into your life, you attracted into it. If something bad happens to you, this was because you attracted disaster by thinking negative thoughts in the recent past. If something

good happens to you, this was because, in the recent past, you thought positive thoughts. So if you think positively all the time, you will become rich, healthy, esteemed and beloved within no time. No real labor in the outside world is required; you can simply think yourself rich. However there is a catch: for as it turns out, one needs to perform a good deal of ascetic labor on one’s mind. One needs to purify oneself of negative thoughts by constantly monitoring one’s mind—reminiscent of the way traditional Christian ascetics sought to rid themselves of sinful thoughts.

As many scholarly treatments have indeed overlooked the workings of asceticism in the contemporary self-help movement, the movement has often been misinterpreted as nothing but a symptom of how individuals are surreptitiously repressed and exploited by capitalist society (McGee 2005; Ehrenreich 2009). For example, Micki McGee’s polemical study, *Self-Help, Inc.*, offers a rich account of modern self-help discourses and recognizes that these discourses promote exhausting labor on the self. However, she describes this labor as a misguided self-enslavement to a repressive capitalist system. She argues, for instance, that “self-help can lead workers into a new sort of *enslavement*: into a cycle where the self is not improved but endlessly belabored” (McGee 12, my italics).

However, by revealing the asceticism of the very secular Seduction Community, this paper portrays self-help, not merely or primarily as a repressive force, as does McGee, but also as a potentially creative force that offers people practical “technologies” through which they can transform, discipline, and empower

themselves. Among the elite practitioners of the Seduction Community, a diffused, inner-worldly asceticism and the hedonistic goal of sexual expressivity seamlessly intertwine. This illustrates how asceticism and hedonism are able to join forces within the self-help tradition, which in turn permits us a glimpse at the idea that modern self-help provides popular culture with a dose of ascetic hedonism.

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## Response

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### The Hedonistic Pleasure of Asceticism

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Modern self-help books often promise us a “quick-fix” that in fact entails quite a bit of work. As Eric C. Hendriks demonstrates in his essay on the “ascetic hedonism” of pick-up artists in a shady corner of self-help known as the “seduction community,” books like *The Game* and TV shows like *The Pickup Artist* promise easy hedonistic sexual rewards but require tremendous self-discipline, self-denial and suffering. What seems like a relatively straightforward, if cringe-worthy, method of seduction actually involves participants adopting a radically new understanding of themselves and their social world. The “Venusian artist” lifestyle Hendriks describes is profoundly ascetic, involving “endurance, sober abstinence from naive romanticism, critical self-observation” and a “never-ending development of the self” (12). If this “identity-shaping suffering” sounds exhausting, we should not lose sight that path supposedly leads to sexual fulfillment. Yet, the advertised quick fix of seducing a beautiful woman leads to something else entirely: a disciplinary practice for self-building that turns out to be pleasurable in its own right.

In the seduction community, the hedonistic goals of sex are continually delayed as ascetic means take precedence over sexual conquest. The practitioners find that self-discipline, self-described

as a “path” or “quest,” becomes just as, if not more, important than sex itself. Hendriks notes the similarity between the ascetic hedonism in the seduction community and the ascetic work ethic at the heart of the capitalism as described by Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. The self-help movement is undoubtedly part of a capitalist world driven by a religious self-discipline as Hendriks claims. However, in Hendriks’ description of the seduction community, hedonism follows asceticism. By hedonistic, Hendriks means both something that is pleasurable and also of questionable ethics; a Venusian artist need not act ethically toward others in this game of seduction, even as he is expected to maintain an ethics of the self. Hendriks’ critique of the seduction community focuses on the way in which it locks its students into laborious self-discipline and ascetic suffering without the assurance of a (rather ethically dubious) pleasurable pay off.

While he does claim that asceticism and hedonism are intertwined here, Hendriks does not ask whether suffering itself may be pleasurable for its adherents. In Weber’s formulation, labor merely for the sake of the reward (here profit, not sex) becomes suspect under capitalism. Capitalism for Weber requires that labor becomes an absolute end in itself, a “calling.”<sup>1</sup> Within the development of the Protestant spirit of ascetic labor, the means take over the ends as we adhere to a duty whose very reward is its continued operation. The ideal entrepreneur Weber describes as wanting “nothing out of his wealth for himself, except the irrational sense of a having done his job well” would similarly describe the ethic at

the heart of the seduction community where participants also find the pleasure of self-empowerment and autonomy in their practice.<sup>2</sup> Asceticism both within capitalism and within the seduction community is a source of pleasure in its own right.

The fact that we frequently refer to love and markets as a “games” reveals this paradox at the heart of asceticism. Games after all, are not only pleasurable for winning, but become a type of calling in of themselves; you may not have won the girl, but you can have fun trying to win her. The game metaphor highlights the similarities between capitalism and these methods of seduction, both which rely on a strategy of rationally maximizing labor and gain within a complicated social field. Weber famously referred to this as “the disenchantment of the world” through capitalism’s “rationalism on the basic problems of life.”<sup>3</sup> We can’t help but notice that seduction, something seemingly outside of rational discourse and control, is increasingly subject to it within self-help literature and Western culture more broadly.

Contemporary seduction attempts to rationalize desire, historically described as outside of purely intellectual and strategic understanding. In doing so, it rationalizes the entire social world by defining everyone within it as he or she relates to the maximization of the player’s utility. Not only does the relationship between lovers take on the framework of the “player” and the “target,” but an entire social world is described in terms of how it maximizes gain: groups of people are “sets,” friends are “obstacles” or “wingmen” (14). The seduction community demonstrates how

thoroughly the rationalization of social life under capitalism has been extended to social life down to our most intimate desires. Besides the games of seduction, we can see this rationalization in the pervasive use of data-driven algorithms in online dating like OKCupid and eHarmony, among others.

But the question of whether seduction *can* be completely rationalized is largely irrelevant here. If obviously cannot, just as the social world under capitalism cannot be completely rationalized. We desire new markets, new women, new situations in which to practice our calculating games of love and labor, not only in the pursuit of some distant reward but as pleasurable practices in their own right. In short, we like playing the game even more than winning it. The corrosive effect of this pleasure of rationalization further extended into social relationships demonstrates how even the most intimate relationships are circumscribed under capitalism. The social world only exists as a field in which to play our own games for the pleasure of mastery and control itself; other people exist for us only in terms of their use-value for our strategies. While Hendriks concludes that the intense focus on asceticism in modern self-help reflects the discipline of the individual under capitalism, we should be just as alarmed with how it impoverishes the relationships of our social world.

### Notes

1 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Routledge, 1990), 62.

2 *ibid*, 71.

3 *ibid*, 76.

## 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

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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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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).<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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 the 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

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### **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.<sup>1</sup>

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,<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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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# Infected Condoms and Pin-Pricked Oranges: An Ethnographic Study of AIDS Legends in Two Townships in Cape Town

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## Abstract

*So-called AIDS myths surfaced as an outcome of the HIV/AIDS epidemic that has escalated severely since mid-1990s in South Africa. Examining these “myths” shows that they belong to the narrative genre of AIDS legends. This article focuses on AIDS legends appearing commonly among Xhosa people living in two townships in Cape Town: one about infected condoms and another concerning pin-pricked oranges. The study, based on ethnographic fieldwork, reveals that the South African AIDS legends are more multifaceted than has been presumed. By examining their motifs and themes it is possible to see how the AIDS legends convey a denotation of resistance against hegemonic messages of HIV testing, condom use, and, most importantly, the disease in general.*

## Introduction

With nearly six million cases of reported HIV infections (UNAIDS 2010), South Africa has the highest number of HIV-infected persons in the world. The majority of those infected are black South Africans. Besides the high infection rate, the South African HIV/AIDS situation has gained attention due to perceptions of the disease

that clearly deviate from what Western medicine would consider scientifically proven. The media and previous research have called these perceptions AIDS beliefs or AIDS myths. Earlier academic studies have given rather far-reaching interpretations of the reasons behind these AIDS myths (Parikh and Whiteside 2007; Leclerc-Madlala 2002; Niehaus 2005; Stadler 2003; Nattrass 2012). However, no one to date has thoroughly discussed what these myths or beliefs encompass; as a result, the terms “AIDS myths” and “AIDS beliefs” are rather inaccurate. Rather, my observations made during ethnographic fieldwork among the Xhosa people in Cape Town suggest that the HIV/AIDS related discourse referred to as “AIDS myths” or “AIDS beliefs” has some striking similarities with the narrative genre of legends.<sup>1</sup>

## Background

During the first years of the twenty-first century, reports of the so-called AIDS myths started to spread from South Africa, first through the media, and later in academic writing. The most noteworthy and disturbing of these was the one claiming that sexual intercourse with a child would cure the disease—the virgin cure myth—which is also assumed to have increased the number of child rapes in South Africa (Pitcher and Bowley 2002). Other reports mentioned conspiratorial thinking and traits related to traditional mythology (Leclerc-Madlala 2002; Niehaus 2005; Stadler 2003). These reports became even more interesting when they were accompanied by ambiguous statements made by leading

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South African politicians. For example, South Africa's former president, Thabo Mbeki, questioned the causality between HIV and AIDS in 2000, insinuating that the disease was part of a conspiracy to increase drug sales (Iliffe 2006, 146-147). In 2006, the health minister at the time, Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, claimed that beetroot and garlic should be considered as treatments for HIV (Baleta 2006, 620). The current president, Jacob Zuma, caused a stir when he, during a rape trial in 2006, said that he had showered after sex with an HIV positive woman, suggesting that this act had reduced his risk of becoming infected (BBC 2006).

Having examined the South African AIDS policy and its consequences, Parikh and Whiteside regard the political debate about the disease as confusing, suggesting that many people have found comfort in them and that the dubious political statements have had "negative implications for behavior change, prevention, treatment uptake, and efforts aimed at reducing stigma" (2007, 67). Pitcher and Bowley believe that the failure of the South African political leadership to acknowledge the causes, effects, and treatment of the disease has offered fertile ground for "bizarre and dangerous myths to take root and flourish" (2002, 274-275). Although Robins acknowledges that cultural interpretations of the disease are complex, he believes President Mbeki's unconventional view on AIDS, and the government's unscientific views caused profound confusion and uncertainty and possibly made popular forms of AIDS denial and alternative explanations credible (2004). The news media have also discussed the relationship between public statements and "myths"; the view

presented has often been congruent with the one above (Bevan 2006; Swarns 2000). Interestingly enough, none of these studies has actually discussed the very material and texture of these "bizarre and dangerous myths" or "alternative explanations."

Many of the previous studies also draw a rather clear line of causation between ambiguous political statements about the disease and the existence of what have been called AIDS myths. I do not contest the impact of the political discourse, but I claim that the relation is not as straightforward as proposed. What has been neglected in previous attempts to understand the presence of "AIDS myths" among politicians is the fact that the politicians in question belong the same narrative culture as the majority of the people in South Africa and are, hence, affected by the same oral traditions as everybody else.

Instead, the search for reasons behind the "AIDS myths" should start by examining more thoroughly their contents. The toolbox applied in previous studies has not been focused or sufficient enough. The "AIDS myths" I observed during ethnographic fieldwork among Xhosa people living in two different townships in Cape Town clearly belong to the global corpus of AIDS legends. In this article, I will approach these legends by scrutinizing the themes and motifs found in them. By doing this, I want to show how the AIDS legends in the townships in Cape Town can be interpreted as a narrative form of resistance against HIV/AIDS.

### **Fieldwork in Masiphumelele and Khayelitsha Townships**

During Apartheid, South Africans were categorized into four racial groups: white, coloured, Asian and black. The 1950 Group Areas Act assigned non-white South African racial groups (blacks, coloureds and Asians) to specially designated living areas (Western 2002, 712). In Cape Town, black South Africans, the work force from the Eastern Cape, were allocated to townships normally found outside the city center. Many of the townships were already overcrowded at that time and the related infrastructure insufficient (Turok 2001, 2351). When the rules restricting the movement and residency of black South Africans were abolished at the end of Apartheid, the townships' population in Cape Town escalated dramatically. Informal settlements thus emerged on their outskirts giving rise to a variety of social problems such as unemployment, criminality, drug and alcohol abuse, and, most importantly, a high rate of HIV infections, which is also the reason why I chose to conduct ethnographic fieldwork in the townships.

In November and December 2009 and January and April 2011, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the townships of Masiphumelele and Khayelitsha in Cape Town. The majority of the inhabitants in both townships are Xhosa-speaking black South Africans with roots in the Eastern Cape. Masiphumelele and Khayelitsha differ in size and location. With a population of between 30,000 and 50,000, Masiphumelele is a small township on all South African scales. It is located on the southern part of the Cape Peninsula between Kommetjie and Fish Hoek. Khayelitsha, again, is one of

the largest townships in South Africa, with its residents estimated to number half a million or more. It is located on the Cape Flats, a half an hour's drive outside central Cape Town. As relics of the Apartheid era, both residential areas are still clearly secluded from the rest of the city.

### **Collecting the Data**

Fieldwork consisted of interviews, discussion sessions, and participant observation with Masiphumelele residents and clients at the male HIV-testing clinic in Site-C in Khayelitsha. Individual and group interviews and discussions were conducted with a total of 64 people. Many others contributed through less formal encounters. During my fieldwork, two female interpreters assisted me with translating and organizing discussion sessions in Masiphumelele and, most importantly, acquainted me with the cultural landscape of the Xhosa living in the Cape Town townships.

Despite being a male, I still had great difficulties in getting men in Masiphumelele to attend my discussion sessions, even when I approached them without one of my local female interpreters. Therefore, the interviews and discussions in Masiphumelele were mainly held with women at home during the day, while their husbands were working or looking for day jobs waiting at the petrol station in Sun Valley, close to Noordhoek. Men had in general better English skills than the women, probably because many of them use English in their work outside the townships, while many of the women in the townships stay at home with children. The interviews

and the discussion sessions were held in Xhosa, English, or both, depending on how well the informant's and my language skills coincided. But, in order to capture the perceptions of HIV/AIDS as accurately as possible, Xhosa was predominantly used in the interviews and discussion sessions, especially with the women in Masiphumelele.

Masiphumelele is a small, almost village-like, township where it is possible to interact with people as an acquaintance instead of the somewhat tense relationship between interviewer and informant. It was therefore natural to consolidate the group discussions at the library by simply "being around" and talking to people. Sometimes, on rare occasions, even the men in Masiphumelele talked to me—if they were alone or in the company of other men.

However, I needed to talk more intimately to men than was possible in mere passing. Luckily, I was allowed to follow the daily routines of an HIV-testing clinic for men situated in a couple of adjoined metal barracks in Site-C in Khayelitsha. HIV testing and being aware of one's HIV status is put forward as an important part of the work against HIV/AIDS in South Africa. The purpose of the Male Clinic in Khayelitsha is to offer men a low threshold possibility to be informed of their HIV status. If needed, they can receive necessary counseling anonymously, and they are not pressured. At arrival, the clients were told who I was and what I was doing at the clinic. They were also told that they could, if they wished, participate in my research by volunteering to have an extensive discussion or interview with me about

the disease and their perceptions of it. The number of men who approached me varied greatly; some days, I had a long queue of potential informants behind my door; at other times, someone just wanted to tell me something while we sat outside in the shade. Many of the men, especially the younger ones, came to the clinic in groups. On a successful day, one good interview experience snowballed to the whole group of friends, and soon almost everyone wanted to share their thoughts on HIV/AIDS with me.

The interviews and the group discussion sessions in both Masiphumelele and Khayelitsha offered unique possibilities to record longer narratives expressing the deeper reflections on and underlying attitudes towards the disease. These also helped me to position the narratives in a cultural matrix of contemporary traditions. However, the encounters that I consider most fruitful were those when sitting in the shade outside the Masiphumelele library having a sandwich for lunch, caught in the rush hour traffic with a Khayelitsha friend, or talking about the previous evening's soccer game between Soweto's Kaizer Chiefs and Cape Town's Ajax while waiting for the clinic in Khayelitsha to open on a Monday morning. Although HIV/AIDS is intensely present in South African society, it is still a stigmatized subject that needs to be approached with sensitivity, not the least due to its close relationship to sexuality.

### **AIDS Legends in the Townships**

Contrary to the impression I had gotten from previous studies and media coverage that reported townships filled to the brim with one "myth" more

bizarre than the other, I was surprised (and, ashamed to say, disappointed) by how well my informants were informed about the disease and its clinical properties. Although child rapes with connections to the virgin cure myth have been documented in South Africa, the only things I heard related to them were the same kind of references to reports of child rape incidents that were based on media reports I encountered back home before starting the fieldwork. My informants' awareness of the virgin cure myth could, of course, lie in the fact that many of the publicly discussed accounts happened already during the first years of the twenty-first century (McGreal 2001; Pitcher and Bowley 2002), years before I started my first fieldwork trip. The considerable publicity the child rape cases had gotten before I started my fieldwork has probably had a debunking impact on the virgin cure myth.

I was often forced to remind my informants that I was not there to check how much they had learned at the different workshops or at school, but to understand how they thought about the disease. I am, however, aware that I, a white European scholar, asking black South Africans living in townships to talk about HIV/AIDS could easily promote such a presumption and affect how people reacted when talking about HIV/AIDS; people simply did not want to appear ignorant and uneducated in front of me. However, as the fieldwork proceeded, and I became more accustomed to my informants and they started to trust and feel more comfortable around me, I learned that there were clear variations in how people talked about the disease; they did not always

focus on hard, clinical facts. The same person, who had just given me her fresh, and seemingly accurate, insights into the medical dimensions of the disease, could in the next sentence say something that clearly stood out; for example, he or she might say that the government-distributed condoms had purposely been contaminated with HIV or that Americans had manufactured the disease to return the Apartheid regime to power. I could not quite make sense of it; was there a clear pattern? Soon, identifiable shapes of legends started to appear from these crumbs. The repertoire of these legends was, however, astonishingly narrow. In this article, I have chosen to focus on two types of legends that clearly stood out from the discourse surrounding HIV/AIDS during my fieldwork: the infected condoms legend and a variety of pin-prick legends, both bearing clear resemblances to the global AIDS legend corpus.

### **Fear, Confusion, and Anxiety**

The term urban legend received broad exposure from folklorist Jan Harold Brunvand's popular book, *The Vanishing Hitchhiker* (1981). Since then, urban legends have become a prevailing subject in contemporary folkloristics. Patricia Turner understands urban legends as "unsubstantiated narratives with traditional themes and modern motifs that circulate orally (and sometimes in print) in multiple versions and are told as if they are true or at least plausible" (1993, 5). Timothy Tangherlini describes these legends as "a short (mono-) episodic, traditional, highly ecotypified, historicized narrative performed in a conversational mode,

reflecting on a psychological level a symbolic representation of folk belief and collective experiences and serving as a reaffirmation of held values of the group to whose tradition it belongs" (1990, 375). Urban legends have a wide circulation, and those with very similar themes and contents can appear in different places, even globally. Urban legends are considered efficient tools for expressing desires, fears, anxieties, and attitudes that exist below the surface (Dégh 2001, 21; Goldstein 2004, 31, 36), and act as "an important parameter of human mentality" (Dégh 2001, 87). Tangherlini further regards them as addressing "real psychological problems associated with the geographic and social environments, acting as a reflection of commonly felt pressures" (1990, 381).

The terminology and possible differences between legends, urban legends, contemporary legends, and modern legends has been discussed in many previous studies. I agree with Linda Dégh in her argument that urban or contemporary legends appear "as the present manifestation of traditional legend, representative of the actual stage of an ongoing process that keeps the story meaningful and viable for all, but in diverse ways" (2001, 91). Nonetheless, I see that the debate surrounding the term urban legend has brought the discussion about how legends should be interpreted closer to present day conditions and, therefore, also closer to how AIDS-related misconceptions or AIDS legends should be understood. Owing to widespread information and awareness campaigns, South Africans are generally very knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS (Stadler 2003). However, detailed and often

rather clinical knowledge about HIV/AIDS does not necessarily guarantee preventative behavior through condom use, abstinence, or refraining from multiple simultaneous sexual partners—that is, through the ABCs of AIDS prevention (abstain from sex, be faithful if you do not abstain, and use a condom). As Stadler observed in his study of KwaBomaba in South Africa's Limpopo Province, even if people are able to recite "in parrot-like fashion the ABCs of AIDS prevention," there is still much confusion about the disease (2003, 358). Similarly, in a study of adolescents in Mali, Mwale observed that the information delivered through, for example, awareness campaigns did not result in behavior that was congruent with decreasing the risk of infection (2008, 297). Bennett proposes that legends of illness and body enable "people without formal knowledge of disease to understand what is wrong with them" (2005, 23).

Today, the scientific community has a fairly unanimous view of the clinical properties and origins of HIV/AIDS. The HI virus found in humans is, for example, considered to originate from a similar virus common among chimpanzees in West Central Africa (Keele et al. 2006). However, when the number of HIV infections started to increase rapidly in the early 1980s, the disease was characterized by a much greater uncertainty concerning not only its origins, but also its clinical features and the possibilities of treating it. Therefore, reasons traditionally related to legends, such as fear of infection, anxiety when encountering sickness, hopes of cure, and a general sensation of insecurity were all sentiments I continuously observed

during my fieldwork. On a general level, these sentiments can unmistakably be related to the reasons behind the legends. However, scrutinizing the themes and motifs in these legends gives more insight into the underlying reasons behind them and their mechanics.

### **The Infected Condoms**

On 1 December 2009, the start of my empirical research, my assistant and I were strolling through Masiphumelele. This day coincided with International AIDS Day, which had slipped from my mind in the confusion of the intensive start and the fieldwork's pace. We therefore almost stumbled upon an AIDS Day function at the Masiphumelele community hall, arriving just in time to see the finale, a dance performance by a group of local girls in their early teens. Hearsay had travelled fast in the small township community, because immediately after the lively show, Thembeke, a young woman in her mid-20s who coached the dance group, approached me. She had heard that I was doing "some kind of a research about AIDS," and she wanted to share something important with me. After all the trouble I had had to start the fieldwork and find people willing to participate in the interviews, I welcomed this spontaneous reaction. After a conventional discussion about the distressing HIV/AIDS situation in the townships, I was perplexed when Thembeke, with evident authority, said:

I have heard that condoms are not right. The condoms can spread HIV/AIDS. I do not know why. I do not like condoms, because of that oily thing. So, some people say that this oily thing is HIV. It is that oil that spreads AIDS.

They say so. And I think, yes, it is true. Because, you know, when the condoms came, the level of HIV went up. I think it is the white men. They say so. The white men do so. You see, the black people have the most HIV. That is why you have put the oil on the condoms, to spread HIV.

Thembeke's account of infected condoms seemed strangely familiar. Had I not heard it before? A couple of years earlier, in 2007, the Archbishop of the Roman Catholic church in Mozambique, Francisco Chimoio, had made the headlines by claiming that European-manufactured condoms were deliberately infected with HIV in order to "finish quickly the African people" (McGreal 2007). Condoms infected with HIV or other diseases have also been mentioned on websites promoting conspiratorial thinking (Nakash 2006; Taylor 2012).

The infected condom legend was clearly the most popular legend among my informants. It is difficult to determine how many, in fact, believed that condoms are infected with HIV; while some of my informants clearly believed in it, others told me that they thought it was "just a silly rumor," and some did not know what to believe. But, almost all of my informants had heard about condoms being allegedly infected with HIV. The legend most often included the same repertoire of motifs: that the HIV virus was added to the lubricant, only government-distributed condoms were infected, and behind the HIV-infected condoms was a conspiracy to infect a targeted black population. Thembeke bases her assumption that condoms are infected with HIV on the causation she has observed between the increased

number of HIV infections and the commencement of condom distribution. Government sponsored condoms, called Choice condoms, are a cornerstone in the fight against HIV/AIDS in South Africa. Choice condoms are abundantly distributed in townships in Cape Town. They can be found in health care centers, clinics, and other public institutions, such as libraries and even schools. The number of HIV infections has been rising steadily since the beginning of the epidemic. In this sense, Thembeke's suspicion is understandable; there is a connection between the HIV infections and the distribution of condoms. However, there is nothing suggesting that the distribution of condoms would be the reason behind the increased number of HIV infections. Instead of seeing the condom distribution as a way to constrain the rising number of HIV infections, Thembeke sees a conspiratorial and racialized plot behind the allegedly infected condoms.

The very same legend about the infected condoms has also been observed in Tanzania by Philip Setel already ten years earlier (1999, 240). In a very similar legend, picked up by Jonathan Stadler (2003) in the Limpopo Province and by Isak Niehaus (2005) in the Mpumalanga Province in the Northern parts of South Africa, the HI virus can be made visible to the bare eye in the form of small worms by filling the condom with water or by putting the condom in hot water or in the sun. I heard this variant only a couple of times during my fieldwork in Cape Town. But, it is probable that the legend about the water filled condom is an extended variant of the infected condom legend I observed during my fieldwork.

For someone to be infected with HIV the HI virus must be transmitted from a HIV positive person, for example, through unprotected sex. Generally, condoms are considered the most efficient way to prevent the virus from being transmitted between two persons having sexual intercourse. Besides blood, body fluids occur commonly in the discourse surrounding HIV/AIDS as an agent that carries and transmits the disease. Condoms are coated with lubricant and packed in plastic wrap. The lubricant applied on the condoms gives them that "oily" feeling mentioned by Thembeke and many other informants. Considering this suspicion and, even more particularly, the worms that appear in the Stadler's version, it is not difficult to see the mechanical connection between the lubricant and the "oily" virus on the condoms. However, in order to start understanding the reasons behind the legend, we must move to the other legend type I observed in Cape Town, the pin-prick legends.

### **Pin-Prick Legends**

Even if the legend about the infected condom did not normally include detailed information about how the virus had been implanted in the condom, in some accounts, a needle was used to inject the virus into the condom, as in this report given in February 2011 by a thirty-five-year-old woman called Cebisa in Masiphumelele:

Most of the time, the people, if you give them the condom, the Choice [the government distributed condom brand] at the clinic, they do not like those condoms, they rather buy it at the chemist or at the clinics ...//...

Because they say sometimes that there are people who inject the condom, so the HIV is there.

Although pin-prick legends are not considered among the most common among the otherwise vast variety of legends, they are still recognized as a distinguishable part of the global legend corpus that accompanied the birth and progression of the global HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. Typical for the first AIDS legends was the inclusion of two strangers who had consensual sex with each other, one of whom deliberately infected the other one, and then told him or her that he or she has now been infected with AIDS. These have been referred to as the “Welcome to the world of AIDS” legends or “AIDS Mary/Harry” legends (Goldstein 2004, 38). In pin-prick legends collected previously, HIV-infected needles have been struck into fruits, condoms, and into people either directly by the perpetrator or by placing an infected needle, for example, on a bus or movie theatre seat (Goldstein 2004, 141-142; Bennett 2005, 114-116). Goldstein understands the motif of being pierced by something sharp, such as a thorn or a needle as an intrusion and contamination, as pierced skin “can be filled with all manners of evil” (2004, 141).

During a discussion session with two women aged twenty-four and fifty-five years in Masiphumelele, a nineteen-year-old woman who worked as my interpreter told me about a journalist who had been deliberately infected with HIV. According to her report, a primetime news anchor for the state-owned South African Broadcasting Company had been

purposely infected with HIV by a nurse during an HIV test. The two informants added quickly that they had also heard about the nurse who allegedly had been jealous of the news anchor’s beauty and success and had, thus, purposely infected her using a syringe filled with HIV-infected blood. During the fieldwork, different versions of this legend, often involving a distant acquaintance instead of the nurse, were told especially by the residents in Masiphumelele.

In February 2011 while I was conducting interviews at the Male Clinic in Khayelitsha, Mpendulo, a thirty-one-year-old man, approached me. After ensuring his anonymity, he proceeded to share his perceptions of the disease. Like many others, Mpendulo first referred to the rumor that condoms were infected with HIV. But he did not want to pursue talking about the condoms; instead he insisted on telling me about oranges that were infected with HIV.

There was some story here [Khayelitsha], I think four years ago, or three, about oranges. They say they put injections in oranges, and then they give free oranges to everybody. You see, when you eat that orange you become HIV positive, and so on.

When I asked Mpendulo who he thought was responsible for injecting the HI virus into the oranges, he thought it was the private company selling and exporting the oranges. Kaschula notes that reports about blood oranges being infected with HIV had already been widely spread around South Africa already in 1993. In these versions, the infected oranges are mostly related to conspiratorial right-wing plots (2008). Reports of citrus fruits

contaminated with HIV found in Europe have been linked to users of intravenous drugs sticking their used needles into lemons and oranges hoping that the acidity of the fruit would disinfect the needle (Flanagan 2003). Mpendulo was not the only one at the clinic who told me about infected oranges. After talking to him, a discussion started at the clinic waiting area, and also other men told me similar stories. Like many others, these accounts were often characterized by expressions of conspiracy.

Considering how present and tangible the disease is among the clients at the Male Clinic, the non-stop information sessions, the testing, the needles, and the fear of testing HIV positive, I found it surprising that the legend about being infected while having an HIV test never appeared there. As fear, anxiety, and other disturbing sentiments are normally related to reasons behind legends, would not the legend implying that you might be infected while being tested for HIV be the most probable legend to be found there? The men at the male clinic queue sometimes for hours to be tested. The distress and anxiety they feel must be overwhelming; for many, the probability of testing HIV positive is considerable, the possibilities of getting adequate treatment in the townships are poor, and the stigma related to being HIV positive is socially restraining. Consequently, as a result of the distress related to these factors, the threshold of entering the clinic to get tested is very high; many men told me that they had thought about coming there for a long time, even for years, but that they lacked the courage to do it earlier.

Of course, from a pragmatic point of view, the absence of the legend about getting infected while having an HIV test could be explained by the fact that men who believed in it never made it as far as the clinic. But this does not explain why the legend about the infected oranges appeared only at the clinic (I never heard it anywhere else), while the legend about being infected while testing for HIV only appeared outside the clinic. Both legends include a needle and the possible threat of an HIV infection as motifs. The only difference between them is that in the former, the HI virus is injected into a fruit, which is to be eaten by someone, and in the latter, the virus is injected directly into a person.

In psychoanalytics, the term displacement is used when sentiments associated with something that is feared and unacceptable are projected onto something considered safer and, therefore, easier to handle. Interpreting themes from popular culture, such as rhymes and tales, Alan Dundes demonstrates how projection is present in folklore as a psychological defense mechanism to address the cause of anxiety through “a guilt-free means of exploring the problem” (1976, 1532). In other words, a more comfortable object is referred to instead of the original one in order to decrease the anxiety and fear attached to it: “What is attributed is usually some internal impulse or feeling which is painful, unacceptable, or taboo” (Dundes 1976, 1505). Dundes goes as far as proposing that projection is such an inherent feature of folklore that “if folklore did not provide a socially sanctioned outlet for projection, it [folklore] would almost certainly cease

to exist" (1976, 1532).

Drawing from this perspective, could not the legend about the infected oranges be considered a local Male Clinic variant of the legend about getting the infection while tested? Such reasoning would make sense if the orange is understood as a more comfortable surrogate for the body, and the legend about oranges, consequently, a more comfortable variant of the legend about getting infected while having an HIV test. In this sense, the fear related to getting tested is projected onto the orange, as the traditional variant of the legend would be too directly anchored to the activities of the clinic to be able to appear there. Both legends could still be considered to address the same distress related to getting tested for HIV. In a more general sense, I also perceived the same kind of distress outside the Male Clinic when I confronted people about HIV/AIDS.

### **Legends of Resistance**

After starting my fieldwork, it did not take me long to notice that people were often rather reluctant to participate in any kind of activities related to HIV/AIDS. At first, I sensed that this was due to people simply being tired of anything that had to do with the disease. But it was more than just a reluctance to talk; many of my informants also felt clearly distressed when confronted with the disease. Considering the number of infected persons, HIV/AIDS has hit South Africa more severely than any other country. In the townships, people are very aware that they live in the most infected country in the world and are, therefore, also the most infected people in the world. Nearly everybody is in one

way or another touched by HIV/AIDS; if you are not infected yourself, a family member, a relative, or a friend most probably is. Faced with the cold facts of HIV/AIDS in their life, the distress of many of my informants was present not only in the legend-like reports I was told, but also in the more hidden expressions of people, such as tone of voice, the shaking of heads, and other types of body language. Expressions of distress became, however, even more articulate in the conspiratorial reports about the disease.

Many black South Africans carry within them bitterness and anger originating in the injustice of the Apartheid era; the townships are still isolated from the rest of the city, living conditions are poor, and the rate of HIV infections is much higher than outside the township walls. The HIV/AIDS infection rate in South Africa started to rise dramatically in the mid-1990s, which also coincides with the end of the Apartheid era in South Africa, a fact that not only feeds into the bitterness and distress that stem from HIV/AIDS, but also offers a fertile growing ground for conspiratorial perceptions that include the displaced Apartheid regime.

Like many others that I talked to at the Male Clinic in Khayelitsha, the twenty-one-year-old Thabo, had the same pragmatic view on how to prevent the spread of the disease, that is, through responsibility, faithfulness, and condom use. When I asked about his thoughts concerning the origins of the disease in April 2011, he told me about a workshop he had attended in 2001. He quoted a man who had talked at the workshop. At a certain point however, instead of just quoting, the words of the quotee became

Thabo's:

People of America wanted to colonize Africa. And they found out that the population here is too much, and most of us do not want them here. You see, blacks did not want white people at that time. There were wars and all that stuff; apartheid and stuff. So, overseas they thought of what would decrease the number of black people here, so that there can be more white people than black people. What they did is that they took the disease. It is like something they created this disease, you see like medically, I do not know how. Africa is the area that has got the highest rate of HIV. Maybe it could be I am not sure.

Thabo's comprehension about HIV/AIDS was rather typical; on the one hand, he was very well informed about the disease and knew his ABCs well. On the other hand, his account is a characteristic expression of conspiratorial thinking very similar to others I had heard. Like Thabo, many of my informants suggested that the disease is part of a malevolent plan to wipe out the black population in South Africa. The antagonist in these accounts appeared as a white man in general, a hidden fraction of the Apartheid regime or "the Americans." Conspiracy theories were especially articulate when expressing notions about the origin of HIV/AIDS, but they were also present in the legend about the infected condom and the pin-prick legends.

Diane Goldstein has probably undertaken one of the most thorough and methodologically inspiring studies of contemporary AIDS legends in Newfoundland, Canada. Many of the themes and motifs that Goldstein

identifies, such as conspiracy theories about sinister plots by governments or other actors with genocidal plans, are very similar to those that I detected during my fieldwork in Cape Town (2004, 52). Richard Hofstadter suggests that social conflicts, based on fears and hatred, are the fuel for conspiratorial thinking (1964, 39). Considering the complex past of South Africa and especially black South Africans, such socially derived fears and frustrations can easily be seen as underlying reasons behind the conspiratorial nature of the AIDS discourse among my informants.

Besides reacting to frustration and distress, the AIDS legends also carry with them a voice of resistance. Goldstein suggests that legend scholars have been "underreading the resistance voice" in, for example, health legends, and that AIDS legends should be understood through the inherent message of resistance against medical authority they convey (2004, 148-151). Elisa Sobo has examined the link between the low levels of condom use among African-American women by interpreting the women's understandings of heterosexual relationships. Sobo proposes that narrative strategies can be applied in order to enhance one's self-esteem or, for example, that conspiracy theories are used to support group dignity (Sobo 1993). Counter-narratives are conventionally considered as verbal reactions to the increasing downfall of the Great Western meta-narratives, such as foundational stories and other myths (Lyotard 1984). However, they can, as Peters and Lankshire (1996) propose, besides being a postmodern narrative phenomenon, also be understood as verbal counter-reactions to an official or

hegemonic narrative.

HIV/AIDS is present everywhere in the townships; almost anywhere you turn, there is a poster informing citizens about the dangers of HIV/AIDS and the possibilities of guarding oneself from them. Besides distributing practical advice concerning condom use and the nearest testing facility, the mere abundance of these signs conveys the message that the townships and their residents are saturated with HIV/AIDS.

The massive information programs about the advantages of using condoms and getting tested for HIV have made people very aware of how the disease works and about the kind of behavior that is desired. Nevertheless, “flesh-to-flesh” sex is still considered to be much more “real” by many of my informants, both men and women. And the fear of testing positive raises the threshold for getting an HIV test; even if people know that by being aware of their own status they can, if necessary, get treatment, not nearly everybody dares to take an HIV test. Not using condoms and the reluctance to having an HIV test clearly constitute a dissonance between people’s knowledge about how they should act and how many people, in fact, act.

To contest the usability and safety of condoms by claiming that using one infects the user with HIV, instead of protecting from an infection, can be understood as a way to question the negative perception inflicted on oneself by not using condoms. Similarly, if the legend about the infected orange is understood as a more comfortable variant of the legend about getting infected while being tested for HIV, it can also be interpreted as a way to narratively

oppose the HIV tests. Furthermore, by seeing conspiracies behind the disease it is possible to put the blame for HIV/AIDS in general on someone else, rather than seeing the own role and responsibility in the epidemic.

The conspiratorial traits of many of the AIDS legends I encountered in Cape Town also further enforces their function as narrative expressions of resistance towards the hegemonic message promoting condom use and HIV testing, but also the disease in general. By telling legends about infected condoms, pin-pricked oranges, and malevolent conspiracies, the South Africans most affected by the disease are able to question the different hegemonic messages surrounding HIV/AIDS and, as Sobo proposes, enhance their self-esteem and maintain the group’s dignity, in a situation where very few good alternatives exist.

### **Conclusion**

When I commenced my first fieldwork about the “South African AIDS myth,” I expected to meet townships filled to the brim with one belief more extravagant than the other.

Instead, as discussed above, many of my informants showed very detailed knowledge of the disease and its clinical qualities. In many cases, their knowledge was far superior to mine. At first appearance, I had, in fact, a hard time observing any so-called AIDS myths, an observation that does not harmonize with previous studies’ suggestions. However, even if not evident in the beginning, a clear mismatch sometimes surfaced between the information gained from different information campaigns at health

care centers or at schools and people's expressions of the disease. Some of these perceptions, especially the reports about the infected condoms and pin-pricked oranges, I recognized as an unmistakable part of the AIDS legend corpus.

During my fieldwork, I learned that HIV/AIDS is a hard subject to approach in South Africa, not only due to people being rather exhausted of the disease, but also because people feel distressed when having to confront HIV/AIDS. Therefore, conducting fieldwork about HIV/AIDS can be troublesome and frustrating. More profound layers and delicate pieces of information in people's perceptions of HIV/AIDS can only be found when informants feel comfortable enough to share their knowledge with the ethnographer, which is also the reason why the ethnographic fieldwork has played such an important role in my study. Scrutinizing these finer grains of perceptions, the themes and motifs found in the legends, such as the lubricant on the condom as a substance carrying the infection and the orange as a projection of the body, have revealed that they convey inherent messages of resistance. Working on different levels, the AIDS legends in the townships in Cape Town can be interpreted as narrative strategies aiming to maintain the control of one's self-esteem and dignity in the distressful crossfire of risk, fear, denial, and a complex political history.

#### Notes

1. Whether they should be called urban, contemporary or modern legends, or simply legends has been amply discussed in previous studies. For the sake of clarity and coherence, and as this article is not aimed at discussing

if legends differ from each other and if they, hence, should be labelled differently, I will call them legends or AIDS legends (see subsection entitled, "Fear, Confusion, and Anxiety").

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## Responses

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**Andrea Kitta**

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Sivelä's research demonstrates the importance of fieldwork and public health campaigns which focus on the needs of the community and individual. The sort of informational fatigue that Sivelä points out among his participants when it comes to the HIV/AIDS message clearly demonstrates what happens when a health message is constantly repeated to a population without understanding the particular concerns, beliefs, or fears of the population. As Goldstein has noted, health information has to fit the community's belief systems, not expect the community to adapt to the message (Goldstein 2004: 56). Clearly there is a disconnect between the health message, which is clearly understood, and the actual practices of the community, which scholars are still attempting to understand. We are fortunate to have scholarship from a wide variety of disciplines on HIV/AIDS, but in this situation, fieldwork such as Sivelä's, Anika Wilson's work in Malawi, and Goldstein's scholarship on HIV/AIDS legends may be the most useful. Risk perception is not an easy thing to understand, since it is, as Sobo notes, "multifaceted, culture-bound, personal, and political" (Sobo 1995: 3). This is not an easy problem and there is no easy answer.

Stigmatization complicates our understanding of risk perception as well. In this case, the testing environment, possible of infection, and discussion about HIV/AIDS are all a part of what Goldstein and Shuman refers to as the "stigmatized vernacular", as it expresses "not only the emic experience of stigmatization, but

also the contagion of stigma—the way it spills over beyond the topic into the means of articulation" (2012: 116). Sivelä notes that the fear of stigmatization may be enough to drive people away from places like clinics, especially if one knows that in addition to the testing they will undergo (a fearful enough situation within itself), they will additionally receive further "education" on HIV/AIDS, as if they do not understand the circumstances which put them into this situation. Clearly, the individuals Sivelä observed already understand that they have engaged in behaviors that have put them in a risky situation or else they would not have come to the clinic. Further stigmatizing these people by forcing them to engage with information that they already understand instead of answering questions and acknowledging their real fears and concerns does nothing to improve their likelihood to return to the clinic or change their behavior.

The conversation (and its related stigma) extends outward from there. Sivelä notes that "politicians are a part of the same narrative culture as the majority of the people in South Africa and, hence, affected by the same oral traditions as everybody else" which is important to emphasize since it can be forgotten by the lay public and media. I have noted in past research that those who hold positions of power are often thought to not participate in legends or be somehow above them (Kitta 2012) when in reality, legends are "not the exclusive domain of any single age, race, profession, or socioeconomic group" (deVos 1996: 3). Simply put, everyone believes in these legends to some extent and those legends can complicate the associated stigmas.

While my recent book only contained a small amount of information with a direct link to Sivelä's research, primarily in the area of contaminated vaccines and injections used as a way to spread disease, I would like to discuss a few of the legends associated with this research. I found the legend associated with the infected oranges to be particularly interesting. While I would not consider myself a proponent of the psychoanalytic approach, I find the linkage between oranges as being symbolic for humans interesting, primarily because when one is taught to give an injection, the typical way to practice is with an orange. Perhaps that is why oranges, above all other possible foods which could be contaminated, are the ones found in this legend. Of course, without knowledge of the popularity or propensity of this particular fruit in the region, this is mere speculation.

Additionally, I found the brief mention of the "Virgin Cure" legend interesting, not only because of the information it provides, but also because it serves as yet another case of how our own research and what we see in the media can become a "fixed" text instead of demonstrating the dynamic process of folklore. There is always the danger that when we study a specific group, especially a group which may not be studied again, that our observations become the basis of stereotypes about the beliefs of those people, which is, of course, not our intention.

Sivelä's study demonstrates some of the major concerns amongst vernacular health scholars, including the stigmatized vernacular, the dynamic process of folklore, and the importance of public

health campaigns which focus on the individual and community, meeting them where they are instead of where they want them to be.

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**J**onas Sivelä's article, "Infected Condoms and Pin-Pricked Oranges: An Ethnographic Study of AIDS Legends in Two Townships in Cape Town" is a deeply interesting ethnographic study from two townships in Cape Town. Tellingly, Sivelä's study notes, "Contrary to the impression I had gotten from previous studies and media coverage that reported townships filled to the brim with one "myth" more bizarre than the other, I was surprised (and ashamed to say, disappointed) by how well my informants were informed about the disease and its clinical properties."

In his fieldwork, he found "clear variations in how people talked about the disease; they did not always focus on hard, clinical facts. The same person, who had just given me her fresh, and seemingly accurate, insights into the medical dimensions could ... say something that clearly stood out ... [that] government-distributed condoms had purposely been contaminated with HIV." He says "these crumbs started to form identifiable shapes of narratives and striking similarities with the AIDS legend corpus started to appear. The repertoire of these legends was, however, astonishingly narrow." The article focuses on two types of legends that stood out from the discourse surrounding HIV/AIDS: infected condoms and a variety of pin-prick legends that imply people are being purposely infected with HIV-infected needles or unwittingly by infected fruit.

HIV and AIDS myths and legends certainly fuelled the epidemic in South Africa by allowing people to ignore messages on how to protect themselves and their partners or excuse risky behavior. Sivelä's article addresses important issues by exploring what is embodied currently in the HIV and AIDS myths.

He understands the context. In 2011, an estimated 5.6 million South Africans were living with HIV and AIDS. In the same year, 270,190 South Africans died of AIDS-related causes (Statistics South Africa 2012). This statistic makes South Africa the worst affected country in the world. Prior to the roll out of treatment, sickness, death, and funerals had become a huge part of daily life, particularly in the townships. Making sense of this epidemic was difficult for the ordinary people.

South Africa is fortunate to have an exceptionally strong research community and a wealth of writing on the epidemic. Research has ranged from bench science to economics and has included quantitative and qualitative methodologies. This may be why there were few "legends."

Sivelä's conclusion that HIV and AIDS legends are used by people as strategies of maintaining control of their self-esteem and dignity in the crossfire of risk, fear, denial, and a complex political history, is important. It is a worthy addition to the small body of ethnographic research that highlights new areas of HIV prevention to be addressed (see, for example, Leclerc-Madlala 2002; Hunter 2004; Visser 2012, and Chazan 2008).

Sivelä's findings show that HIV and AIDS "myths" are human and social phenomena which need an appropriate

method of analysis. So-called myths, or legends as he classifies them, can be best studied using an ethnographic approach that deals with social interactions, behaviours, and perceptions that occur within groups, teams, organisations, and communities.

As Sivelä discusses, it is the cultural aspects that are most uncomfortable for South Africans. This was seen in the Mbeki lead denial (in which the President argued that HIV did not cause AIDS and poverty was the major issue for Africa) that has been extensively documented (Nattrass 2012; Fourie 2006; Cullinan and Anso 2009).

In 2000 when the Mbeki response first emerged, one of the authors of this contribution (Whiteside) co-wrote a book with Clem Sunter aimed at the South African public, *AIDS: The Challenge for South Africa*. The cover stated "On the issue of HIV / AIDS, the majority of South Africans can be divided into two broad categories: those who bury their heads in the sand and deny that the epidemic exists and those who believe that it exists but they cannot do anything about it." The text of the book included boxes with "Myths" and "Reality." For example:

Myth: Condoms don't work because the virus can pass through the latex, and anyway they fail.

Reality: The virus cannot pass through the latex. If condoms are used properly, consistently, and are South African Bureau of Standards (SABS) approved, they provide close to 100 per cent protection. (Whiteside and Sunter 2000, 34).

Whiteside, an economist, and Sunter, a captain of industry, thought this would bring clarity. These authors believe that

collecting and communicating accurate information is the key to understanding and fighting the HIV and AIDS epidemic. They were wrong. As this article shows, thirty years into the HIV and AIDS epidemic, misconceptions surrounding HIV and AIDS and its transmission are still present.

The lack of a comprehensive understanding of the nature of HIV and AIDS myths is due to researchers' failure to use appropriate methodologies to explore the phenomena of HIV and AIDS myths. The few existing studies on HIV and AIDS myths are predominantly underpinned by quantitative and qualitative methods or both, and neglect participant observation when using qualitative research techniques (Jewkes et al. 2006; Evian 2006; Dickson 2012). This article begins to address the gap.

Increased use of ethnographic research into HIV and AIDS myths can provide rich, holistic insights into South Africans' views and actions, and the location they inhabit. Ethnographic research helps social scientists document the culture, the perspectives, and practices of the people in their settings that sustain and nurture HIV and AIDS myths. These can only be understood when researchers directly engage with the South African communities they are studying. Through ethnography, researchers could 'immerse' themselves in South African communities, and generate a richer understanding of the subtleties of their myths.

Even if Sivelä's article has rich and detailed understanding of the link between human and social behavior with HIV and AIDS myths, it is incomplete if there are no efforts to use

the ethnographic scientific research for practical applications so as to enhance the fight against the HIV and AIDS epidemic. Ethnographic researchers should translate their research into action, helping to further understand and find practical responses to the HIV and AIDS myths and epidemic. And this sadly is where most ethnography falls short.

Sivelä's findings show the importance of investing in ethnographic research within South African academia, government, and civil society: to inform policy and implementation with ethnographic and locally legitimate evidence on HIV and AIDS myths. The capacity for ethnographic research is virtually non-existent in much of South Africa.

It is also important to address research-policy communications gaps. A key to bridging Sivela's research and policy is to increase the accessibility of his findings through rapid and wide dissemination to all stakeholders by means of a variety of media channels. Therefore, a primary question should be, to what extent will Sivelä's findings be disseminated apart from publication in *Cultural Analysis*? Researchers such as Sivelä need to recognize the role of, and join forces with, proven effective linking mechanisms in South Africa such as civil society organizations (CSOs), the private sector, and the media. The implementation gap needs to be addressed, and links must be forged between researchers like Sivela, street-level bureaucrats, and CSOs.

In order to maximize his chances of policy impact, Sivelä and ethnographers in general should recognize how they can be proactive. First, they can develop a detailed understanding of

the policymaking process, the nature of the evidence they have and all the other stakeholders involved in the policy area who can help to get their findings across. They could develop an overall strategy for the work by identifying political supporters and opponents; keep an eye out for and be able to react to policy windows; ensure the HIV and AIDS myths evidence is credible and practically useful; and seek to build coalitions with like-minded groups in South Africa. Secondly, ethnographic researchers should be tactical by getting to know and work with the policymakers; build long-term interventions of his research; communicate effectively; use participatory approaches; and identify key networkers. Being tactical is a basic ethical requirement of anyone who does this type of research, but when it deals with a challenge like AIDS it is morally necessary.

Finally, as Southern Africans, we note with satisfaction that Sivelä found fewer AIDS legends than he expected. We suspect that with treatment being available people's preoccupations are with poverty, unemployment, hunger, and shelter. The interesting project for the future is to make sense of how the epidemic could be leveraged to build social cohesion and a better society.

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# The Dynamics of a Cultural Struggle in Academia: The Case of New Age Music Research<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*Music is not just about sounds. It is a political act. Likewise, the academic discourse about music plays a role in cultural polemics. This paper deals with the characteristics and dynamics of the academic struggle over a research topic that is the subject of a cultural conflict—New Age music. An in-depth analysis of the academic discourse and its polemic dynamics leads to an identification of the struggle strategies, and a distinction between different dispositions and paradigms among the researchers. Our conclusions demonstrate the penetrability of the academic sphere by cultural fashions, as it is not rational considerations and factual findings, but rather trends, habits, socio-cultural or professional affiliations, and ideologies that motivate and “advance” research.*

## Introduction

In recent years New Age music (NAM) has become a widespread and familiar musical category—on radio stations, in music stores, at festivals and at musical performances. Along with the massive inculcation of NAM into the cultural market, a lively debate has arisen

regarding the values it represents, the way it is marketed, and its artistic value.

When we began studying the cultural conflict being waged around NAM, we discovered that the emotions, ideologies, politics, and balances of power that characterize this struggle are also reflected in the arena of academic study. Academic research is perceived as neutral, objective, and as providing only scholarly analysis. However, academia is actually an additional arena for the cultural struggle, echoing the same claims.

In this article, academia is the object of the research. We examine the way an academic struggle is conducted over a cultural issue, and highlight the processes that form norms, standards, and truths. We focus on the characteristics of the struggle, namely preferred values, manners of thought, and ways of expression—both for NAM’s defenders and opponents. A unique challenge in conducting such a study is keeping in mind that we the authors belong to the field being examined.

We will begin with a presentation of NAM and the broad cultural context from which it emerged—New Age culture. Later, we will address the various academic discourses that are at the core of our study (see Fig. 1<sup>2</sup>): research of New Age culture and of popular music, and cultural criticism. The latter constitutes a theoretical infrastructure for this article, as will be elaborated on in the methodological paragraph. The main body of the article is a description and analysis of the academic discourse about NAM. Finally, we will summarize the findings and discuss their implications.

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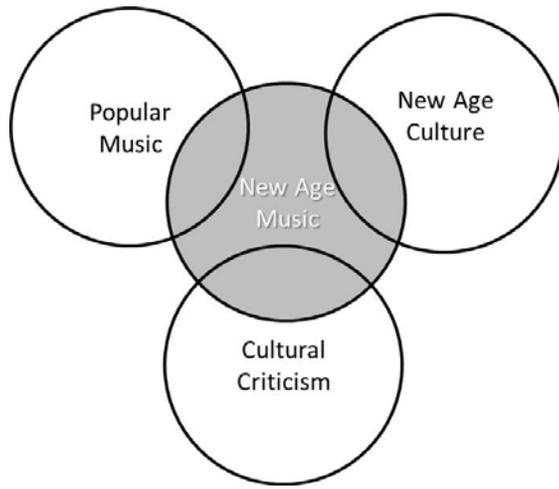


Fig. 1: New Age music research as it relates to relevant academic discourses

### New Age Music

NAM is a vocal and instrumental musical style, which developed in the second half of the twentieth century as minimalist music meant to create a particular atmosphere, usually tranquil and meditative. Among its first harbingers one may recall Brian Eno (Hibbet 2010, 299), Mike Oldfield, and Wendy Carlos (Berman 1998, 256, 259). In the 1980s NAM entered public awareness and began to be an accepted category in the marketing language of record companies. In the early 1990s some people identified NAM as the one of the most significant components of the music industry, although it also became the most disputed musical genre (Zrzavy 1990, 33).

NAM is a super-category that includes many musical sub-categories<sup>3</sup> such as ethnic, World, Trance, ambience, space, healing, meditation, nature, minimalist, Muzak, environmental, and so on. For instance, at AllMusic Internet site, a well-known online music guide service, New

Age is listed among twenty one musical super-categories (such as Rock, Jazz, and Classic),<sup>4</sup> with twenty four “subgenres and styles.”<sup>5</sup>

NAM’s widespread cultural presence is expressed in extensive marketing activity, festivals and performances, on websites and in databases that feature music and video-clips. For example, the Amazon website features a NAM category among twenty categories such as Rock, Classical, Jazz, Opera, and Vocal music. While the New Age category contains 86,358 items, Blues contains 85,946 items, Classical 382,311, and World music 600,680.<sup>6</sup>

Among the many NAM singers and artists, suffice it to mention a few central examples. Enya is one of the most famous New Age artists and singers. She began to become famous in the mid-1980s as a performer and composer of World music and Irish music, through the documentary series *The Celts*, which was broadcast in Great Britain by the BBC, and which traced Celtic culture in Europe (a popular subject of interest in New Age culture). Enya’s success grew in the 1990s, and her album *A Day Without Rain* sold 15 million copies in 2000. In the 1990s, her albums were rated several times by *Billboard*, a magazine that bases its ratings on sales and radio broadcasting in the U.S.A., in their list of the 200 albums of the year.<sup>7</sup> In 2001, she was awarded the annual international prize in Monaco at the World Music Awards by the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry, where she was declared the singer whose sales had been the highest in the world that year.<sup>8</sup> Enya won many more awards, including four Grammys and the esteemed

Academy Award nomination from the American Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in Hollywood.

Another example of a New Age musician who achieved international acclaim is Yanni, a pianist who plays NAM (of the Classical sub-category). He publicized a video-clip of a performance of his in Athens in 1993, *Yanni Live at the Acropolis*, which was very successful, and was considered one of the bestselling music videos of all time. Yanni was awarded many platinum and gold albums, and performed in dozens of countries in the world for millions of fans. Billboard rated Yanni's concert tour, following the release of his album *Ethnicity* in 2003, as the fourth largest concert tour in the world that year. In February 2011 Yanni's album ranked 91<sup>st</sup> in the world on the Billboard 200 list.

Ryan Farish is an American producer and Disc Jockey of electronic NAM. One of the peaks of his career was when a fifteen-year-old girl made a video-clip for soldiers in Iraq to his composition *Pacific Wind*, which she entitled "Remember Me." The clip had 30 million views and was rated 48<sup>th</sup> in April 2008, in the search category of "most watched YouTube video of all times."<sup>9</sup>

These examples indicate the success of NAM and its penetration into the mainstream of contemporary popular music. Notwithstanding its great distribution, NAM has remained controversial in almost all its aspects. Which artists are New Age artists? What are the musical attributes of the genre? Is it even worthy of being defined as a musical genre? What are its historical roots? Is it music of high quality? What is the secret of its success?

As part of the struggle surrounding NAM's cultural status, some researchers and artists deny that NAM is a musical genre. Thus, in the *New Age Encyclopedia*, NAM is presented as a "marketing slogan," and it is explicitly indicated that it is "not a musical category" (Aidan 1990). The musician Wendy Carlos, who tends to be identified as the creator of the first New Age album (*Sonic Seasonings*), uttered the same claims (Berman 1988, 259).

The current study does not deal with the question regarding the existence of the musical genre called NAM, nor trace its historical roots, nor judge the quality of the music. We accept the existence of the phenomenon as a cultural fact: there are musicians who create NAM; there are companies that market it; there is an audience that consumes it; there are artists associated with it. In our view, as such a cultural phenomenon it is worthy of research. Furthermore, the denial of NAM being worthy of research is what especially stimulates our study.

### **New Age Culture**

One cannot write about NAM and the dispute that surrounds it, or its social and ideological characteristics, without describing its broader context as part of the New Age movement. The New Age movement emerged through a range of counterculture phenomena in a continuous process that came of age in the 1970s, such as alternative medicine, meditation, Far East doctrines and practices, admiration of indigenous cultures, neo-shamanism and neo-paganism, spiritual feminism, consciousness and self-help groups, spiritual psychotherapies, and channeling (Hanegraaff 1998; Heelas

2008; Roof 1999; Sutcliffe and Bowman 2000).

Along with external factors such as fashion accoutrements, the New Age movement is characterized as a rich world of ideas and values, and as having a typical discourse (Ruah-Midbar 2006). *Inter alia*, it is characterized by sanctification of the self and a call for full realization of human potential, a holistic approach, opposition to authorities and institutions including modern Western science, preference for experiential epistemology over rationalism, an encouragement of the externalization of emotional expression, an accent on healing, expectation of planetary transformation as well as encouraging personal transformation, desire for closeness to nature, admiration of femininity, an interest in mysticism, and the “perennialist” philosophy ascribing a common source of all religions (Heelas 1996; Hammer 2001; Hanegraaff 1998). The emphasis on music in New Age culture is part of its special interest in creativity and art in general (Weissler 2007). Music plays a role in New Age culture in various ways, from its ceremonial context to its therapeutic uses.

Although the New Age movement started out as part of the counterculture with the “drop out” slogan, it gradually was integrated into mainstream institutions, including medicine, education, economics, religion, and even the military (Heelas 1996; Heelas and Seel 2003; Puttick 2000; Ruah-Midbar and Zaidman 2013). The current sociological profile of New Agers fits the updated inclination of the New Age Movement towards the mainstream: they belong

to the upper middle-class sector, and are characterized by relatively higher education (Kemp 2003).

Among the most established mainstream institutions is academia, with which the New Age has a complicated relationship. New Age culture is ambivalent towards Western science, whereas on the one hand, it opposes knowledge authorities that are external to the individual (Hammer 2001), but, on the other hand, it is interested in creating a bridge between science and religion by means of presenting holistic worldviews that use pseudo-scientific terminology (Hanegraaff 1998). Thus, for New Agers, modern Western science is a “significant other” (Hammer 2001), as is also reflected in their extended level of education (Kemp 2003).

This constitutes some of the background of the academic discourse regarding New Age, which has been characterized by a sharp polarization between those who would caution against contemporary spiritualities’ dangers, and those “apologists” who would defend their research objects (Zablocki and Robbins 2001).

The academic debate as to New Age phenomenon found expression also outside academia—in the media, in courts of law, and so on (see for example, Lewis and Melton 1992)—attesting to the ideological background that motivates the dispute. In addition to the academic struggle, New Age is criticized in various contexts: economy (for example, some people blame the New Age for extreme encouragement of a capitalistic attitude—see Carrette and King 2005), religion (since the New Age draws adherents from different religious communities

—see Saliba 1999), and professional contexts (such as in the case of the mental health profession —see Shupe and Darnell 2006).

Thus, NAM is a cultural product of a broader disputed phenomenon, in which academia is an interested party. Expectedly, some of the “fire” that is aimed at NAM stems from the larger context of the dispute. Actually, NAM contends with double marginality in the academic discourse, the marginality of New Age culture and that of popular music genres (see Fig. 2, and the next section). This problematic cultural positioning also places NAM in the eye of the storm of scientific debate.

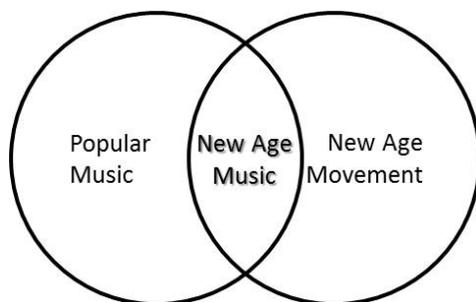


Fig. 2: New Age music as a cultural-artistic phenomenon

### Academic Discourses on New Age Culture and Popular Music: Debates, Trends and Cultural Criticism

The cultural struggles related to New Age culture surface in a period overlapping similar controversies about popular music, and new social movements, and coinciding with the rise of the postmodernist discourse, beginning in the late-1960s and early-1970s, parallel to the counter-culture movement (Roof 1999). These cultural phenomena were gradually reflected in new emerging academic

discourses: a critical-cultural discourse in different academic disciplines, and academic studies of New Age culture, as well as of popular music. Those polemic academic discourses are parallel to—and occasionally affect—one another.

In anthropology, an emerging critical approach perceived scientific research as an active part of colonial expansion (Hymes 1969; Asad 1973). This new anthropological approach featured reflexivity as a substitute for the positivist approach that aspired to verified knowledge (Geertz 1968; Pratt 1986). Reflexive anthropology asserts that in the process of research, cultures that possess different value and language systems intersect: the researcher’s culture, and that of the phenomenon being studied (Garriott 2006). Similarly, anthropologists began to promote the method of participant observation (Urry 1984) as an expression of a reflexive position that is aware of the relativity of the researcher’s point of view, and the influence of her presence and interpretation (Fontana 1994, 211-218).

Since the mid-1990s, scholarly voices that were empathetic to the New Age increased, opposing the anti-cult movement and its academic patrons. Taking part in the empathetic wave were researchers such as Elizabeth Puttick, Steven Sutcliffe, and Joanne Pearson, who were active in the arena of contemporary spirituality and still partially identify with it, thus expressing the participant observation approach. Paradoxically, this research, which had been influenced by critical academic trends, was more empathetic—and less critical—toward the research object. The longer the controversy goes on, the more it exposes

the value system of researchers: research questions ostensibly presented as technical, are revealed as questions that are actually politically charged (Ruah-Midbar 2006; Sutcliffe 2006; Zablocki and Robbins 2001).

It is insightful to acknowledge that the critical-empathetic discourse among the researchers of the New Age is part of a broader trend, which promotes new realms of research—popular, marginal, eschewed phenomena. Those researchers commit a political act merely by engaging in this research (likewise in the choice of research queries and methods), expressing subversive self-consciousness.

In the research of popular music, the political agenda is to undermine, or question, the basic assumption of classical musicology, mainly the distinction between “high” music and “low” music (McClary and Walser 1988, 240). Middleton summarizes the contrast between classical musicology and popular music research, by denoting three aspects that characterize the former: terminology (musicological language is specialized and ideologically charged), methodology (focusing on the musical “text,” namely notes, rather than performance), and ideology (perceiving music as autonomous, transcendental, and true, and focusing on the artist, rather than on the social enjoyment of the listeners) (Middleton 1990, 103-126).

Popular music expresses alternate values and requires completely different research methods. Thus, the subversive research is usually committed not by musicologists, but by sociologists and culture researchers. Here again, we see how the academic struggle reflects the

cultural one—between classical (“high”) and popular (“low”)—as popular music research struggles to be granted the recognition and appreciation accorded to classical musicology.

Within the field of popular music, a similar controversy exists between various styles of popular music, such as Country, Rock, and Jazz. In order to portray itself as “authentic,” each genre attempts to distinguish itself from the modern music industry (Wall 2003). All participants in these struggles—artists, the industry, consumers, and of course the academics—use evaluation criteria of the musical genres as a means to overpower (Negus 1996, 162). Another tool in the dispute is expressed through the label of a musical genre.

The stylistic label has a great deal of importance in popular music, for the marketing companies as well as for the consumers. Just like truth claims, which camouflage power struggles in the guise of knowledge, experts, and facts (Foucault 1980, 88), in the musical context, the labeling of a phenomenon as a “genre” gives it status and power. Various researchers have noted the importance of assigning a musical product to a genre as a tool that provides an entry ticket into the marketing department of the record companies (Frith 1996, 74; Shuker 2002). Types of music that have not been labeled as a “genre” in shops and on websites, such as music on the telephone and on television, are not found in the catalogues of the record companies, and they do not exist in cultural or academic discourse (Kassabian 1999, 113).

Ascribing musical product to a specific genre influences, in turn, their industrial organization, namely their

social-cultural function, position, and the ability to produce and distribute them. In addition, the identification with a genre mediates, fashions, enables, and limits the consumers' musical experience (Negus 1999, 17). The genre is also a tool for the government to regulate musical fields. It makes possible the regimentation, or canonization, of musical education processes by means of allocation of funds, censorship, and so forth (Holt 2007, 3). Consequently, the creation of conventions, that is, criteria, according to which music is assigned a specific genre, is not just a result of the analysis of musical parameters but also of the discourse of artists, consumers, and authorities (ibid, 23).

In light of the great importance of recognizing music as a genre, it is not surprising that the debate surrounding NAM focuses on the question of genre. Consequently, researchers discuss questions such as: Is NAM a musical genre? What are its boundaries? Is this a new genre, and what are its historical roots? These questions, which are relevant for every popular genre, become even more acute with regard to NAM because of its eclectic nature. These questions become crucial, since the denial of NAM as a genre ostensibly "justified" its exclusion from academic discourse.

#### **Methodology: Reflexive Research Methods and the Research Field**

Reflexivity grants the cultural researcher an opportunity to achieve "objectivity" in cases where her involvement in the field of research is significant (Davies 2008, 10). The reflexive glance at academia arose with postmodern discourse, raising questions about the relationship

between the reality being studied and the scientists, and about the manner of scientific advancement. Karl Popper claimed that the natural sciences cannot achieve truth, but can only choose from theories about reality (Popper 1963). Thomas Kuhn turned to a critical path of a different sort, when he identified the cultural influences on the scientific "paradigm": accepted scientific beliefs, customary rules of research (in a certain discipline), and accepted resolutions. Kuhn also related to the conditions that allow for deviating from these norms and generating a "paradigm shift" in science (Kuhn 1962).

Using critical tools to analyze an arena that is in itself perceived as critical, the academic arena—might be complicated. Various critical approaches have been our beacons in our analysis of the cultural and social mechanisms in which NAM researchers function.

As researchers, we belong to the community that is being researched, namely to the battlefield within academia. We are aware that our research will also contribute its part to the academic politics around the New Age. It therefore behooves us to recognize the part our position plays in the formation of this research. Keeping in mind that each researcher—us included—is biased, we strive to be reflexive and aware of our predispositions. As the end of this paper is enhanced reflexivity and disclosure of the politics of academia—be it concealed or revealed—some biographical notes seem required.

Our position is a result of our personal choices as well as our academic training. In Omri's undergraduate studies in music, along with acquiring classical

musical skills he also absorbed disdain for popular music: the professors, the study program, the methods of evaluation, and also the extra-curricular events echoed the same conservative message. As he developed interest in technology in his graduate studies, he gradually found himself opening up to new worlds of knowledge, in a multi-disciplinary program that emphasized cultural and critical aspects of technology and science, which he applied to the musical world. He became interested in popular musical phenomena, and more suspicious towards the classical dogma. Marianna wrote a doctoral dissertation on the topic of New Age culture. Since in Israel there was no study of New Age at that time, this area was suspicious for academics, especially in Judaic Studies, where she originated. Her training in critical theories encouraged her to notice the politics and discursive acts behind the academic criticism of New Age. It became her goal to make this field legitimate to study. Part of this project was her establishment and co-chairing of ICSCS—the annual Israeli Conference for the Study of Current Spiritualities, where invited scholars from abroad featured, establishing the status of research on New Age and alternative spiritualities. Our meeting led to some research questions that fascinate us both with regard to NAM.

Our field of research includes the academic publications explicitly referring to NAM—about two dozen research studies from 1987 to 2010 (see appendix).<sup>10</sup> In these studies, NAM constitutes the central topic and occasionally appears in the title. We will start with a survey of all those studies, followed by an analysis.

### **Academic Discourse on New Age Music**

The first academic study about NAM, from the late-1980s, asserted the importance of NAM as a reflection of a belief system growing within Western society (Garneau 1987). Garneau's study could have served as a catalyst for subsequent studies analyzing the reflection of New Age beliefs and values in music, but the majority of the studies published since then curbed this direction of research. Instead, most researchers of NAM addressed fundamental questions. Writing in an argumentative manner, they mirrored the cultural struggle on the questions of the quality and legitimacy of NAM.

Presentation of the research studies derive from a chronological point of view, but will be based on analytical divisions. The primary division is between those that negate NAM and those that affirm it, where the first group is the larger one.<sup>11</sup>

### **Opponents of New Age Music: Negation of the Music**

Leslie Berman, a music critic, curator and president of various musical organizations, openly describes the change that began for her regarding NAM, from "simplistic dismissal" to "debate" (Berman 1988, 253). The question about the quality of the music is at the center of Berman's writing, in which she notes that its rise was "offering a forum for increasing numbers of mediocre musicians and half-baked knock-offs of more successful and imaginative purveyors" (ibid., 265). In which case, according to her hierarchal perception of music, Berman places NAM in a low position.

The inferior value of NAM has continued to echo in later academic works. The journalist and critic Mark Prendergast, for instance, describes NAM in his book *Ambience Century*<sup>12</sup> as a music that is perceived as inferior, and for the most part “emotionally shallow,” although he gives it credit for promoting minimalist music (Prendergast 2000, 144, 147).

It is noteworthy that similar remarks on quality appear in researches of New Age cultural products in general. For instance, Hanegraaff, a prominent researcher of the field, writes about one of the New Age books he analyses, that it is

[...] an appallingly shallow piece of writing, produced by an author without an ounce of literary talent and whose “insights” evince a remarkable lack of profundity or originality [...]

He further explains that the book is “important” in order to understand New Age “not because of its qualitative merits but in spite of their absence” (Hanegraaff 2000, 289).

Helfried Zrzavy raises the question of why academic research has neglected NAM (Zrzavy 1990, 35). His main conclusion is that the cause is its lack of coherence and eclectic character. His analysis leads to the conclusion that the only aspect of this phenomenon that indicates coherence is the graphic design of the record covers. He also mentions the high quality of those albums’ pressing. In other words, not musical, but economic and marketing interests, make-up this genre (ibid., 37):

The question of New Age’s rather enigmatic cohesion, despite its obvious musical identity crisis, thus cannot be answered without taking into account the wider context of the targeting, packaging and marketing of the product.

He completes his paper expressing a wish that NAM continued in existence not on account of its packaging but on account of its other features, as it consolidates (ibid., 51). His sincere investigation of the reasons of the scholarly neglect of the field might have placed him as a supporter of the phenomenon, however, in fact he reproduces the view that in order to be worthy of academic investigation the genre must be musically coherent, and reassures that it is not. Consequently, since in his opinion, the coherence of NAM derives only from marketing forces rather than musical ones, he categorizes it as lacking in quality.

Appearing in the *New Age Encyclopedia* are the entries “Music and the New Age” and “Music, Channeled” written by Kelly Aidan. Aidan mentions the interests found at the very basis of NAM—its composition, marketing and distribution—claiming they are not derived from purely artistic or ideological motivations. Although he does mention the characteristics of the music and its uses, such as “background music for meditation for attaining some change in the state of consciousness” (Aidan 1990, 296), he notes, however, like Zrzavy, that it is a “marketing slogan and not a musical category” (ibid., 295). He notes, in the context of the economic interests that motivate the production and distribution of the music, that “a major reason for the popularity of NAM

among radio stations is that it enables station owners to operate stations with virtually no paid staff" (ibid., 299).<sup>13</sup>

Aidan is one of the leaders of Wicca. As an academic who is also involved in the spiritual field, one would expect him to avoid being critical of NAM. However, since neo-Pagans are especially stringent in dissociating with the New Age label and being differentiated from that group (Pearson 1998; Pike 2004), it is perhaps not surprising that the ideological-sociological adversity between neo-Paganism and the New Age would find expression in academic writings.

Criticism in the marketing-economic area is very typical of academic writing about New Age culture, also in the broader context beyond the musical aspect (see, for example, Carrette and King 2005). Thus, Zrzavy's and Aidan's analyses of NAM recall the findings of another researcher on the emergence of the New Age movement in Germany, Christoph Bochinger, who claimed that the term "New Age" is

[...] nothing but a label, which was "pasted on" the new religious scene by the publishers, the secondary literature and a few protagonists: in the German-speaking domain, "New Age" has never lived, and even less is it a social movement which might be described in the singular (Bochinger, as cited in the translation of Hanegraaff 1998, 377).

Bochinger argues that "there is no such thing as 'New Age Movement,'" and that the term "was actually produced by the application of marketing principles to the religious domain," denying that it has any coherent worldview (ibid., 377-378).

The latter argument—that there is no real religious philosophy, and therefore no movement of New Age—echoes the claims for the lack of coherence in NAM, suggesting that it is not a real musical genre.

A different route of judgment of NAM is in terms of authenticity and cultural appropriation. Jennifer Bain, a musicologist who specializes in medieval music, claims that it is because of NAM that the musical compositions of Hildegard von Bingen from the twelfth century have penetrated public awareness. Nevertheless, she says that "what made Hildegard famous may prove to be her demise," whereas her commodification generated products that were not faithful to the source nor to the cultural-historical context in which they were created (Bain 2004). This accusation echoes similar claims against other cases of cultural appropriation by New Age Adherents (see, for example, Aldred 2000).

Another claim that has to do with historical—and even more generally, scientific—fidelity is that of Lisa Summer, a researcher of music and therapy, and of Joseph Summer, a composer and expert in acoustics and musical technology. In their study, they severely condemn using NAM for healing, and the approaches and beliefs that underlie this practice. Although they both approve of therapy by means of music (and although Lisa herself works in this kind of therapy) they oppose doing it by means of NAM. For this purpose, they present a historic dynasty of charlatanism and false pseudo-scientific claims, starting in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century with Madame Blavatsky and continuing with Rudolf

Steiner, theosophical thinkers who deeply influenced New Age. The authors explain that important criticism of New Age therapists is avoided mostly because of the feeling that their intentions are good, even though their explanations about therapeutic advantage have no clarity or logic (Summer 1996).

### Exclusion of the Music

Whereas the studies recounted above are actively opposed to NAM, part of the academic discourse expresses passive opposition. This opposition ranges from minimum mention of the term “New Age” to absolute avoidance of relating to it academically. The avoidance of academic discourse about NAM means avoidance of creating knowledge about it. As knowledge equals power, the absence of intensive research in this field constitutes a tool of weakening it in the struggle against it, a means of nullifying the power of groups interested in distribution or consumption of this music (Foucault 1980, especially 52). Even if it is not possible to indicate a conscious choice, interest or direct action to avoid academic study of NAM, the absence of a significant body of research on such a prevalent and influential phenomenon constitutes a political act of exclusion. This is an actual execution or reproduction of the opposition.

Another similar act is the treatment of cultural phenomena directly and closely connected to NAM without mentioning this connection explicitly, which weakens the cultural visibility of this music. Not far from this is the act of marginal and slight mention of the genre, where it is necessary to expand on this connection. Academics “whose research is based on

shared paradigms are committed to the same rules and standards for scientific practice” (Kuhn 1962, 11), and in our case the standard is that NAM is not perceived as an important or even as a worthy research topic.

The following examples illustrate the power of silence with regard to NAM. The article by Gordon Lynch, a researcher of religions who focuses on the sociology of secularism, deals with popular and spiritual music, but the phrase “New Age Music” is not mentioned at all in the body of his work, and similarly not in the literature with which he corresponds (Lynch 2006). Penelope Gouk, an historian who edited an anthology of research studies on healing music and its cultural contexts (Gouk 2000), does not mention NAM, either in the introduction to the book or within the framework of the studies she included in it, although the use of this genre is ubiquitous in music therapy methods, so much so that it is sometimes hard to distinguish between healing music and NAM (Summer and Summer 1996, 8).

In many research studies that deal with sub-genres of NAM, the term is hardly ever mentioned by name, or it is mentioned as marginally as possible, as though it were not significant for the purposes of the research. Thus, for example, Anthony D’Andrea, an anthropologist and cultural researcher, demonstrates in his book about Trance music (D’Andrea 2007) a profound familiarity with the New Age scene. However, even though he is dealing with Trance music, which is a sub-category of NAM, and even though the concept “New Age” appears in the title of his book, *Global Nomads: Techno and New*

*Age as Transnational Countercultures in Ibiza and Goa*, the term “NAM” is mentioned minimally, only twice. The first time in an offhand manner, within a biographical description that does not contribute directly to the content of the research, and again in noting that NAM is the super-category that includes Trance Music, the subject of the book’s research.

A single mention of NAM can also be found in the collection of articles on Psytrance, which was compiled by Graham St. John, a cultural anthropologist who deals with new cultural and religious movements as well as electronic dance music culture (St. John 2010). Out of 17 articles, only one of them mentions NAM incidentally. A few more articles mention the term “New Age” once or twice, but not the music of that culture, usually as one of the factors in a system of many contexts and influences.

Whereas some scholars recognize the connection between Trance music and the New Age, in the book about Trance music in Goa by Saldanha Arun (cultural geographer), NAM has no reference, while the New Age culture appears only once:

The concept of trance-dance was popular in the early nineties to capture the strong religious undertones of electronic dance culture, having developed alongside and sometimes interwoven with New Age philosophy and dance therapies (Arun 2007).

The study of Bryan Meadan on the culture of Trance music goes one step further. It does not mention NAM or New Age at all (Meadan 2001).

Keith Potter, a researcher of contemporary music, and a founding member of the Society for Minimalist

Music, tells in his book about Minimalist music the story of the founders of that musical style. Even though he focuses on four composers also considered to be among the progenitors of NAM, this genre is never mentioned in the book (Potter 2000).

Vilas Bohlman, a composer and researcher of Jewish music and Modernism, writes in his book about World music, that the record industry amused itself with different names for this genre in the 1980s, and only in the 1990s did the term “World music” become established. Among the names that came up, he notes “music of the New Age,” which has no place beyond this in the whole book (Bohlman 2002).

While Bohlman recognizes the connection between NAM and World music, Richard Nidel, a lawyer who published a book about World music in an academic publication, denies this. NAM is mentioned only once in his book, where he claims unequivocally that World music is not New Age music (Nidel 2005, 2).

Obviously, we cannot survey all the cases of exclusion of NAM from those studies in which it could or should have naturally occurred.

### **Supporters of the Music**

The academic discourse that expresses a position in support of NAM is varied: ranging from the presentation of clearly positive views regarding the phenomenon, to the neutral stance in which one may see a relatively positive outlook, considering the pervasive exclusion and criticism of NAM in academic discourse. We will begin with the outright supporters and then present

the “neutrals.” The group of supporters is smaller than that of opposers, as we shall presently see.

### **Approval of the Music**

The article by Dennis Hall expresses definite solidarity with NAM. Like those who disapprove of the genre, he too notes the difficulty in defining the phenomenon, but his sympathetic writing style uses this fact in favor of the music and its unique characteristics. He continues in this vein further on in the article, where he characterizes NAM as designed to be heard on the edges of listening or as postmodern music: eclectic in its components; “seeks to confuse boundaries” between genres and hierarchies; playful and ironic; uses quotes extensively; expresses anti-intellectualism, and so on. He does not see these attributes as problematic or deficient. On the contrary, he connects these attributes, which he sees as complimentary, to his thesis that NAM is exposing “the building blocks of the culture,” and contributing “to the formations demanded by the condition of postmodernity.” The culmination of this writing may be seen in an advertising quote of NAM producers with which he identifies, since, in his opinion, it clarifies and reinforces his thesis that this music is “a haven from the demands of the world around us” (Hall D. 1994, 18-20).

An article by Susan Grove Hall, “An Analysis of an Ecstasy,” declares her position in the presentation of the research query: “What is entrancing all these listeners, myself included?” and this personal, positive, bold undertone is maintained throughout the article. The entire article expresses great

appreciation for the phenomenon. Hall expands passionately on the secret of the appeal of NAM and concludes that it is a phenomenon that must be understood in the context of American popular culture, whereas the listeners respond in accordance with the cultural mentality they have acquired (Hall S. G. 1994, 24, 32).

### **Inclusion of the Music**

The “neutral” positions regarding NAM assume that NAM is a genre and a legitimate cultural phenomenon, and make no value judgments on the phenomenon, for better or worse. The inclusion of NAM in research studies is not at all perceived as problematic, and does not necessitate, in the eyes of these writers, any discussion as to the esthetic or qualitative good or bad in NAM. It is treated as any other legitimate field of research.

Three academics, who specialize in the psychology of music and its applications in education and in society, used NAM in order to study gender bias related to music (Colley 2003; North 2003). Selecting NAM as a tool for testing the issue of gender bias, without expressing any undertone of apology, attests to the approach that it is not problematic music, which may assist in studying the psychological characteristics of listeners. A similar “neutral” approach also appeared in other empirical studies (which compare results of listening to NAM or classical music)—one in the field of music therapy (Mead 1991) and the other in the field of researching states of consciousness (Joyce 2003; Smith 2004).

The research of Ryan Hibbet, a researcher of English literature and

popular music, entitled “The New Age Taboo,” focuses on characterizing the position that opposes NAM. This critical study examines the widespread declaration of consumers and suppliers of assorted kinds of music—“This is not NAM” (Hibbet 2010). The understanding at the basis of the research is that the suggested objection to NAM as embodied in this manner of speaking indicates a mental and ideological stance that is worthy of investigation. Although it does not present any personal value judgment with regard to the music, nor with regard to the opposition to it, the very choice of the research query indicates a position that is not entirely “neutral,” because of the problematization it creates regarding opposition to NAM. Since he does not express overt support for NAM, we have placed Hibbet in the category of “inclusion,” although he takes a step beyond inclusion of the music, in creating a problematization of NAM’s criticism.

**Analysis and Discussion: Research Paradigms and Types of Academic Struggle**

Investigating the academic controversy around NAM, we found two directions—opposition to the phenomenon and support for it. Each direction is split in two groups that express struggles of

different types: those who approve of or negate the phenomenon express an overt conflict, while those who exclude or include it express a covert conflict (see the chart below).

The two groups of overt conflict express a direct and pronounced argument for or against NAM, an explicit ideological position, and are mostly aware of the conflict. In contrast, the two secondary groups, of covert and indirect conflict, express a pragmatic position that is a practical realization of the ideology. They seemingly act on the basis of a given discourse (of exclusion or inclusion of NAM), without being aware of the existing conflict and the ideology latent in their choice. Their academic work reproduces the ideology, and thus take passive part in the conflict.

Beyond these divisions, we wish to characterize the criteria and values that underlie the academic position, i.e., the arguments and reasons for opposition or support. This content addresses the researcher’s choice, and uncovers her predisposition. Thus, the following remarks relate to studies that contain a direct struggle, and which explicitly raise criteria as part of this conflict.

In striving to endorse or nullify NAM, its researchers indicate different scientific evaluation criteria such as eclecticism or

	<b>Supporters of NAM</b>	<b>Opponents of NAM</b>
<b>Overt/ direct conflict</b>	<i>Ideological argument</i> (Mostly aware of the conflict/ideology)	
	Approval, even admiration	Principle negation
<b>Covert/ indirect conflict</b>	<i>Pragmatic position</i> (Sometimes not aware)	
	Inclusion	Exclusion

authenticity that are supposed to decide NAM's quality and status. Since the criteria are value charged, it is significant to inspect them when analyzing the academic polemic. Some criteria are accepted by all researchers, while others are identified with a certain group. For instance, it is agreed that NAM is eclectic, except that some see eclecticism as a blessing while others expect a genre to be coherent. In the case of historical authenticity—the mere criterion indicates an opposition to NAM. Thus, the controversy over the music's quality does not necessarily lie in disputed facts, but in the evaluation of those facts.

We would suggest sorting the values and criteria into two groups, one of them expressing a modernist paradigm and the other expressing a postmodernist paradigm (Butler 2010; Jameson 1991; Lyotard 1984; Pericles 2007).<sup>14</sup> While the opponents of NAM, who are the majority, write in a modernist style, its supporters use a postmodernist one.

Both paradigms—modernist and postmodernist—are actually the framework within which the debate around NAM takes place. Each of the paradigms relates differently to musical tradition, to aesthetics, and to science. Each of them upholds different values and therefore raises different criteria for evaluation, while imputing varying importance to each of them. Needless to say, this dynamic—which actually determines the research's conclusions as to NAM—occurs behind the scenes. It is not present in the text, and may even be derived from values of which the writers themselves are not aware.

According to the modernist paradigm, a musical genre is perceived as coherent,

distinct from other styles and possessing clear boundaries, and the quality of the music is measured by a clear hierarchy. Ideal music is perceived as high-quality and intellectual, therefore understandable by the elite, as opposed to inferior music consumed by the masses, and concurs with a scientific approach. Its presence is at the center of the listener's attention, as opposed to ambient music, which is played in the background and is on the periphery of one's attention.<sup>15</sup> "High-quality" music is unique, and it does not try to imitate other musical works; its stylistic and cultural affiliation is clear, and there is clarity as concerns its composer. There is mutual feedback between appreciation for the producer of the music and for her products, with emphasis on the product, according to the quality with which the producer is esteemed. "Pure" music is a product of mere artistic expression, as opposed to functional music, which has underlying non-artistic intents.

The postmodernist paradigm upholds different values than those noted above. Whereas the modernist seeks authenticity, the postmodernist denies the possibility of attaining it. In lieu of modernist research that tracks historical sources in the past, the postmodernist prefers to focus on the cultural context at present. Whereas the modernist would laud the stylistic coherence derived from defined boundaries, the postmodernist would praise the eclecticism of the sources and the stylistic diversity. Instead of the quality of the music, the postmodernist would seek its utility. Instead of focusing on composers and compositions or "depth" and "authenticity," the postmodernist would focus on consumers and on the

composition's effect on them; "surface" and "death of the composer." Instead of dealing with philosophical questions, the postmodernist prefers to focus on social and utilitarian (e.g. therapeutic) questions. Intellectualism is substituted, for the postmodernist, by an accent on emotion and experience.

An interesting case that exemplifies the paradigm's power is a negating research study (Summer 1996) that deals with music therapy. While one might expect a discussion on therapeutic utility (a typical postmodern criterion), in actuality the authors deal with questions of authenticity and scientific truth, which stem from their modernist paradigm.

Even when opponents of NAM present its positive sides, these are also derived from judgment according to modernist criteria. For example, Prendergast, an opponent of NAM, who describes it as inferior in quality, gives it credit for advancing minimalist music of "genuine quality," i.e., he attributes positive value to it in accordance with modernist criteria, which distinguish between qualities that are "genuine" and "false" (Prendergast 2000, 144). All in all, the opposition can be summed up as concentrated on the claim that NAM does not measure up to modernist criteria.

It would serve the discussion to add the conceptualization that distinguishes between an etic and an emic discourse (Headland, Pike, and Harris 1990). In Anthropology, an etical discourse includes the scientific terminology and categories stemming from the researchers' view (e.g. the term "inconsistent" or "agency"), whereas an emic discourse stands for the language of the adherents/believers being studied (e.g. "flow", "sacred"). The

etical terms chosen are crucial in dictating the research's outcome, since an etical term that is too distant or different from the emic discourse might portray the research object as negative, incoherent, irrational, and unworthy. On the other hand, etic categories that too closely echo the emic discourse might lead to an apologetic non-critical research that lacks fertile and significant insights.

Therefore, the end of the studies is determined at their beginning. Since all researchers would agree that NAM is a postmodernist phenomenon, the salient unsuitability between the conservative etic discourse of the modernist paradigm and their research object, necessarily leads to the conclusion that it is an unworthy phenomenon. On the other hand, postmodernist researchers find NAM to be a true manifestation of the paradigm they hold, since their etic discourse is inspired by the emic discourse of postmodern phenomena, and in a no less predictable manner they view it favorably.

Actually, each researcher puts together some putative facts into a narrative, using different etic categories that reflect her values. Some issues that are shared by all the researchers—such as the eclecticism and widespread distribution of NAM—are understood by modernist researchers (e.g. Zrzavy 1990) as incoherency that prevents the music from being recognized as a real genre, and thus appealing only to the laity. The parallel postmodernist account (e.g. Hall D. 1994) of the music portrays it as hybrid, subversively blurring boundaries between genres and classes, and thus a sophisticated mirror of our culture, which rightfully appeals to the masses.

The proximity between New Age phenomena and postmodernism is not confined to the music, as has been noted by several researchers. Among the common values of New Age and postmodernism, one could mention criticism of Western rationalism, an emphasis on experiential epistemology, a preference for utility over truth and the blurring of boundaries (see, for example, Huss 2007; Lyon 1993). An example of the proximity between New Age and postmodernism might be found in a central research study of the field describing New Age adherents as

a manifestation par excellence of postmodern consumer society, the members of which use, recycle, combine and adapt existing religious ideas and practices as they see fit (Hanegraaff 2002, 249-250).

The characteristics of New Age culture mentioned in this citation (e.g., eclecticism, the costumer's/adherent's empowerment) were reiterated in academic descriptions of NAM.

In summation, the cultural and value-related distance between researchers of NAM and the object of their studies produces predictable results for their research. Bourdieu taught that controversies in the social court are in fact struggles about the rules of the game, including the conditions for being allowed entry into the court, acceptance of presumptions upon entry and so forth. Likewise, one can see the conflict between the two paradigms in the field of NAM research as a struggle, that seeks to conquer the cultural arena by means of an attempt to determine the principles of the game, by deciding between modernist and postmodernist discourse (Bourdieu 1995, 7274).

### **Epilogue: Dynamics of the Cultural Struggle in New Age Music Research**

Music is not just about sounds. It is a political act. Composition and marketing, broadcasting and consumption, exclusion and silencing, disapproval and approval—these actions in the artistic field are culturally, morally, and socially charged. The academic discourse about music, we claim, is part of a cultural polemic of this sort. Moreover, the research of NAM contributes to the identification and understanding of cultural ideas that make their way to the mainstream.

The academic discourse about NAM started with an unusual article by Garneau, in 1987, which did not have the nature of a debate, and which suggested examining the characteristics of the phenomenon in light of its widespread cultural context, i.e., learning about the system of beliefs growing in Western society through the new music being created in the New Age arena. The ongoing academic discourse on this subject, did not follow the trail blazed by Garneau. It seems to us that the ongoing controversy in the academic arena has reached a point of exhaustion (similar to the one portrayed by Zablocki and Robbins 2001), at which it is worthwhile to go back and examine Garneau's suggestion, and proceed from there toward a constructive way of dealing with the field of NAM beyond a discussion of good or bad.

Concomitantly after the publication of Garneau's article, an academic debate was embarked upon in two double stages (see fig. 3). The first stage was ideological, and it started with overt opposition, which began with three research studies in the years 1988–1990: Berman, Zrzavy,

and Aidan, and soon afterwards there appeared support and defense in two studies in 1994: Hall D., and Hall S.G., followed by more opposing voices in four research endeavors, conducted between 1996 and 2004. In the second stage, the conflict was translated onto a pragmatic plane, in research studies done by those who excluded it, beginning with studies published since 2000, and those who included it after an exceptional predecessor in 1991. Four appeared in the years 2003–2004, and one in 2010, which accompanied the ideological conflict as a back end conflict, with a sense of not being completely aware of being part of a battleground. Consequently, whereas the first stage was overt and ideological, the second was covert and practical, and, whereas opposition appeared first in every stage, defense appeared afterwards. It might be the risk in taking NAM's side in a hostile professional arena that brought fewer researchers to take the supporters' side

Ostensibly, this progression creates an impression of rationalism, a progression that advances in accordance with the Western scientific ethos—from premise to conclusion, from finding to finding, from claim to claim. However, in actuality, we

have seen that a sincere internal dialogue between the different studies has never taken place. The research studies do not only disregard Garneau's suggestion but avoid reliance on conclusions or findings of others. There is no real attempt to convince or to be convinced, to reject claims or to test them. Mention of previous research on the topic of NAM in the studies reviewed is minimal and marginal. Every researcher presents an ideological position based on her own criteria, or implements her taken-for-granted internalized stance. There is at no stage any reflection on the basic assumptions.

We found, that when the academic discourse expresses values, it is motivated by ideological presumptions, and when it does not express them, it is motivated by habits and fashions. Neither of them constitutes rational consideration, but these are the actual generators of the dynamic of the polemic.

Even though the researchers are not conducting a dialogue among themselves, they raise similar questions, such as the extent of NAM's coherence as proof of its quality. These questions, one might guess, are derived from the lively public discourse surrounding NAM.

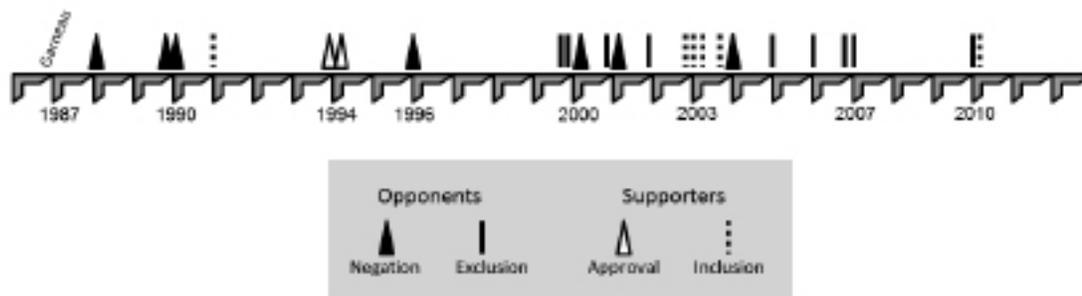


Fig. 3: The chronological course of research of New Age Music

This indicates how much the academic discourse is nourished by public discourse and its prevalent fashions, more, in fact, than it is nourished by internal, analytical causality. We are thus apprised of the permeability of the academic realm. It is neither an isolated and autonomous field, as purported to be, nor coherent and continual.

In this study we have dealt with the dynamic of a cultural struggle as it is reflected in the academic arena. Dealing with a controversial research object facilitates characterizing the course of the academic debate. It enabled us to examine academia's isolation from the other cultural arenas versus its penetrability by cultural fashions, and its rationality (in accordance with the Western scientific ethos) versus motives and ideologies that affect its current. The penetrability of the academic sphere by cultural fashions, one might ponder, increases the likelihood that as the postmodernist discourse advances, so shall the research of NAM flourish.

#### Notes

1 Acknowledgement: This paper was supported by Zefat Academic College and Netanya Academic College.

2 Cultural criticism is actually not just a separate research circle, but a research approach that influences and penetrates other circles in the illustration. For the sake of simplicity, the categories are presented in the illustration in an inaccurate way, as noted.

3 It is interesting to note that the sub-categories of the New Age genre are occasionally displayed without being identified as New Age but as independent genres, such as mere "World music."

4 [www.allmusic.com/genres](http://www.allmusic.com/genres). (All the links in this paper, and their data, were accessed on 18/02/2013).

5 [www.allmusic.com/genre/new-age-ma0000002745](http://www.allmusic.com/genre/new-age-ma0000002745).

6 [www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb\\_sb\\_noss?url=search-alias%3Dpopular&field-keywords=](http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_noss?url=search-alias%3Dpopular&field-keywords=).

7 [www.billboard.com/charts#/charts](http://www.billboard.com/charts#/charts).

8 [www.theonering.net/torwp/2002/03/08/14783-enya-wins-best-selling-female-at-world-music-awards](http://www.theonering.net/torwp/2002/03/08/14783-enya-wins-best-selling-female-at-world-music-awards).

9 [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ervaMPT4Ha0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ervaMPT4Ha0).

10 Research studies that are not part of the academic arena (for example, if they have been published by a publishing company or in a journal that is not academic), are not included in this review. Although they often see themselves as researches (e.g., if the authors have a Ph.D.), they are not actually taking part in the academic discourse, and are not players in this arena. An interesting example might be a manual for healing using NAM, co-authored by a Ph.D. holder, which was not published in an academic press (Watson and Druri 1987). It is also worth mentioning that since research about NAM does not always include this term (as we will explain further in the discussion about the "excluders"), we could not locate all the researches, and the cases brought forward should be seen as representative examples.

11 In very few of the cases, the research discussed presents views in both directions, but we organized the classification according to the weight of the claims that contribute towards the legitimization and the value of the music.

12 We include this book within the academic discourse, because of the style in which it is written as well as because it is used as a source by researchers (for example, St. John 2010, 97).

13 The economic aspect is mentioned in the definition that appears in the Grove Dictionary of Music, too, where it says that

NAM brought a great deal of revenue to the recorded music industry (Schreiner 2001).

14 Even if some researchers maintain both paradigms, ultimately only one paradigm is pronounced.

15 Theodor Adorno is identified with the claim that qualitative and authentic music requires active listening from its target audience, whereas products intended for popular consumption (whether it is popular music or classical music) is designed so that inferior listening is required for them (Adorno 2002, 506, 276).

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## Appendix

A list of the studies included in the paper (according to the order being mentioned)

- Garneau 1987  
*Opponents of New Age Music*
- Negation of the Music
- Berman 1988
- Prendergast 2000
- Zrzavy 1990
- Aidan 1990
- Schreiner 2001
- Bain 2004
- Summer and Summer 1996  
*Exclusion of the Music (only examples)*
- Lynch 2006
- Gouk 2000
- D'Andrea 2007
- St. John 2010
- Arun 2007
- Meadan 2001
- Potter 2000
- Bohlman 2002
- Nidel 2005  
*Supporters of the Music*  
*Approval of the Music*
- Hall D. 1994
- Hall S. G. 1994  
*Inclusion of the Music*
- Colley, North and Hargreaves 2003;  
North, Colley and Hargreaves 2003
- Joyce 2003; Smith and Joyce 2004
- Mead, Cogan and Cox 1991
- Smith and Joyce 2004
- Hibbet 2010

## Sorting Out Donkey Skin (ATU 510B): Toward an Integrative Literal-Symbolic Analysis of Fairy Tales<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

*This article debates the merits of fairy tale interpretive frameworks that privilege the psychological and symbolic, versus those that utilize a literal and feminist orientation. Using ATU 510B as a test case, for its intriguing blend of real-world elements and the fantastic, the author suggests that a synthesis of literal and symbolic theories allows for the fullest understanding of the polyvalent meanings of tale, which is particularly problematic due to its depictions of incest. Drawing examples from canonical as well as contemporary versions of ATU 510B, various psychoanalytic and feminist interpretations of the tale type are put to the test, and ultimately combined to reach a more productive framework.*

ATU 510B, “Peau d’Asne” (also “Donkey Skin” and previously “The Dress of Gold, of Silver, and of Stars [Cap o’ Rushes]”), exists within a rich, international oral tradition and has attracted literary rewriters, from Charles Perrault and the Grimm brothers, to modern American novelists and short story writers. The tale has been problematic for publishers as well as scholars, however, due to its overt references to incest. As Kay Stone observes, ATU 510B rarely appears in collections “since the heroine is forced to leave home to avoid her father’s threats of an incestuous marriage” (1975, 46).

Scholars of this tale type must decide how to interpret the tale’s elements, ranging from those that appear in real life—family relationships, rings, and dresses—to those that are clearly fantastic, like the garments that shine as brightly as celestial bodies. Interpretations of this tale tend to focus either on its manifest or latent content; however, exclusive attention to surface details instead of deeper symbols, or vice versa, restricts the potential meanings of the tale and its possibilities to address a wide range of experiences. The purpose of this inquiry is to illuminate this full range of meaning in ATU 510B and, in doing so, to outline a flexible interpretive methodology that can better account for these multiple interpretive levels.

Classificatory scholarship on ATU 510B tends to focus on its divergences from the related tale type ATU 510A, “Cinderella.” Hans-Jörg Uther’s updated *The Types of International Folktales* describes ATU 510B’s plot generally: a king promises his dying wife that he will marry someone as beautiful as her (or who fulfills another condition), who turns out to be their daughter. The daughter delays the wedding by asking her father for magical garments, often three beautiful dresses and a coat or covering of rough fur or wood. The daughter escapes to another kingdom, works in the castle, and enchants the resident prince in her dresses. She taunts him with her secret identity, retaliation for his rude treatment of her servant persona. Finally, she slips him a token or he uncovers her, and they marry. The versions that Uther lists span the British Isles, Baltic states, Scandinavian countries, Germanic-speaking countries, Romance-language

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countries, Mediterranean countries, East European states, Slavic states, Middle East, some parts of Asia, and European-colonized locations in North and South America.<sup>2</sup>

Christine Goldberg's monograph on ATU 510B gives an outline of the tale's plot that positions the "Unnatural Father" and the "Love Like Salt" episodes as equivalent, for either one can provide the motivation for the daughter to flee and pose as a servant. Goldberg asserts that, because "the Unnatural Father (motif T411) is a character in AT 706, The Maiden without Hands," the incestuous father's presence cannot be used to distinguish ATU 510B from other types (1997, 31). Instead, she argues, "The essence of the Donkey Skin tale—its identifying qualities—are the heroine's disguise and her position as a servant" (1997, 31). Yet the same could be said of ATU 510A, or ATU 923 ("Love Like Salt").<sup>3</sup> Thus the reason for the heroine's flight must inform any consideration of this tale type as distinct from related tales.

As the threat of incest links many variants found under these tale types that chronicle the rise of an innocent persecuted heroine in disguise, an analysis of one should be informed by the others.<sup>4</sup> D. L. Ashliman's analysis and collection of Indo-European incest tales relies on intertextuality to discuss the tales in light of one another. His summary of ATU 510B on his webpage "The Father Who Wanted to Marry His Daughter" is useful, as it does not rely solely on motifs to define the tale, but instead breaks the tale down into plot elements rather like Holbek's moves.<sup>5</sup> Ashliman's comprehensive analysis includes ATU 510B in addition to ATU 706, brother-

sister incest tales, and other tales that are not as easily classified, reminding us that the boundaries between tale types are fluid.

In this paper, however, I primarily limit my analysis to examples of ATU 510B. I utilize some of the well-known texts found in Ashliman's online tale collection, "The Father Who Wanted to Marry His Daughter": Charles Perrault's (French) "Donkeyskin," the Grimms' (German) "All-Kinds of Fur" ("Allerleirauh" in German), Thomas Crane's (Italian) "Fair Maria Wood," and "Broomthrow, Brushthrow, Combthrow" from Austria. Ethnographically-collected texts in my analysis include Laura Gonzenbach's Sicilian "Betta Pilusa" (in Zipes 2004, 52-58), E. T. Kristensen's Danish "Pulleru" (in Holbek 1998, 552-53), Alessandro Falassi's Italian "Donkey Skin" (1980, 42-45), James Taggart's Spanish "Cinderella" (1990, 106-109), and Ibrahim Muhawi and Sharif Kanaana's Palestinian "Sackcloth" (1989, 125-30). Finally, I also draw on recent literary rewrites of the tale: Robin McKinley's *Deerskin* (1993), Jane Yolen's "Allerleirauh" (1995), and Terri Windling's "Donkeyskin" (1995). Though the above-mentioned tales are the only texts I will directly reference, I also make use of Marian Rolfe Cox's 1893 collection of Cinderella-type tales and Anna Birgitta Rooth's 1951 *The Cinderella Cycle*. Here, I take the view that it is more useful to view literary and ethnographic texts on a spectrum than to separate them completely in analysis.<sup>6</sup>

### Interpretive Frameworks

How we interpret fairy tales depends a great deal upon how we conceive of their relationship to reality, and the nature of this

relationship remains contested. Although fairy tales' content may not be precisely mimetic, the scholarly treatments of them have often employed the metaphor of a mirror to describe a wide variety of relationships between these texts and reality. For instance, Stephen Swann Jones (2002) hypothesizes that fairy tales are cultural and psychological mirrors, while Kate Bernheimer's edited book *Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: Women Writers Explore Their Favorite Fairy Tales* (1998) is based on the premise that fairy tales offer people, especially writers, valuable sites of self-reflection. Bengt Holbek, by contrast, observes that it does not appear possible to keep the interpreters out of the interpretation, and hence that "texts are in fact mirrors in which we see our own faces rather than anything else" (1998, 402). Fairy tales do not always serve as simple mirrors, however. As Cristina Bacchilega demonstrates in *Postmodern Fairy Tales*, the mimetic strategies of fairy tales are ideologically motivated, making it crucial to ask not only how the fairy tale is framed, but also who is holding and manipulating that frame. Therefore, it is necessary to ask about cultural context, and to determine when fantasy can be interpreted as mirroring reality or distorting it.

That fairy tales have some connection to reality is undeniable. Vladimir Propp, for instance, notes: "Obviously, the tale is born out of life; however, the wondertale is a weak transcript of reality" (1984, 84). This remark implies that while tales may not be mirror-images of reality, they are still informed by human experience. Similarly, Lutz Röhrich argues that: "Reality underpins even fantasy; not even fantasy is independent of the

social conditions in the narrator's real life" (1991, 192). Holbek goes further in his *Interpretation of Fairy Tales* to claim that fantasy may even be the primary instrument through which social conditions can be discussed, mediated, and escaped (1998). Social context is an important part of folkloristic analysis, but it is not always clear whether this context should privilege internal (relating to the psychology or emotions of characters and narrators) or external reality (historical or actual events). This conundrum creates the divide between symbolic and literal readings of fairy tales.

Often the issue of performing literal or symbolic reading has broken down along the lines of those who see characters as exhibiting human emotions and reactions, and those who see them as flat details or psychological devices in service of a larger narrative. The question of whether characters in fairy tales represent real human beings and can be analyzed as such is subject to great variation. In the assorted versions of ATU 510B, for instance, we see behavior that ranges from earthy and human to abstract and archetypal.<sup>7</sup> This range is necessarily related to the tension between communal tradition and individual innovation, which is at the heart of folklore performances. Naturally, diverse narrators and audiences will relate to their characters differently, with several levels of projection and empathy. Given this range, it is most productive to view the behavior and humanity of fairy-tale characters on a spectrum, extending from conceptual to concrete.

Since the way in which we see fairy-tale characters—as symbols or humans—carries consequences for how they are

interpreted, this dichotomy of views on the nature of fairy tale characters has given rise to two distinct traditions of interpretation: psychological approaches, which interpret characters conceptually; and literal approaches, which interpret characters as concrete. I shall give an overview of both approaches in the scholarship on ATU 510B before presenting a more subtle synthesis of interpretive methods.<sup>8</sup>

### **Psychological Approaches to the Tale**

Scholars interested in symbolism claim that literal readings of fairy tales are simply not adequate, since the fantastic elements of tales must be accounted for. Symbolic readings of folk narrative can take many forms, of which the psychological approach is but one. However, given the comparative prevalence of psychological approaches in fairy tale studies, I have chosen to foreground these theories in my discussion of symbolic approaches.<sup>9</sup> According to Donald Haase, psychological approaches work on the assumption that “fairy-tale plots and motifs are not representations of socio-historical reality, but symbols of human experience that provide insight into human behavior” (2000, 404). This approach is useful in explicating incredible aspects of tales not found in real life. As Holbek notes: “If the meaning...of the marvelous features in fairy tales cannot be disclosed by a study of their historical origins, some kind of synchronic approach to interpretations becomes a necessity” (1998, 259).<sup>10</sup>

Psychological approaches to ATU 510B, however, do not always focus on the fantastic elements of the tale. More often, the interpersonal relationships within the tale are the focus of interpretation,

though how they are interpreted often breaks down along Freudian or Jungian lines.<sup>11</sup>

Freudian or psychoanalytic approaches to ATU 510B privilege the Oedipal drama, positing that the fairy tale is told from a child’s point of view. Any projection within the tale is thus on the part of the child protagonist. A few examples from related tale types will illustrate this tendency. Dundes, Holbek, and Bruno Bettelheim all focus on explaining the incestuous father-daughter relationship from the daughter’s perspective. Dundes begins his study of ATU 706, “The Maiden without Hands,” with a discussion of the Electra complex, relating a comment by early psychoanalyst Riklin on tales where fathers want to marry their daughters: “the initial death of the mother (queen) reflected wishful thinking on the part of adolescent girls who, in terms of the Electral complex, wanted to replace their mothers vis-à-vis their fathers” (1989, 138). From this view, the cycle of father-daughter incest tales is not actually about real-life incest, but rather the daughter’s desire for her father, disguised and embedded within the tale’s plot. Other Freudians arrive at similar conclusions. Bettelheim states that Cinderella’s “degradation—often without any stepmother and (step)sisters being part of the story—is the consequence of oedipal entanglement of father and daughter” (1975, 245). Ben Rubenstein connects young Cinderella’s “phallic strivings and penis envy” to “the sexual pursuit of the daughter by the father,” whom the daughter desires (1982, 225).

In contrast, Jungian approaches to fairy tales eschew the infantile sexuality hypothesis, focusing instead on

universalized masculine and feminine values. Marie Louise von Franz's approach is typical in that she does not address incest or conditions of power and abuse in real life in her discussion of ATU 706, "The Maiden without Hands." All of the characters in this tale represent inner figures within a psyche, with the father as the destructive animus and the future husband as "a collective dominating positive spirit" (1993, 95). Marion Woodman also views the father-daughter tension as part of a soul's journey. In *Leaving My Father's House: A Journey Toward Conscious Femininity*, she uses the Grimms' version of ATU 510B as an organizing metaphor for every woman's voyage from patriarchal trauma to contact with the eternal feminine.<sup>12</sup> This analysis focuses on collective experiences with individual testimonies woven in. The fairy tale is meaningful only insofar as it expresses the Jungian paradigm of feminine development that Woodman follows.

Holbek surveys Freudian, Jungian, and other psychological approaches to fairy tales, claiming to reject each one owing to his inability to "pronounce any one of them more 'right' than the other" (1998, 319). However, in his own analysis, Holbek resorts to what Vaz da Silva criticizes as "fairly standard Freudian symbolism" which attempts "to reduce all symbolic expressions to emotional impressions" (2000, 7). The tendency for psychological approaches to be reductionistic is one problem with applying them to fairy tales, which are by nature polyvalent. Additionally, most of the psychological theories applied to folklore were created to be used in therapy and not the interpretation of cultures

and texts. So this must also be taken into account. Thus, the origins and uses of psychoanalysis in particular should be questioned before their relevance to fairy tales is unconditionally accepted.

For example, the Electra complex is instrumental to the psychoanalytic interpretation of ATU 510B and kindred tales, and is an especially contested idea. Kilmartin and Dervin point out that, because Freud did not see the developments of males and females as analogous, "the Electra complex and the Oedipus complex should not be represented as parallel" (Kilmartin and Dervin 1997, 269). In fact, they continue, "the Electra complex is actually not much more than a footnote in psychoanalytic history, rejected by the father of the field (Freud) and later ignored by the very person who coined the term (Jung)" (Kilmartin and Dervin 1997, 269). Today, even Freudian scholars such as Alan Dundes have questioned whether the Electra Complex's underlying notion of "penis envy," Freud's idea that a girl would reject maternal identification and desire to be with/like the father, "isn't simply a form of male projection" (1982, 220). Casting the existence of penis envy into doubt thus threatens the legitimacy of the Electra complex, which would invalidate most psychoanalytic interpretations of ATU 510B.

In addition to problems with the terminology associated with psychoanalysis, there are feminist concerns about the validity of psychoanalytic principles. Initially articulating his "seduction hypothesis," which concluded that his female patients actually were telling the truth when they said they had been sexually molested,

Freud later shifted his views, dismissing these claims as fantasies (Warner 1994, 350). This shift has had repercussions for the fields of psychology, therapy, and any discipline that employs Freudian ideas. The authors of "The Emergence of Child Sexual Abuse from the Shadow of Sexism" examine "the attitudes and prejudices that blamed the victim, minimized her experience, and held her accountable" in light of "Freud's legacy... which has pervaded our conception of child sexual abuse for nearly 100 years, informing medical, legal, and psychiatric treatment" (Bayer and Connors 1988, 12). In the evolution of Freud's ideas from the seduction hypothesis to the Oedipus and Electra complexes: "The real experience of sexual abuse, which was the basis for the earlier theory, was turned into a fantasy of longing and seduction in which the child is transformed from a victim of adult power to a willing participant in the sexual fantasy" (Bayer and Connors 1988, 13). It is an interesting twist on wish-fulfillment that Freudian ideas like the Electra complex "reinforce feelings of self-blame on the assumption that children's *feelings* are responsible for the alleged trauma" (Bayer and Connors 1988, 14, italics in original). In the case of ATU 510B, the protagonist's desire for her father's love can be seen as the motivation for the tale's plot, but only if the entire tale is understood as fantasy, not mimesis. That is, any incestuous feelings on the part of the girl toward her father would seek an outlet through a fantasy that exculpates her from responsibility for taboo desires.

Projection and identification present further problems with the psychoanalytic approach to fairy tales. For instance,

Francisco Vaz da Silva asserts that projection cannot be attributed to fairy tale characters at all. Instead, he declares, "there cannot of course be such a thing as projection on the part of a fairy tale character" which means "projection is to be ascribed to narrators identifying with" characters (2000, 5). In Vaz da Silva's view, then, projection can be seen as an artificial construct imposed by narrators upon characters, or worse, as a theoretical frame forced by the interpreter.

Another concern with projection is the difficulty of determining *who* is doing the projecting upon whom. Specifically, the premise that fairy tales are told from a child's perspective raises issues of culpability and authority. Maria Tatar notes that people are drawn to readings of fairy tales that blame children's sexuality for what befalls them "in part out of a desire to avoid facing the 'unpleasant truths' that emerge once we conceded that some of the events staged in fairy-tale fictions can be as real as the fantasies they seem to represent" (1992, xx-xxi). In tales like ATU 510B, where the protagonist is threatened with incest that she supposedly desires from a psychoanalytic view, the incest that is present in the text is thereby dismissed as a subconscious fantasy, not something that might be present in real life. If tales of abuse are not, as psychoanalytic interpreters assume, told from the children's perspective, then they mean something very different about power relations. Jack Zipes claims that fairy tales, along with other folk narrative genres, express an adult perspective on power and the family (1995, 220). That is, they rationalize the self-serving actions of adults, while portraying

the consequences for—not the desires of—children. Interestingly, Otto Rank, a member of Freud's circle in Vienna, viewed father-daughter incest stories as fantasies from the father's perspective (1992), hinting at a more culture-reflective view of the tales' content.

Jungian interpreters have, at times, completely ignored any reality of violence, instead viewing the fairy tale as a journey of the soul, disconnected from any reality of sexual abuse. Woodman, for example, acknowledges that physical incest occurs, but uses ATU 510B to address psychic incest, which she believes is more prevalent and requires women to re-evaluate how they relate to femininity and masculinity—rather than addressing the underlying social and sexual problems of living in patriarchal societies. At their worst, psychological analyses of fairy tales not only ignore realities of abuse, but also rationalize them. For example, Bettelheim's Freudian explication of the protagonist's punishment in ATU 510A, "Cinderella," uses the problematic idea of masochism: "deep down a child who knows that she does want her father to prefer her to her mother feels she deserves to be punished for it—thus her flight or banishment, and degradation to a Cinderella existence" (1989, 246). This mentality can be used to justify violence against children, as in Ben Rubenstein's analysis of his young daughter's behavior in the context of the Cinderella story and psychoanalytic theories of masochism. He writes that his daughter's "unconscious constructed a beating phantasy [sic] arising sharply out of her castrated feelings" (1982, 226). Further: "It was obviously her wish that I would come and beat (attack) her. I had,

many times, been quite impressed by the obviousness of this wish" (1982, 226-27). This interpretation exemplifies many of the problems with psychoanalytic approaches to fairy tales—its dogmatic lens that departs from the text, and its reliance on the ideologically skewed roots of psychoanalysis—in addition to offering a disturbing glimpse of how a fairy tale can be read to justify one's own power by blaming the victim.

### **Literal Approaches to the Tale**

By contrast, scholars such as Jack Zipes reject psychological approaches to fairy tales in favor of highlighting the realities of "child abuse, neglect, and abandonment" in fairy tales (1995, 220). Literal-minded scholars are also aware that psychological interpretations can detract from the sobriety of problems like sexual abuse by transforming them from social crimes into harmless and universal developmental issues. A literal interpretation of ATU 510B highlights the incest motif as reality, not symbol. Though in many versions of ATU 510B the incestuous act is threatened rather than carried out, I consider even the threat of sexual violence to be damaging and thus worthy of discussion.<sup>13</sup> In this light, the magical elements become metaphors for the heroine's experience of abuse, as well as reflections of a patriarchal society that condones such abuse by veiling or ignoring it. Often, literally-oriented scholars draw attention to the problems inherent in viewing the father in the tale as faultless, as psychoanalytic interpretations seem to portray him. Indeed, all motivations—of characters in tales, and of the interpreters themselves—are questioned. As Alice

Miller points out, psychoanalysis has generally had a one-sided view of the parent-child relationship: "The way parents actually feel about their children is brought out very clearly in fairy tales...In psychoanalytic literature, on the other hand, parents' feelings towards their children are hardly ever the subject of research" (1984, 237). Projection and power remain key issues in literal interpretations of ATU 510B, though seen from a different angle than in psychological interpretations.

Two approaches to literal interpretations of fairy tales are the historical and feminist perspectives, which are complementary but with differing assumptions and goals. I characterize as "feminist" those approaches that not only focus on women's perspectives, but also actively theorize the connections between gender, sexuality, society, and power.<sup>14</sup> Some of the historical approaches to incest tales border on myth-ritualism in their attempts to elucidate the inclusion of incest in folklore; Dundes characterizes these approaches as attempting to explain away the "monstrous" incest motif with rationalizations that reach far back into ancient times (1989, 136-37).<sup>15</sup> In Holbek's methodological remarks on socio-historical approaches to fairy tales, he concludes that all the sources he surveyed "pointed to a connection between the contents of the tales and the living conditions of the narrators" (1998, 400).<sup>16</sup>

Helen Pilinovsky deals with the literal possibility of incest in her essay "Donkeyskin, Deerskin, Allerleirauh: The Reality of the Fairy Tale," in which she traces recent literary transformations of ATU 510B as well as the symbolism

found within oral tradition. Pilinovsky focuses on the tale's potential to convey the heroine's positive responses to danger: "Although the princess in each version of tale type 510B does face the possibility of sexual abuse, she is portrayed as being able to avoid it through a combination of unlikely luck...and unrealistically achieved accomplishments" (2001). Pilinovsky does not take into account psychoanalytic scholarship, dismissing the possibility that the heroine desires her father's attention by stating that abuse is never the victim's fault. She rejects psychoanalytic theory on the basis of its "number of problematic qualities," only acknowledging "examples in the genre of the fairy tale have been said to serve a therapeutic psychological function" (2001).

Literal approaches tend to follow the culture-reflector theory of folklore, which, in the case of ATU 510B, would state that the manifest details of the tale reveal something about the culture in which it is told. D. L. Ashliman, in his essay "Incest in Indo-European Folktales," refers to the cultural context which sustains the plot of ATU 510B: "Reflecting the patriarchal values of the society that used them, these folktales seldom challenge a father's authority to do with the members of his household whatever he pleases" (1997). This is congruent with the context-sensitive approach that Ibrahim Muhawi and Sharif Kanaana use in their study of Palestinian-Arab folktales, which include a variant of ATU 510B, "Sackcloth." Muhawi and Kanaana interpret the heroine's plight thus: "the sexual awareness begins even before the girl leaves home, producing feelings of confusion, shame, and guilt, especially

since she seems to arouse a most unnatural passion in her father. Hence her desire to cover her body completely, so as to appear to be not only of the opposite sex but also a horrible freak whom no one would want to touch" (1989, 145).

Some literally-oriented scholars incorporate psychological approaches, even while acknowledging skepticism toward the power structures contained within. Ashliman states, "folktales dealing with father-daughter incest often reflect a psychological projection of unresolved Oedipal issues" (1997). Further, "the description of the fleeing daughter's 'rescue' gives further credence to a psychological projection interpretation of type 510B tales" because "the man who discovers and ultimately marries the runaway princess closely resembles the girl's own father. He too is a king, exerting despotic, patriarchal authority over his household" (1997). Ashliman also examines the rhetorical devices that transfer culpability from the father or obscure his role in the incest. Examples include the promise extracted by the king's dying wife to remarry under certain conditions, or the daughter's initiative in trying on her mother's ring (or shoe in some versions).

Literal interpretations convincingly highlight power imbalances within patriarchal family structures, but they do not account for all of the tale's features. Forcing certain details that appear in any one version of the tale to conform to a case study of incest is difficult at best. Isolated aspects make sense, but others are too marvelous or too unique to fairy-tale structure to be interpreted in a realistic light. For instance, why would a tale depicting the trauma resulting from

incest seek to exculpate the perpetrator, and not punish him as so many female villains are cruelly punished in other tales?

### Synthesis

Claude Lévi-Strauss famously criticized attempts to artificially splice together psychological and literal explanations of folklore. In these attempts, Lévi-Strauss points out, a piece of narrative data is either made to fit a society directly—"mythology reflects the social structure and social relations"—or if the data does not directly fit the society, made to fit indirectly: "should the data be conflicting, it would be readily claimed that the purpose of mythology is to provide an outlet for repressed feelings" (1965, 83). This dichotomy, which Lévi-Strauss portrays as a way for scholars to map their theories to their data, may not actually be an irreconcilable opposition. Rather, it is possible to view psychological and literal explanations as opposite yet complementary, just as there are many levels of meaning that coexist within fairy tale texts.

While certain studies have been critiqued for placing too much weight on either the manifest or the latent content of incest fairy tale texts,<sup>17</sup> some folklorists have already begun to show how it is possible to integrate literal and symbolic approaches to father-daughter incest tales. Below, I shall argue why this strategy is essential. As Tatar notes, "to see a daughter as wholly detached from the drama of her father's desire is just as absurd as labeling her 'guilty of the original incestuous thought' when it is the father who makes the advances" (1992, 126). In fact, Tatar and Ashliman

both incorporate psychoanalytic theory to describe some reasons for the appeal of these tales. Tatar explores the characters of the seductive daughter and the collusive mother, who have emerged in folktales and literature, predating psychoanalytic theory (1992, 130). This observation parallels Dundes's argument that the "folk" have been using Freudian symbolism long before Freud put a name to it (2007, 319-320). Ashliman agrees that "projective inversion...has contributed to the broad dissemination of the folktales dealing with father-daughter incest" (1997). Though he agrees that these tales can "provide positive emotional responses to diverse problems" and "could indeed bring psychological comfort to a young woman troubled by unresolved Oedipal issues," he does "not want such a reading to deflect attention from the principal source (in [his] opinion) of the tales' popularity and longevity: their depiction of problems ensuing from the sexual abuse of a child" (1997). Marina Warner's common-sense observation seems to cover all the aspects of an interpretation of the tale: "the 'Donkeyskin' type of story yields a common insight into minds and experiences of young women growing up, and into erotic fantasies on both sides, the father's and the daughter's, conscious as well as unconscious" (1994, 350).

Context is key in determining how to evaluate the usefulness of an approach to interpreting a fairy tale. For instance, although feminists are justifiably wary of psychoanalysis, as mired as it is in sexism, Juliet Mitchell notes in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*:

A rejection of psychoanalysis and Freud's works is fatal for

feminism. However it may have been used, psychoanalysis is not a recommendation *for* a patriarchal society, but an analysis *of* one. If we are interested in understanding and challenging the oppression of women, we cannot afford to neglect it (1974, xv, italics in original).

Thus, if the Electra complex is at all present in ATU 510B, it is helpful as a descriptive, not prescriptive, model. Other feminists have critically employed psychoanalytic concepts in order to explain the sexist phenomena they observe in society. Gayle Rubin modifies Lévi-Strauss's kinship theories to argue that the essence of kinship systems lies in an exchange of women among men. Rubin's theory, along with Judith Butler's writings about the performativity of gender, pairs psychoanalytic insights (like Freud's work) with structuralism (like Lévi-Strauss) to reach a feminist scholarly synthesis<sup>18</sup>.

Psychological approaches to fairy tales do in fact have a subtle contribution to make to literal-minded scholars of fairy tales. Psychoanalysis, like analytic psychology, presents itself as revealing universal truths—about subconscious drives in the former case, and ties to archetypes and the collective unconscious in the latter, each of which is translated into symbols that ostensibly populate fairy tales. Both systems suffer from a lack of cultural context, but then, each of these systems reveals something about the worldviews of its adherents. If psychoanalysis is a patriarchal and sexist system of thought, and if its content can illuminate fairy tales, then these connections will indicate something about patriarchal values in and around

fairy-tale contexts.

In contrast, one of the downsides to literally interpreting fairy tales is that it ties them very closely to their particular cultural contexts, making it difficult to extract theoretical statements that can be generalized to other conditions. Viewing fairy tales within the context of transmission is useful to a point, and this is when the scholar must step in to try on different exoteric theories. Remaining close to the text by prioritizing the manifest details of the tale, though, prevents the interpretation from straying too far into abstraction (or wrong-headedness). It is crucial to integrate symbolic and literal approaches to fairy tales in order to ensure that an interpretation is not one-sided. And perhaps surprisingly, psychological and literal interpretations of ATU 510B do converge very neatly.

### Converging Interpretations

Tatar persuasively suggests that not only narrators, but also audiences and readers, of tales are drawn to privilege certain readings of tales over others, according to where they would like to assign blame and agency (1992, xx). This matters because, among other things, fairy tales offer models for how to interpret beliefs and actions in the real world. The history of interpreting “Bluebeard” as a tale chastising curious women—rather than chastising serial killer husbands!—set against a background of domestic assault in the West is a prime example of the relevance of fairy tale logic in the real world (see Bacchilega 1997, 104-112). The “folk” as well as interpreters of folklore utilize multiple strategies for identifying and assigning blame and agency within the tales. These strategies include the

instrumentalization and conflation of tale roles, as well as the constellation of symbols involving the heroine’s skin covering.

From a structural perspective, the father in ATU 510B serves as a catalyst for the heroine’s flight, and also a hostile donor figure to the heroine (Holbek 1998, 417). Vaz da Silva points out that the father usually gives the gifts as a result of the promise made to the mother, and sometimes the heroine takes items belonging to her deceased mother (2002, 217 n. 3). The mother’s role in motivating the incestuous intent that occurs after her death can be read in a number of ways. Ashliman notes that the technique of shifting the blame from the incestuous father to the dying mother often appears in conjunction with an episode in which the daughter tries on her deceased mother’s shoes, clothes, or ring, thus seeming to invite engagement from her father. Amelia Rutledge suggests in her reading of the novelization of ATU 510B, *Deerskin*: “The promise to the wife can be read as an attempt to mitigate paternal culpability by suggesting his misguided fidelity; the promise also aligns both parents against the daughter” (2001, 175).

Though absent, the mother can mean many things in tales of father-daughter incest, and she continues to exert a large influence over not only the story’s plot, but also the interpretations thereof. Alan Dundes interprets the absence of the mother in 510B-type tales as a case of wish fulfillment for the girl who theoretically wants to marry her father, given that the mother is out of the picture at the story’s start (1982, 236). Yet a dead mother could also signify a

girl's conscious feelings of abandonment in an incest situation. As Judith Herman and Lisa Hirschman note in *Father-Daughter Incest*, female incest survivors often feel abandoned by their mothers in their roles as protective adults (1981, 31). Many of these women also reported feeling hostile toward their mothers. This corresponds to the villainization of the mother in ATU 510B which, according to Tatar, results from the dying mother's wishes being used to justify the father's attempted seduction (1992, 128-29). This interpretation works with both psychological and literal approaches: from the daughter's perspective, psychoanalytically, the mother really *is* the villain in the Oedipal drama, or read in light of real-world incest, the mother is the villain in abandoning her child to the sexual predation of the father, or further, providing him with the incentive to sexually pursue his daughter.

Within the tales, however, the mother-daughter relationship is much more complex than villain-victim. Taggart analyzes the version of ATU 510B he collected in Spain by using some psychoanalytic concepts (the Oedipal triangle and the concept of split projections) but he does not simplify his data to make it fit the psychoanalytic model. He states that the (female) narrator's telling

...illustrate[s] that the heroine's entanglement with her father and her emergence from that entanglement come about as a result of her complicated relationship with her mother...On the one hand, the narcissistic and controlling mother instructs her husband to marry only another woman who looks like her and

unwittingly places her daughter in the Oedipal situation. The widowed father follows the wishes of the heroine's mother and proposes marriage to his daughter because she is the only woman who looks like his dead wife . . . On the other hand, the mother, symbolically recast as the female neighbor, helps Cinderella extract herself from her Oedipal entanglement by giving her advice and the pelican suit, by which she escapes her father's incestuous proposal of marriage (1990, 110).

It is interesting that Taggart does not scrutinize the father's role in following the death-bed premise, only portraying him as a pawn of the mother. Among the tales I have selected to analyze, the death-bed promise appears in the majority: Perrault's "Donkey Skin," "Fair Maria Wood," the Grimms' "All Kinds of Fur," "Betta Pilusa," Falassi's "Donkey Skin," "Cinderella," *Deerskin*, Yolen's "Allerleirauh," and Windling's "Donkeyskin." The criteria given for the selection of a new bride include marrying someone who looks like the mother in "Cinderella" (Taggart 1990, 106), someone as beautiful as the mother in *Deerskin* (McKinley 1993, 20), someone as beautiful and with the same golden hair in the Grimms' "All Kinds of Fur" (Ashliman 1998), someone whom the mother's ring fits in "Fair Maria Wood" (Ashliman 1998), and someone whom a ring belonging to the mother fits in Falassi's "Donkey Skin" (1980, 42) as well as in "Betta Pilusa" (Zipes 2004, 52).

With regard to the beauty conditions, it is the father who decides that only his daughter is as or more beautiful than her mother, and thus proposes marriage

to her. These tales give narrative agency to the father, transforming the girl into a victim, whereas in the tales that require fulfillment of a condition, the girl often acts in a way that seems to invite her father's attention, because she is emulating her mother. In "Donkey Skin," the girl tries on her mother's wedding ring and comments: "Look, father, how nice it looks on me...mother's ring" (Falassi 1980, 42). Similarly, in "Betta Pilusa," the girl tries on her mother's ring, but with an unexpected effect: "The ring slid very easily onto her finger, but when she wanted to take it off, she could not manage to do it" (Zipes 2004, 52). The girl becomes frightened, and wraps a piece of cloth around her finger so her father will not see, but he becomes angry and rips the cloth away, then declares his intention to marry her. In this tale, the ring's magical staying power illuminates the flow of desire from two angles: it exculpates a girl who may desire her father and traps a girl who may fear her father's desire. Both dynamics can coexist within an individual's psyche, just as both possibilities exist within the scope of the tale's variations.

In "Fair Maria Wood," the father tries the wedding ring on various women, and then puts the ring on his daughter's finger against her will.<sup>19</sup> Yet this version is anomalous, because she consents to marry him, and the wedding actually takes place prior to the donor sequence, whereas in most versions the heroine obtains gifts from her father and leaves home before they can be wed. Here, the father asks her what she wants on the day of the wedding, and then provides her with four silk dresses and a wooden dress, with which the daughter escapes—

but not until her father is referred to in the text as her husband. This version is unique in hinting that actual incest has occurred, which supports the notion that ATU 510B deals with sexual abuse in addition to psychological development issues. Similarly, in Windling's "Donkeyskin," the father acts on a promise to his deceased wife to marry only a "maid...better than the Queen," who turns out to be their daughter (1995, 298). By juxtaposing the fairy tale and a realistic account of an abused girl, Windling concretizes the issue of incest. A related thing happens in Yolen's "Allerleirauh," wherein the father succeeds in marrying his daughter, leading to a chilling conclusion: "But this is not a fairy tale. This princess is married to her father and, always having wanted his love, does not question the manner of it" (1995, 39). The resolution of this literary version addresses both the actual and the psychological realities of incest, already present in oral tellings of 510B, implying that modern authors detect both levels of meaning and view them as inextricable.

In "Broomthrow, Brushthrow, Combthrow," "Sackcloth," and "Pulleru" the father elects to remarry of his own initiative, without the mother setting conditions. Holbek only provides an abbreviated version of "Pulleru," but in it, after the mother dies, the father "wants to marry another woman like her" and thus proposes to their daughter, who resembles her (Holbek 1998, 552). In "Sackcloth," the father wishes to marry his daughter simply because: "No one seemed more beautiful in his eyes, so the story goes, than his own daughter and he had no wish to marry another" (Muhawi and Kanaana 1989, 125). In this tale, the

father goes so far as to ask his daughter to call him "cousin," which Muhawi and Kanaana explain is a culturally relevant detail because in Palestinian society, endogamy in the form of parallel first cousin marriage is "ideal" for a number of reasons (1989, 16). In "Broomthrow, Brushthrow, Combthrow," the mother and daughter both have golden crosses on their foreheads, and the father decides to only marry a woman with a mark like that. This biological determinism can be read in two ways: the inevitability of the Electra complex in girls who have been socialized in a patriarchal society, or the certainty of a father's right to consider his daughter his property in a patriarchal society.

As Tatar observes, fathers in ATU 510B and related tales are rarely portrayed as evil or punished for their incestuous desires (1992, 131). Considering that the mother in 510B texts has already been punished by death, it is incongruent that so few fathers are even reprimanded. This fits with Tatar's observation that in fairy tales more generally: "Even when they violate basic codes of morality and decency, fathers remain noble figures, who rarely commit premeditated acts of evil" (1987, 151). For instance, in "Fair Maria Wood," the father—on the day of his marriage to his daughter—is named a gentleman for gratifying his daughter's wishes for silk dresses. This positive view of fathers resonates with Herman and Hirschman's data collected from incestuous families: "most of our informants had some fond memories of their fathers. Although they feared their fathers, they also admired their competence and power" (1981, 82). Since incest survivors as well as Electra-phase girls can be reluctant to blame their

fathers for their actions, and due to the frequency with which fairy tales espouse patriarchal values, it makes sense that in these tales, fathers would rarely, if ever, be punished.

When the heroine flees her father's incestuous advances, she often has a helper. In Perrault's "Donkey Skin" as well as Falassi's "Donkey Skin," she has a fairy godmother to help her; in "Pulleru" she gets advice at her dead mother's grave; in Taggart's "Cinderella" she receives advice from a neighbor; and in "Betta Pilusa" she receives advice from her father confessor. These various helper figures all signify different aspects in the meaning(s) of the tale: the fairy godmother and neighbor can assimilate with the mother to represent a maternal figure, whose aim is to prevent incest from occurring (be it out of protectiveness or jealousy). The father confessor can represent an authority higher than the father, which is a direct challenge to the father's rule of the family. This intervention is in the girl's interests, but still locates the tale within a patriarchal frame. "Sackcloth" also features a religious figure, an Islamic *cadi*, whom the father asks in metaphorical terms whether marriage to his daughter is acceptable. The *cadi*'s support of the father's bid to marry his daughter demonstrates the potential complicity of patriarchal authority figures with the familial authority of the father. The girl is her own helper in the following tales: "All Kinds of Fur," "Fair Maria Wood," "Broomthrow, Brushthrow, Combthrow," and "Sackcloth." These tales may represent an optimistic view that the girl is able to move past her Electra desires, or the abuse she either feared or endured, and essentially save herself.

Another point of convergence between psychological and literal interpretations, and one that is manifestly present in many versions of the tale, is the eerie resemblance between the heroine's father and future husband. In the Grimms' version of the tale, there is practically no differentiation of the two men (Ashliman 1998; Tatar 1992, 134; Vaz da Silva 2002, 299). On a symbolic level, Vaz da Silva argues that themes in Iberian versions "reveal continuity between the old man and the young one who replaces the former in marrying the juvenile avatar of the deceased wife" (2002, 103). From a Freudian point of view, this makes perfect sense. In breaking free of her Electra attachments, the heroine seeks a substitute that closely resembles her father. This also tallies with a feminist view of things, as in Gayle Rubin's description of how women are traded among men, in an effort to maintain homosocial alliances without lapsing into homosexuality (1975).

In "Pulleru," the prince hits the heroine with a boot and later a towel, and she then teases him with these details at the dance. The heroine of "Allerleirauh" has to endure daily beatings over the head with the king's boots, which she must pull off for him each night before bed. The abuse is even more severe in "Fair Maria Wood." At first the master of the house merely abuses the heroine verbally, but when she asks for permission to attend the second dance: "He grew angry then, and took a stick and began to beat the poor servant" (Ashliman 1998). As might be guessed from the title of "Broomthrow, Brushthrow, Combthrow," the prince angrily hurls each of these objects at the heroine one day after another, and she teases him by hinting at those objects at the balls.

Details from these versions of ATU 510B support a literal interpretation parallel to the psychoanalytic interpretation. Because the heroine marries her husband regardless of his abusive tendencies, Tatar pessimistically questions "whether this is really a story that charts a course from incest averted to the legitimate fulfillment of desire" (1992, 135). Ashliman laments the cruel exploitation the heroine often encounters in her new home, commenting: "Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of 'All-Kinds-of-Fur' and other tales of this type is the apparent passivity with which the heroines accept the verbal abuse, the physical blows, and the sexual harassment dealt to them by their future husbands" (1997). The transition from an abusive parent to an abusive spouse, repeatedly found in ATU 510B, is reminiscent of a real-life pattern observed by therapists and caseworkers. Herman and Hirschman state based on clinical evidence, that "incestuous abuse has also been frequently associated with a tendency toward repeated victimization in adult life" (1981, 29). Framing every version of ATU 510B as a portrayal of repeated victimization is not necessarily true, however.

In "Betta Pilusa," the heroine suffers no abuse at the hands of her master—in fact, he is kind: "The king went to her every day, brought her delicious bits of food, and conversed with her," and he is the one to invite her to his wedding ball (Zipes 2004, 55). In Taggart's "Cinderella," the heroine does not even come into contact with the king's son until she attends the ball. The initial encounter in Perrault's "Donkey Skin" is one-sided, privileging the male gaze: the prince glimpses the heroine in her lovely dresses by spying

on her humble lodgings. Likewise, in Falassi's "Donkey Skin" and Muhawi and Kanaana's "Sackcloth," the king does not abuse the heroine, but rather is curious about her upon hearing reports of her beauty. It is tempting to speculate, that since women narrated most of these non-abusive versions (barring Perrault's), these narrators were projecting into the tales their ideal concepts of marriage partners—men who are not abusive. These versions make sense in light of Marina Warner's statement that "in the 'Donkeyskin' cycle, [the heroine's] rebellion means she chooses between father and lover, and they do not conspire" (1994, 325). If taken to mean that father and future husband do not conspire to abuse and oppress the heroine, this is an optimistic model for feminine development, for it implies that a girl can mature to the point of moving beyond her (Electral) attachment to her father and thus seek a suitable replacement.

Thus, abuse in the heroine's new home is not a requisite definition for ATU 510B. The spectrum of possibilities in both oral and written versions makes it clear that, for some of the "folk" abuse is an issue that needs to be addressed in some form, while for others, it is not the primary issue in the tale. Regardless, the connection between the father and the husband parallels an oscillating identification of the heroine's two personas in the tale. As Vaz da Silva notes:

The heroine under her hide is, quite literally, an enigma to be unraveled... as she hints, at the balls, that she is the same lowly wretch the prince loathes and mistreats at home...no one can unveil the riddle in her until

her hide falls off. The gist of this theme is, then, that the hidden maiden appears as two separate persons, the final identification of which leads to marriage (2002, 213).

The husband's ability to identify these "two separate persons" is an inversion of the father's inability to recognize his daughter as an unsuitable spouse. While the father tries (and fails) to conflate wife with daughter, the husband succeeds in meshing two personas that are a good match for him: a servant-provider and a woman who conspicuously presents herself as sexually available. What Vaz da Silva's analysis omits, though, are the sexual politics of the heroine's oppression and the fact that rather than "her hide" simply falling off, in varying versions of the tale she is often stripped of her protective covering by force.

The heroine's skin covering is an important part of ATU 510B. One way to approach its meaning(s) is to use Arnold Van Gennep's work on rituals, as a frame for understanding the heroine's donning of the skin as a separation from her world (i.e., a journey to the spirit world) before being reincorporated into a nuclear family structure (1999). As noted earlier, the heroine transitions from living with her father to marrying a man somewhat like him. While she is between the two states of attachment, she exists in a liminal place, which her disguise makes material. Her disguises vary idiosyncratically, but they have central characteristics in common. Margaret Yocom discusses the disguise in a broad international selection of ATU 510B tales, demonstrating how with "the multiple skins of her ambiguous body, she sometimes disgusts but always intrigues those who meet her" (2012, 97).

W. F. Nicolaisen describes instances of naming as linguistic cloaking in versions of ATU 510B:

The female protagonist, while nameless as a princess, bears the name of the rough and unbecoming coat she has to wear as a fugitive from persecution; she consequently has to live out her new coat-given identity by being relegated to do the most menial tasks. One cannot be a princess or beautiful or both when one bears humble or even ugly names such as "Katie Woodencloak," "Donkey Skin," "All-kinds-of-fur," "Cap o' Rushes," "Ruuchklaas," or "Catskin" (1984, 261).

Of the tales in my sample, the following are named for the heroine's disguise: all three contemporary literary transformations ("Allerleirauh," "Donkeyskin," and *Deerskin*), "Betta Pilusa" which translates to "Hairy Bertha" (Zipes 2004, 55); "Sackcloth," both Perrault's and Falassi's "Donkey Skin" versions; the Grimms' "All Kinds of Fur," "Fair Maria Wood," and "Pulleru," which Holbek describes in his summary of the tale thus: "They called her *Pulleru* because she looks *pulleret* (tousled, messed up)" (1998, 552). These names are inflicted upon the heroine along with her servant status. They align her with nature, since many are animal skins or other natural substances, such as wood or barely-processed materials like rough cloth.<sup>20</sup>

That the function of such a disguise might conceal the heroine's sexual shame works equally well in both symbolic and literal interpretations. In a Freudian reading, the girl cannot stand to recognize her unconscious desires, just as in a literal reading the heroine

would be traumatized by the possibility if not the occurrence of incest. Warner illuminates the underlying similarities between the psychological and literal interpretations: "Although [the heroines] have suffered wrong in all innocence in the fairy tales, they accept the taint and enact it on their own persons. Shame and guilt do not prompt different reactions, and in this the victims behave exactly like penitents" (1994, 358). Whether the heroine's actions express shame or guilt, ATU 510B is a tale about surviving certain aspects of childhood and adolescence and maturing, with the mediation of a protective skin covering. If one is inclined to recognize an Electral attachment binding father and daughter, the heroine's flight is necessary once she realizes that her father is not a suitable husband for her. Recognizing that it would be an unhealthy arrangement for her to actually marry her father, the heroine initiates the plot of the tale by withdrawing from her nearly fulfilled wish in order to seek a wholesome alternative. As such, this tale can be interpreted as the necessary stage in childhood development when the girl surmounts her Electral attachment to her father, in order to attach her love to a viable mate. Falassi's reading of "Donkey Skin" supports this interpretation: he links a real-life refusal of incest with the refusal of incest that occurs within the tale, leading to a real-life latency phase, and in the tale to an "intermediate phase" featuring "indeterminate ugliness" (1980, 46). This evaluation lends the tale an inner logic. It describes maturation using symbols that resonate on multiple levels.

Symbolically, the heroine's skin camouflage takes on polyvalent meanings

when interpreted with attention to the heroine's flight. Pilinovsky discusses the implications of the garment, citing the Law of Contagion in connection with the nature of the coat made of "skins, either from a creature magical in itself, or procured through magical means" (2001). Yet where Pilinovsky sees the heroine's disguise as a resource, Ashliman views it as a "grotesque cloak" that reflects the "intense feelings of shame" the heroine experiences (1997). Heroines in ATU 510B sometimes try to conceal all vestiges of their femininity, as in "Sackcloth" wherein the heroine dons "a tight-fitting sackcloth that will cover [her] whole body, except [her] nostrils, mouth, and eyes" (Muhawi and Kanaana 1989, 126). Here, the girl becomes a "strange-looking man" and "some kind of freak," thus losing both her femininity and her humanity (1989, 128, 129). Even when the heroine does not cross-dress, her humanity may be questionable. Tatar states that the "flight into the woods, with its concomitant degradation of the heroine into a creature of nature, remains the lasting mark of the father's attempted incestuous violation" (1992, 133). In contrast, Yocom views the furry disguise as a resource: "She strategically uses asexuality to camouflage her sexual body" (2012, 105). In some cases—like in the Grimms' "All Kinds of Fur" where the king finds her in a tree; in "Sackcloth" where she is discovered eating leftover household scraps; and in "Betta Pilusa" where the king sees her in her gray fur and wants to shoot her—heroines are first discovered in an animal situation. Often, the heroine is forced to live in animal-like conditions, or with animals, as in "All Kinds of Fur" where she sleeps "in

a little stall beneath the steps" (Ashliman 1998); in Falassi's "Donkey Skin" where she tends the king's geese; in Taggart's "Cinderella" where she wears a pelican suit and tends turkeys; in "Betta Pilusa" where she lives in a chicken coop; and in *Deerskin*, where she cares for the prince's hounds. Thus, not only the heroine's disguise, but also how she is treated, reflects her forced association with nature.<sup>21</sup>

In order to re-enter civilized society, the heroine must demonstrate her capacity to conform to patriarchal standards of feminine competence. Sandra Gilbert questions whether the heroine chooses to re-enter society, or whether she "cannot altogether abandon the imperatives her culture has impressed upon her" (1985, 377). In many versions of ATU 510B, the heroine prepares food for the lovesick prince, which serves not only to heal him but also to identify her as his chosen lover. For example, she cooks porridge for the king's son upon his orders in Falassi's "Donkey Skin;" she prepares bread containing recognition tokens in "Betta Pilusa;" a cake containing a ring in Perrault's "Donkey Skin;" a custard containing a ring in "Cinderella;" and soup containing a ring in "Pulleru," "Broomthrow, Brushthrow, Combthrow," "Allerleirauh," and "Fair Maria Wood;" and she serves the king's son his dinner in "Sackcloth," although she drops the tray more than once in order to avoid him in this version. When the heroine cooks or bakes for the prince, this is a functional display of her domestic abilities, as well as a demonstration of her replacement of his mother as the main nurturer in his life (which is an interesting transformation of her father's attempt to force her to replace

her mother, his wife). In some versions, the heroine engages in other clearly “feminine” activities, such as spinning. Thus, she is not only reincorporated into a cultural sphere where she is no longer identified as or with animals, but also valued for her human skills. This valuation may not be immediately apparent, however, due to the manner of the heroine’s uncloaking—sometimes voluntary, sometimes not.

Heroines of ATU 510B are forced from their homes and compelled to rely on the dubious charity of a future husband. The circumstances under which their trials end vary. Goldberg hypothesizes that, over time the heroines in ATU 510B have developed more self-reliance and independence (1997, 41). However, these conditions continue to fluctuate. The heroine in “Sackcloth” displays the initiative to attend a wedding dance, but this version does not contain the recognition token motif, and instead the heroine must be ordered to serve the king’s son food. However, even in versions where the heroine attends parties and ventures as far as teasing the prince with hints of her identity, the extent of her initiative is difficult to determine. Ashliman makes a convincing case for the traumatized behavior of the heroine, demonstrating that she is not yet capable of recognizing and securing a suitable partner for herself (1997). He sees the heroine’s teasing of the prince as “psychotic behavior,” which is “perfectly believable for one who has just been sexually threatened by the man who should have been her closest and most powerful protector, her own father” (1997). This “psychotic behavior” corresponds to Herman and Hirschman’s

list of symptoms found in female incest survivors: “guilt, shame, feelings of inferiority and low self-esteem, anxiety, imitative ritualized sexual behavior, hostile or aggressive behavior, and school problems” (1981, 30). The heroine’s inferior social status while she is a servant, and her compulsorily repeated trips to the dances, could well fit this description.

When her future husband finally figures out his beloved’s identity, often it is he who must bring her out into the open. Holbek notes that persecuted heroines in tales must “suffer in patience” to be “*discovered* by their princes, in some cases quite literally dis-covered...*Pulleru* is stripped of her rags” (1998, 584, italics in original). The same thing occurs in the Grimms’ 1812 version of “All Kinds of Fur,” when the disguised heroine is summoned by the king: “she tried to make an excuse and then run away, but as she ran by, the king noticed a white finger on her hand, and he held her fast. He found the ring that had slipped into her finger, and then he ripped off her fur coat” (Ashliman 1998). The heroine resists having her identity revealed, and the act occurs in an almost violent struggle, which she loses. In Falassi’s “Donkey Skin,” the king’s son threatens the heroine if she does not comply with his wishes, and removes her donkey skin so “whether she wanted to or not,” she agrees and takes it off (1980, 44). Similarly, in “Betta Pilusa,” the king she serves threatens to cut off her head unless she reveals her identity to him—yet she then actively throws off the cat skin she wears (Zipes 2004, 58). These stratagems are not empowering for the heroine; she is stripped of the comforting

anonymity of her disguise, and forced to confront her fears of human contact that her overzealous father instilled in her. The inherent variability of oral tradition, however, also supplies the occasional empowering alternative: in Taggart's "Cinderella," the heroine asks for a few minutes to comb her hair and get dressed, and is granted these small kindnesses. In "Sackcloth," Muhawi and Kanaana explain the heroine's dancing in public as "a declaration of her new awareness, her readiness to accept a mate" now that she is more secure in her identity (1989, 145). However, the heroine is finally revealed to the king's son only once the prince pulls out a knife in order to disrobe her (1989, 130). This example—empowerment coexisting with coercion—demonstrates the difficulty of extricating these themes from each other in the tale as a whole.

The tale's outcome offers a final view of converging interpretations of ATU 510B. The heroine's dark past does not get much in the way of resolution; like the dirty animal skin she discards after being discovered, the incest is rarely mentioned again at the denouement. Only in two versions—"Broomthrow, Brushthrow, Combthrow" and Falassi's "Donkey Skin"—is it said that the heroine is able to reveal her father's incestuous advances. In the former, when the prince recognizes her, "she now [has] to tell him her life story," which does not sound entirely voluntary (Ashliman 1998). In the latter, the heroine serves her father salt-less food at her wedding, and when he complains, she publicly announces: "It has no taste, just as the man who wants to marry his daughter has no taste" (1980, 45). These declarations, and related

confrontations with the father, are few, as can be seen in Cox's plot summaries of 510B tales (1893, 53-79). The fact that so few daughters confront their fathers with their crimes is an indication of the power structures within these societies, as well as the effects of victimization. As Herman and Hirschman point out: "Most incest victims both long and fear to reveal their secret" (1981, 129). Just as likely is the possibility that such Electra wishes on the daughter's part have been repressed, then overcome, hence there is no need (and certainly no desire) to bring them up again.

### Conclusion

I share Michèle Simonsen's skepticism about whether it is possible to *interpret* fairy tales, in the sense of decoding some secret meaning, or rather to simply *understand* them in a given context (1985). Because fairy tales contain both literal and fantastic elements, we must employ more than one interpretive frame in order to access both surface and symbolic meanings. ATU 510B, in particular, is a problematic case due to the portrait of incest and power structures it depicts, a picture all too easy to ignore by switching one's focus to the "hidden" meaning of the tale. There is only so much "hidden" in this tale, however. As Elizabeth Marshall explains: "The daughter rather than the father bears the cultural punishment that highlights the danger inherent in forbidden sexual contacts" (2004, 409). In other words, it is significant that tale contains the message that the *daughter* is the one punished for the sexual transgression. Marshall points out that the tale's message is more than the sum of its parts; there are messages

not only about incest and family relations, but also about how society codes, condones, and communicates about these topics. Read in this light, the tale “suggests that the danger inherent in father-daughter incest is not the act itself, but in potentially knowing and telling about it” (2004, 410).

Contemplating the layers of meaning in this tale is a bit like peeling back the layers of the heroine’s skin to uncover who she is and what she means. The heroine’s father decides to marry her, often because of a characteristic close to her biological skin: a golden star or cross on her forehead, golden hair, the way a dress or ring or shoe molds itself to her body. The heroine’s skin, therefore, is part of her sexual and social identity, inevitably desired by her father, which causes her to hide herself under layers that obscure this new, maturing identity. In Yocom’s analysis, “the beautiful gowns of the heroine are just as much a disguise as her ashy rags or her rough-fur pelt” (2012, 93). The multiple skins she wears reinforce the idea that “gender is an ‘act’” (Butler 1999 [1990], 187), that she dons femininity and animality as the situation demands.<sup>22</sup> Whether she enters a period of latent sexuality or traumatized anxiety, the heroine’s triple skins—her own skin, the dresses, and the disguise—become a chain of symbols through which tale-tellers, collectors, editors, and writers can express their views on feminine development in patriarchal societies. Just as the heroine’s beautiful apparel conceals her possibly bruised and scarred skin, so the interpretations of ATU 510B that exonerate the father, veil a potentially ugly reality.

The physical and sexual abuse (often incestuous) of children continues today, as do retellings of ATU 510B, though these are not usually aimed at children in Western society. The fact that retellings of 510B are not as popular as those of 510A leads some scholars to the misconception that incest is simply no longer a relevant topic: “During the evolution of the story, the motif of the ‘unnatural father’ gradually vanishes, and the relation with the cruel stepmother and stepsisters is foregrounded” (Mei 1995, 5). Tatar, on the other hand, recognizes that while incest may have vanished from the manifest layer of many retellings of tales in the 510 cycle, the latent contents remain both comprehensible and necessary:

In depicting erotic persecution of a daughter by her father . . . mothers and stepdaughters tend to vanish from the central arena of action. Yet the father’s desire for his daughter in the second tale type furnishes a powerful motive for a stepmother’s jealous rages and unnatural deeds in the first tale type. The two plots thereby conveniently dovetail to produce an intrigue that corresponds almost perfectly to the Oedipal fantasies of female children. In this way fairy tales are able to stage the Oedipal drama even as they disguise it by eliminating one of its two essential components (1987, 150).

Yet Tatar’s methodology is also valuable in that it does not immediately reject psychological concepts, but rather integrates them into an analysis that is keenly aware of power structures.

As this survey of material establishes, it is both impossible and unwise to wholly accept or reject either the psychological or literal methods of interpretation. The most comprehensive and rewarding

approach is to compromise and to attempt to integrate these perspectives, using them to illuminate one another and, most importantly, the tale in question. As I believe I have shown, interpretations of tales can and should converge. This method ensures that no single approach is allowed to dominate the tale's interpretation, and that fairy tales act less as mirrors for the interpreter's biases than as texts that can be understood within various contexts. Meaning, like all cultural performance, is always embedded, and should be studied in ways that allow for the most nuanced expressions of human experiences, whether they be actual, symbolic, or something in between.

### Notes

1 I would like to thank the editors and reviewers at *Cultural Analysis* for their insightful commentary and guidance in clarifying my arguments. This article also owes much to Pravina Shukla, Sandra Dolby, and Henry Glassie for their support while I transformed my research into a suitable master's thesis project at Indiana University. I am grateful to my colleagues, friends, and family members who have listened to me talk (perhaps too much) about my ideas on this topic. Finally, I owe a lasting debt to Alan Dundes, who first inspired me to research the possible convergence between psychological and feminist approaches to ATU 510B, when I came to his office hours to argue about his lecture on incest in fairy tales and he said, "Well, write a paper on it!"

2 It is interesting that Uther notes: "This form of the incest motif (the king wants to marry his daughter after the death of his wife) is

often documented independently since the 12th century" (2004, 295). Other scholars, such as Christine Goldberg, downplay the incest motif in favor of other defining characteristics.

3 Goldberg's historical analysis of multiple versions of ATU 510B leads her to some interesting conclusions about women's agency, claiming that the motifs of hiding boxes and spying scenes in earlier versions of ATU 510B gave way to plot mechanisms in which "the heroine achieves a considerable degree of self-determination" (1997, 41).

4 The fact that incest is mentioned in more than one tale type does not invalidate its presence as a key motif in the definition of ATU 510B. One reason that the father-daughter incest does not blur the lines between ATU 510B and ATU 706 is that the maiden without hands leaves home under different circumstances—not only after suffering mutilation, but without the magical garb, disguise, and/or transportation that the incestuous father, tricked into serving as a donor figure, usually provides. Similarly, in ATU 923, the donor sequence is missing, and the heroine must win the prince under a different set of circumstances from the dances and visits typical of ATU 510B. Thus, motifs must be examined within the contexts they appear.

5 Moves are discussed in Holbek 1998.

Ashliman's plot formula for ATU 510B is:

1. A dying woman extracts from her husband the promise that he will remarry only if he can find a woman that fits a certain description.
2. After a period of mourning, the widower discovers that only his daughter meets the requirements for

remarriage set by his deceased wife, and he asks her to marry him.

3. The daughter, in order to buy time, and in hope of dissuading her father, asks for a number of gifts, but he finds these with little difficulty.

4. Seeing no other solution to her dilemma, the girl dresses herself in an unusual garb and runs away.

5. She finds both refuge and abuse in another man's household, where she serves as a maid.

6. She temporarily escapes from the kitchen where she works and makes a series of appearances at a dress ball.

7. A prince falls in love with the heroine in her beautiful attire. He discovers that the beautiful woman is none other than his maid, and he marries her. (1998).

6 It is important to note that distinguishing between author and collector is a tricky issue. As many Grimms' scholars have documented, the Grimms made substantial changes to their tales while claiming that they were representing stories straight from the mouths of the "folk" (discussed in Dundes 1999, 1-5). Rather than draw a firm line between author and collector, I prefer to follow Francisco Vaz da Silva's lead in asking, "[W]hy then would different criteria apply to oral folk-tellers and to the Grimms, if not for the notion that the former are the sole bearers of 'pure oral tradition'—and that therefore the latter cannot but produce 'fakelore'" (2002, 116)? Like Vaz da Silva, I see many authorial inventions as "thematic transformations within an age-old tradition" (2002, 119), and thus I tend to view oral and literary versions of a tale type as existing on a spectrum.

7 The argument for abstract/archetypal characterization in fairy tales fits Max Lüthi's description of fairy tale characters as depthless. Lüthi claims: "The whole realm of sentiment is absent from folktale characters...Individual narrators, of course, may interject a word about the hero's sorrow or joy. But we clearly sense that this is incidental embellishment and does not pertain essentially to the folktale as a form" (1982, 13). Supporting Lüthi's argument, the characters in the Grimms' version of ATU 510B are barely described at all. Yet at the other end of the spectrum, tale characters can and do exhibit real human emotions. The heroine in "Betta Pilusa" weeps when she goes to a priest to confess her father's crimes, and her father becomes "very sullen" when his immediate desire for his daughter is thwarted.

8 In dividing the approaches I address into psychological and literal, I am not neglecting structuralism, but rather using it apart from these, because it is not an interpretive method so much as a descriptive one—less about meaning than form.

9 One notable exception is Alan Dundes's use of allomotifs to access an underlying folk symbolic code, which can be done without resorting to any particular theoretical model. However, Dundes's application of allomotif analysis to ATU 570, "The Rabbit Herd" (1987) is unmistakably psychoanalytic in tone, as is Holbek's application to ATU 433, "King Wivern" (discussed in Vaz da Silva 2002, 22-24). Further, as Claude Lévi-Strauss notes in a discussion of symbolism, Freud "tries to decipher myths by means of

a single and exclusive code, while a myth will always put several codes into play" (1988, 186). Freud's code of choice was, of course, psychosexual, and while Lévi-Strauss also prioritizes sexual codes in *The Jealous Potter*, he makes a compelling case for interpreting myth according to multiple codes, and allowing for symbolism and metaphor to work multi-directionally rather than uni-directionally (1988, 193-195). I focus on psychological approaches in this essay because they have been the most prevalent application of symbolic reading in fairy tale research.

10 Alan Dundes concurs with this point: "The literal-historical approach has its good points, but it cannot possibly plumb the depths of the fantastic" (1989, 144).

11 Alternate psychological approaches—to ATU 510B and to fairy tales in general—remain rare. Amelia Rutledge analyzes McKinley's novelization of ATU 510B, *Deerskin*, using Lacan's theories of identity to map the protagonist's transition to subjectivity. Rutledge describes the protagonist's relationships with others, primarily her mother and her future husband, in terms of Lacan's mirror stage, wherein a child progresses towards self/other distinctions in the social (symbolic) world. Rutledge's use of a psychological approach does not prevent her from referring to different versions of ATU 510B that intertextually inform *Deerskin*, nor from treating the incest within the text as real. Thus, Rutledge's analysis finds a balance between the tales she works with and the theories she employs.

12 An example of Woodman's style of interpretation is: "In rejecting an incestuous marriage, Allerleirauh leaves behind the collective crutches that supported her as the golden-haired daughter of her golden-haired mother" and "chose to give nature a chance by living in the forest" (1992, 205).

13 I especially agree with Yocom's interpretation of the tale's theme of survival: "Some see in 'Allerleirauh,' as I do, an undercurrent that carries the experiences of incest survivors who move back and forth among different perceptions of themselves and their bodies as they journey toward renewed life" (2012, 93).

14 Also notable is the recent queer approach to fairy tales, as seen in *Transgressive Tales: Queering the Grimms*, edited by Kay Turner and Pauline Greenhill. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2012.

15 In my view, trying to explain the incest motif by means of a historical approach, such as claiming that ritual incest used to occur and remains in the "folk" memory, is not only unverifiable, but also tells us nothing of why the tale remains relevant enough to continue in oral and literary circulation. Holbek criticizes historically-oriented interpretations as grossly underestimating the role of the individual narrator, but not to be entirely dismissed because, "There are traces of ancient beliefs and rituals in many fairy tale motifs" (1998, 258).

16 However, Holbek also claims that incestuous desires "are *manifestly* present in tales like AT 510B and other tales of the feminine pattern" which would lend credence to a literal interpretation of the tale type (1998, 320, italics in original).

17 Examples of placing too much emphasis on only one aspect of interpretation exist in both psychological and literal studies. Tatar critiques Dundes's reading of ATU 706 for ignoring the heroine's crippling vulnerability and making her the story's villain. This instance of victim-blaming leads Tatar to claim that Dundes's interpretation "is a perfect illustration of the hazards of giving too much weight to 'hidden meanings' while neglecting the significance of a tale's manifest content" (1992, 125). Yet Dundes is not ignoring the manifest content of the tale—namely, incest—but rather shifting the emphasis from a sexual crime to a psychological desire. Conversely, Holbek utilizes similar reasoning—"one should pay attention to what the characters *do* rather than to what they *say*"—to explain how in ATU 510B, "we see no reason why the father's desire should not be taken at face value" (1998, 554, italics in original). This is one inconsistency of Holbek's approach, as he reads incest into "King Wivern" (ATU 433B) when it is not there manifestly in the text, and ignores latent desires in ATU 510B.

18 Indeed, applying Judith Butler's model of gender performativity to ATU 510B yields an intriguing starting point for a future study. The polyvalence of the heroine's identity and the importance of surfaces (skin disguises; sooty skin) point to a complexly embodied and contested gender identity.

19 Dundes has demonstrated the "explicit . . . symbolism of finger-rings" to refer to sexual intercourse, which would be a fitting explanation of the father's attempt to force his daughter to wear a ring in her mother's place (1989, 14). It might also be a metaphor for the father's rape of the daughter.

20 Moreover, as Marina Warner points out, in certain renditions of the tale, the tellers and audiences would have been aware of additional meanings in the heroine's disguise: "As an outcast, spurning the sexual demand made upon her, her disguises—donkey, cat, or bear—reproduce the traditional iconography of the very passion she is fleeing," and these particular animal forms also anticipate sexual pollution (1994, 355).

21 For the association between women and nature in the West, in contrast to how men tend to be aligned with culture, see Ortner 1974.

22 This morphological variability connects to Butler's notion of agency: "Indeed, the source of personal and political agency comes not from within the individual, but in and through the complex cultural exchanges among bodies in which identity itself is ever-shifting, indeed, where identity itself is constructed, disintegrated, and recirculated only within the context of a dynamic field of cultural relations" (1999 [1990], 161-162). From this perspective, the heroine in 510B approaches a Butlerian notion of agency by being so flexible in terms of her shifting skins and identities.

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## Response

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I teach a course on fairy tales at USC, and we dip into Bettelheim and von Franz alongside reading a few of these “Donkeyskin”-type-tales, so this article was especially interesting to me. First: I found it very helpful that Jorgensen broke down the methods of analysis so clearly. Symbolic, literal. I also appreciated that she seemed to favor both, while taking into account possible issues with each. Although the psychoanalytic approach *can* be dogmatic and reductive, I also think fairy tales are uniquely suited toward this kind of analysis.

As a fiction writer, I am particularly attracted to fairy tales as a counter to the more character-driven fiction that is the American norm; there, we usually have some internal engagement with the characters’ thoughts and emotions to help a reader piece together motivation. “What a character wants” or why they act is often the driving question in book group discussions and writing workshops. This allows for a certain kind of psychological interpretation, but one usually based on direct passages that give access to internal information. But with fairy tales, the internal is generally shut-off, unavailable. No one is thinking or feeling overtly; motivation is usually fairly opaque. The actions, however, are plain and stark, and a reader is left with story as the main source of analytic material.

There are many issues that come up with a story like ATU 510B, and with the patriarchal problem Jorgensen acknowledges-- the problem of ascribing

the girl’s longing for her father as the reason for the story’s plot. But! It also strikes me that a tale is one of the only types of storytelling where this kind of psychological wondering can be even considered. Because we do not know what she is thinking, we have a lot of room to guess, and to make flat and symbolic and archetypal what might otherwise be offensive, if used upon a three-dimensional character. If/when taken literally, all the complications of actual real incest and abuse flood in, as Tatar and Zipes and others here address, importantly. These concerns are valid and crucial, and cannot be skipped. But they often are the frontline of inquiry, which is why I find the symbolic interpretations almost illicit in their assertions. Which area of interpretation is an underdog here, when it comes to fairy tales? I’m not sure.

What Jorgensen does very effectively is move us through a range of interpretations—from the more plodding and reductive Freudian interpretations to the more historical and realistic interpretations and finally to psychological ones that feel more nuanced, such as those from Woodman and Falassi.

Jorgensen also admits to the limitations of analyzing these tales in her conclusion.

I agree; I was thinking of Donald Barthelme’s concept of good art in his great essay *Not Knowing*. He’s talking about his experience of Rauschenberg’s sculpture of a goat and tire that both intrigues and confounds him.

What’s magical about the object is that it both invites and resists

interpretation... its artistic worth is measurable by the degree to which it remains, after interpretation, vital--no interpretation or cardiopulmonary push-pull can exhaust or empty it (20).

I do believe fairy tales model this as well as anything: whatever lens we use to view the tale and its meaning does not stick permanently to the tale. The tale, told and retold and retold, seems to be one of the most pleasurable items to analyze, and deserves deep and complex study, but will always, always, ultimately resist the analysis and return to its fairly blank state, to its story-self, open again to interpretation.

## Responses to Previous Issues

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**Response to Kimberly Ball's  
UFO-Abduction Narratives and the  
Technology of Tradition**  
Cultural Analysis Vol 9 (2010): 99-128

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**A**lthough "alien abduction" is identified on the web-site of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research (<http://www.contemporarylegend.org>) as one of its areas of interest, the topic does not actually figure prominently in the society's publications. Ball's paper provides an opportunity to examine two questions. First, what is the relationship between the alien abduction narratives (AAN) in Ball's sample and the texts typically studied by urban legend (UL) scholars? Secondly, what light can UL scholarship throw on AAN?

To begin with the first question, we note that most UL texts do not deal with the paranormal. However, this need not mean there is a sharp distinction to be drawn between AAN and UL, since there is one widespread UL, the Vanishing Hitchhiker (VH), which does have supernatural or paranormal content, making it the most appropriate UL to compare with Ball's texts. However, other differences may be noted. The AAN are all first person narratives, whereas VH texts, like other ULs, are usually third person narratives. Furthermore, most VH texts are relatively short, around 200-300 words, and many have structural features in common. For example, the revelation

that the passenger in the vehicle is a ghost comes relatively late. In contrast, the AAN vary considerably in length and have no obvious common structure. This difference is important since the character of VH and UL texts arises from a process of honing that takes place in the frequent retelling that goes on as the stories are repeated by different people. The fact that any given UL text is the result of re-telling by different people is what particularly interests social psychologists. Conversely each AAN is a unique personal testimony without any signs of honing.

Despite these differences, we believe that UL scholarship does have some relevance to an understanding of AAN. It is widely acknowledged that ULs may have a number of different meanings and functions for those who tell them and hear them. Ball's paper generally makes a persuasive case for the AAN being seen as expressing anxieties about modern technologies for the transmission of information. However, some of the texts in her sample contain little evidence to support such an interpretation. For example, one of the texts Ball cites, Raziell (2009), is simply an account of observing a possible UFO with no reference to abduction. The texts vary considerably in the narrator's degree of conviction that abduction actually took place. Some are straightforward assertions that the narrator was abducted but others are much more tentative. Spacemushrooms (2009), for instance, merely describes a dream and comments that "the imagination is a very seemingly infinite thing". Similarly, Magicwords55 (2009) expresses uncertainty in the words "if it really was a abduction and Im not

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confusing a dream with reality” (original spelling and grammar retained). Zeeboe (2011) goes further. He rationalizes childhood memories of being abducted, saying “I honestly don’t think I was abducted. I think it was all based off the power of suggestion”.<sup>1</sup>

Given the variation in her sample texts, we would argue that it is inappropriate to look only at one possible function of the narratives. While scholars may treat a collection of unique texts that display numerous similarities in content and structure as a “legend,” there appears to be much greater variation between the AAN texts than UL texts, and it is therefore harder to justify treating them as a coherent group of texts in which each narrative has a presumed equivalent function. So while some AAN might well be related to anxieties about “digital information technology and mass media”, others make no mention of it at all. Even within those narratives that do draw attention to such technologies it is possible to interpret the usage of such terms as the best explanatory model the individual has to explain their experience – this does not in itself indicate the technology mentioned is the source of anxiety in the narrative.

ULs seem to circulate amongst many different types of groups and communities, and those who listen to, or tell, ULs need not necessarily believe the stories. In contrast, AAN texts are predominantly communicated to self-selected groups which contain many participants who are clearly inclined to believe in the reality of alien abduction. Yet despite their differences, there are still a number of possible points of fruitful comparison. Because VH narratives,

like other ULs, may sometimes be met with some audience scepticism, many contain elements that appear to function as authenticity convincers by providing ways of heading off disbelief. For example, when the vehicle driver meets the hitchhiker (ghost) he frequently has a companion, thus dealing in advance with the potential explanation that the experience described was an individual succumbing to a hallucination. Similarly, the ghost frequently leaves behind some physical evidence of their presence, such as an item of clothing. AANs might be examined to find whether similar convincer techniques are employed. We note, for example, that the narrators and those who comment on them sometimes offer credentials of believability, such as being a college professor or having served in the military.

There are other features of the AAN texts which also may be fruitfully analysed. For instance, some appear to be attempts at interpreting dreams. Many experiences appear to originate in childhood memories, while other narrators refer to personal problems in their lives, which appear to pre-date their key AA experience. None of these features appear to be particularly favourable to Ball’s central thesis. A fuller analysis might lead to a broader view of how these AAN function. For instance, if we were to consider AAN as attempts to understand anomalous or disturbing experiences rather than as expressions of anxieties about contemporary life, we might want to consider that many AAN function as external attributions of internally sourced anomalous experiences such as dream states, or reconstructed memories based on post event suggestions by other

people. Viewed in this way, references within AAN to modern communications technologies may be seen in a somewhat different light. Hence a modern person may have recourse to implicate aliens as the source of their experience whereas a mediaeval peasant might use religious terminology such as demonic possession for their explanations of events. In both cases such individuals make use of powerful non-human external agents as the source of their experience. The inhumanness of such beings reinforces the inexplicable aspects of the recalled incident as the agendas or plans of such beings are ultimately unknowable to normal humans. Within such narrative accounts we would expect to find reference to the most current societal explanatory models available to such individuals, so in modern narratives we will find allusion to 21<sup>st</sup> century science and technology which grounds the narrative in the knowledge available to us, this is supplemented by futuristic or fringe science beliefs to cover areas of the narrative that are beyond explanation by present day technology. This amalgamation of contemporary knowledge with speculation on powerful non-human beings as an explanation of anomalous experience can equally be applied to the demon and fairy-lore which Ball notes at the start of her paper.

In Ball's argument, the key distinction between these early supernatural based narratives and AAN "is the aliens' use of highly advanced technology" but we consider this distinction can be attributed to temporal differences within a continuum of societal knowledge and ideas available to individuals who have had an anomalous experience and

use that knowledge to explain their experience. The referencing of advanced technology in AAN is therefore less an indication of an individual's anxieties about such technologies but in its potential explanatory power for that individual.

### Notes

- 1 All the cited narratives are from Ball's list of sources.



## Reviews

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*Folklore and the Internet: Vernacular Expression in a Digital World*. Edited by Trevor J. Blank. Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2009. Pp. ix + 260, acknowledgments, introduction, appendix, references, about the contributors, index.

*Folklore and the Internet* provides a much-needed published collection of folkloristic research about online behaviors in a single forum. The general realm of Internet research unifies the articles as each researcher has varying methodologies, topics of research, and presentations of conclusions. As more academic fields expand their research into online forums, the field benefits from the research of folklorists who see online expressions as behaviors negotiating the constraints of digital media and not representations of static text. Each chapter analyzes computer-mediated behaviors, including Russell Frank's analysis of the practice of forwarding humorous e-mails, Lynne S. McNeill's analysis of a specific internet meme, "End of Internet" websites, and a Webography of public folklore resources compiled by Gregory Hansen. Each researcher in this volume must define boundaries either through the presence of online relationships, which are congruent to those expressed in real-time communities, or through the presence of stark differences. The methods used by the researchers in this volume will be helpful for other researchers defining the structure of online material because of the noticeably different methods researchers use to approach what can appear to be tenuous communities. Furthermore, analysis of online behavior must consider

general preconceptions about Internet behavior, which will influence even academic readers. These preconceptions differ from the reality that online behavior and materials are mediated through a system of computer codes structuring websites, commercial interests, and, as one of authors, Robert Dobler specifically points out, complex issues of legality (179).

Each article must justify the existence of a valid, research-ready online community and discuss possible conflicts or barriers to understanding the fluidity or rigidity of this community. Robert Glenn Howard analyzes the vernacular web of communication created by fundamentalist Christians discussing their experience with spiritual warfare online (159). He specifically states, minus the exact name of the search engine he used, the three specific terms he used to narrow down the sites he examined and on what basis he excluded certain sites (166). The instability of a search engine, which chooses hits based on relevance, is disclosed to the reader in a reflexive analysis of his methods. Confronting the instability of online communities serves as a basis for outlining each choice of research materials and constraints placed on the material to make it manageable. In general, this leads to a high degree of clarity about theoretical and methodological choices individual authors made, including the archiving methods and researcher's critical interpretations of a user's presentation of his or her own identity online.

In general, researchers made their topics accessible to readers who might not be familiar with the forum or website

through written description. William Westerman's article about editor bias on *Wikipedia*, embodied in a conflict over userboxes, was the only article to contain images. On a whole, the anthology would have benefited from the inclusion of images since some cited materials are not still extant or easily accessible. Aside from Westerman, other researchers used descriptions of website layout and the pathways used to access material on specific sites to convey the websites' structure to readers, since even a static image does not adequately represent the process of moving through a space on the web. In the future, collections of online research might benefit from supplemental online materials. For this collection, some conclusions would have been more easily reached and illustrated with the inclusion of an image. For example, Westerman's inclusion of a "real" *Wikipedia* article and a parody of the same *Wikipedia* article used to illustrate the conflict over userboxes would have rendered his argument less effective if the images were only described to the reader, due to the complexity of the image (141-142).

Aside from this concern, the volume achieves the goal of presenting a cohesive presentation of the status of online research in the field of folklore. The editor of this volume, Trevor Blank, currently an instructor of American studies and folklore at Pennsylvania State Harrisburg, calls on folklorists conducting research online to engage "in a greater dialogue with allied disciplines" and to free themselves from self-imposed academic boundaries (4). In this respect, the selected articles are successful at including perspectives from other fields

and varied perspectives within the field of folklore. This includes perspectives from educators like Marc Prensky, who advocates for change in education systems because learning styles have changed due to technological influences, and perspectives from public folklorists managing materials online. This is to the benefit of folklorists engaged in Internet topics and Internet researchers from other fields and will hopefully increase interdisciplinary dialogue. Often, these chapters draw on previous folkloric research conducted on real-time behaviors to draw out similarities and differences to online behaviors. Elizabeth Tucker's work on the characterization of missing women online, for example, draws from her own work on haunting of physical spaces and research done on the transmission of legend material in real-time. Gregory Hansen's development of public folklore's presence online relies on Sharon Sherman's construction of documentary videos' modes of presentation to develop the structure of websites. These and other chapters mediate current online research, which is defined by changing conditions of online behavior through previous research rooted purely in the physical realm. Links to past research are useful for developing parameters in the online research and expanding the scope of the previous research.

Almost every researcher notes the changing role of time between the transmission of folklore in physical space and face-to-face contact and transmission of folklore in online forums. Lynne S. McNeil notices that the process of meeting people online differs from social processes in real-time because "the *pace*

and *scope* of these social processes that have increased so exponentially" (83). This collection succeeds in demonstrating that there are online boundaries, which are not always analogous to real-time communities, and which can be delineated in order to conduct meaningful research. It also hopefully establishes a basis for increasing research in the area, including the development of changing perceptions of time in online forums. These issues (the static nature of time in the case of Robert Dobler's frozen MySpace pages or, conversely, the rapid development and transmission of information) have begun to be developed in this collection. Further work can develop the effects this warping of time has on the transmission of folklore and the process of conducting fieldwork utilizing online resources with reflexive analysis of researchers' own experiences.

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*Recycling Indian Clothing: Global Contexts of Reuse and Value.* By Lucy Norris. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010. Pp. ix + 226, notes, bibliography, index, 7 illustrations, 16 color plates.

In *Recycling Indian Clothing*, Lucy Norris maps the reuse and transformation of second-hand clothing in India as it moves across broad spectrums of society. Divested from middle class and elite Indian wardrobes, and picked up by local Waghri traders (Gujarati merchants that buy and sell used cloth), these garments recirculate—often in dramatically new forms—in markets both in India and abroad. Norris highlights the social relationships deeply embedded in the collecting and repurposing of cloth, and the unique cultural value that fabric has on the subcontinent. Working through Indian notions of purity/pollution and traditional beliefs that attach personal, and often sacred, associations to cloth, Norris reveals that the circulation of used clothing from India is highly complex and multi-tiered in its movement and engages both men and women from all social strata and religious backgrounds. By shedding light on this understudied aspect of South Asian material culture, Norris seeks to show that the remaking of old clothing is, in fact, a process of remaking selves.

Pulling from Igor Kopytoff's theories about the biography of objects and Arjun Appadurai's notion of the social life of things, Norris attempts to move away from strictly anthropological and historical studies of Indian clothing that closely document "traditional" textiles; she instead places emphasis on the shifting meaning and value of garments

in their disposal and subsequent reuse. Her book joins other scholarly studies that explore the highly personal roles that clothing fulfills in peoples' lives, notably Emma Tarlo's *Clothing Matters* (1996), Joanne Eicher, Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins, and Kim K.P. Johnson's *Dress and Identity* (1995), and Jane Schneider and Annette Weiner's *Cloth and Human Experience* (1989).

And yet, Norris's study differs in important ways: by focusing on the circulation and repurposing of *used* clothing, an understudied topic in general, she is able to highlight several global contexts in which Indian cloth finds new life and meaning, a departure from earlier texts that center on the role of cloth solely within a South Asian context. Her fieldwork begins by looking closely at the domestic market in which old clothing (e.g., worn-out silk *saris*, cotton *dhotis* and *salwaar* suits, jeans, sweaters) from the wardrobes of well-off urban residents is exchanged for money or other goods by Waghri traders. She engages in a form of "wardrobe archaeology" (34), documenting the personal connections associated with cloth as she sifts through the closets of female neighbors in the Trans-Yamuna district of New Delhi where she lived for one year. Norris then traces these old garments as they leave the homes of middle class women and are dispersed by Waghri traders into a highly segregated network of merchants, designers, and entrepreneurs, who in turn sell these old garments as-is to the poor or use them as raw material for "new" products to be sold on a global stage.

Key to Norris's study is the significant cultural value attached to cloth in India,

a notion that emerges from Tarlo in particular. Fabric is rarely thrown out when no longer wanted or needed, but instead is most often given new life as hand-me-downs and gifts to servants or relatives, or used as currency to barter for new and desirable home products (most often stainless steel pots). Both historically and in the present-day, cloth in India is a "bio-moral substance" (7) that transmits ideas of holiness, purity, and pollution to the wearer. It also confers status, and, when gifted, it retains something of the spirit of the giver, imbued with his/her power or essence. Cloth in India also has connotations with political struggles for independence in the first half of the 20th century, made most famous by Gandhi's *swadeshi* campaign and championing of hand-spun, hand-woven *khadi* cloth. As Tarlo has argued, the decision of what to wear in India is one rife with social significance, and is not a choice taken without thought or consideration. With this cultural context in mind, Norris's examination of the circulation and reuse of second-hand clothing in India carries particular significance.

Norris recounts a familiar story to scholars and students of modern and contemporary India: since the liberalizing of India's economy in the 1990s, there has been a dramatic increase in the consumption of material goods and, with it, an increase in waste. Unwanted clothing constitutes a large portion of that waste. Similarly, as nuclear families replace extended family units, older clothes once handed down to younger family members and household servants are now tossed out with other kinds of refuse, particularly in urban spaces like Delhi. However, Norris shows that, unlike

other kinds of material waste, clothing is particularly flexible for reuse: unstitched *saris* and *dhotis* can easily be converted to skirts or blouses, old *salwaar* suits can find new life as cushion covers, and scarves can be turned into handkerchiefs and polishing cloths.

Similarly, Norris complicates the meaning of terms such as “waste” and “recycle,” and shows that the boundaries between “new” and “used” are highly permeable, particularly when examining objects across global contexts. As her research reveals, old clothing cycles through a series of traders, tailors, and merchants to emerge as “new” home furnishing products and tailored “ethnic” garments for foreign tourists and consumers in the UK, Europe, Australia, and the United States. Along the same lines, export surplus clothing and fiber scraps produced in Indian factories (e.g. extras from a print run, factory rejects, leftover fabric pieces from cut garments) are sorted and sold at weekly wholesale markets in Delhi and ultimately find their way into “new” products marketed to middle and upper-middle class residents of the city. It is in highlighting this global movement and transformation of cloth that Norris contributes significantly to the field; she shows that objects, like people, experience their own life cycles that transcend a single place or moment of origin, and that the process of mapping these biographies is an essential part of understanding the value of material culture.

While Norris’s emphasis on the “afterlife” of second-hand Indian clothing allows her to probe deeply into the unchartered world of Waghri traders and the personal lives of middle class women

who exchange their old silk saris for new kitchen utensils, her neglect of the details of cloth itself—the aesthetic features and ways in which specific textiles were made—renders obscure potential reasons for *why* particular clothing is valued in the first place. By providing photographic examples and a more detailed discussion of the technical differences between a silk Benarasi *sari* and a cotton *kota doria* sari, for example, Norris would be able to reveal the nuances of value placed on these garments by individuals involved in their trade and transformation. It is perhaps in this way that Norris’ field, cultural anthropology, can learn from the disciplinary tactics of art history and visual analysis; exploring the aesthetic features of an object can uncover often unspoken reasons for why people value certain things, ultimately producing a more complete biography of an object. Despite the sparse use of illustrations and lack of detailed visual and historical analysis of actual textiles, Norris succeeds in opening up for scholarly discussion an important new area of textile and South Asian studies, and produces a text that will be enjoyed across disciplines by students and scholars interested in global practices of recycling and the circulation of material culture.

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*Cognitive Poetics and Cultural Memory: Russian Literary Mnemonics*. By Mikhail Gronas. Routledge Research in Cultural and Media Studies, vol. 28. New York: Routledge, 2011. Pp. xiii + 174, introduction, notes, bibliography, index.

Mikhail Gronas's book *Cognitive Poetics and Cultural Memory* is an intriguing analysis of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Russian literature and literary culture from the perspective of what Gronas calls "mnemopoetics." While the material analyzed is Russian, this book is an admirable test case for a theoretical framework applicable far beyond even the study of modern, let alone Russian, literature.

Gronas sets up his initial case for mnemopoetics in his introduction, arguing that however much new media change the *way* we remember, the need to remember remains. His four chapters attempt mnemonic/cognitive reinterpretations of "four distinct phenomena: the vagaries of taste, canon formation, the social uses of poetry, and literary creativity" (8). Gronas draws primarily on cognitive poetics, cultural memory theory, and memetics (analysis of memes), but memetics is the dominant member of this triad. His approach is "mnemocentric," to use his term, in that it focuses on the survivability of units of cultural production. He hypothesizes "that what sexual pleasure is to genes, aesthetic pleasure is to memes, the minimal units of cultural evolution, first postulated by Richard Dawkins in 1976" (1). The conceptual framework of evolution, the "survival of the fittest," is ubiquitous throughout the book,

bleeding into metaphors of war at times, and culminating in a poetic conflation of memory and organism in the final line of the book: "Our only way to survive in the world is to make it memorable" (131).

The chapters themselves are relatively self-contained and include occasional helpful reviews of Gronas's arguments up to that point. Chapter one, "Mnemonic Critics: Conceptual Metaphor in Literary Judgements," is an attempt at a history of the rhetorical and linguistic mechanisms of the discourse of taste. Gronas dissects several conceptual metaphors of the literati in nineteenth-century Russia (X is the Russian Y, literary critics as barroom brawlers, etc.) as case studies in the way in which the discourse of taste organizes its object and makes it memorable. Chapter two, "Mnemonic Readers: The Literary Canon and Mnemonic Survival," shifts focus from the perception of literary works to their perpetuation. He takes the formulation "the canon is cultural memory" to its logical conclusion, noting that "...if one takes canonicity as a measure of historically enduring reproducibility, one could argue that the canon is quite literally a mnemonic system" (53). In keeping with his debt to memetics, Gronas covers the canonicity of texts of any size and structure, including "minimal units." Gronas's example for this chapter is just such a minimal-unit: Konstantine Batiushkov's phrase "memory of the heart" from his poem "Moi Genii" (My Daimon). To explain the success of this phrase in the Russian cultural memory, he turns to cognitive science. The mechanisms of canonization, he argues, turn out "to operate in much the same way as the mechanism whereby new lexical units and concepts emerge and

then secure their place in the language" (70). When it comes to a minimal fragment, the mechanism is the same. Batiushkov's phrase survives because it fills a semantic gap, designating the "unnamed but recognizable," which the more ambiguous term "memory" does not specify (70). The approach is limited to what Gronas calls "micro-canonicity," as the "unnamed but recognizable" in longer works such as *War and Peace* is just too complex for such analysis.

Gronas's third chapter, "Mnemonic Lines: The Social Uses of Memorized Poetry," explains the unusual survival of "traditional verse" in Russia in terms of the continued practice of memorizing poetry and the continued usefulness of mnemonic poetry. This chapter describes the "mnemonic culture" in which poetry circulated, a culture which was enabled by and founded on the memorization and recitation of poetry in schools. Early Russian revolutionaries attacked rote learning as backward, but by the early thirties, "...school poetry memorization was rediscovered as one of the most effective weapons for infusing a sense of national and ideological coherence into the minds of Soviet children" (89). Memorized poetry is a double edged blade, however, and mnemonic poetry proves an invaluable resource in a world of banned texts, whether for recording the atrocities committed, providing distraction, or simply maintaining one's humanity and dignity when stripped of all but one's thoughts. Many of Gronas's examples, in fact, come from the Gulag—but he notes that poetry was *able* to function as it did there because the precedent was already established outside, in society as a whole, where

poetry was intended to be memorized and incorporated into intellectual and social life.

Gronas's final chapter, "Mnemonic Poets: The Tip-of-the-Tongue State, the Saussurean Anagram, and the Mechanisms of Mnemonic Activity," shifts emphasis to the mnemonics of the poet's creative process by way of the mystery of Saussure's anagrams, theme words which the famous linguist found broken up and hidden in poems both ancient and new. Gronas's case-in-point, Mandelshtam's poem "Swallow," also serves to illustrate the "tip-of-the-tongue" state. Gronas argues that both phenomena are examples of perceptual and semantic "priming," seen in the tip-of-the-tongue state by the way in which the target word is "blocked" by other words which are either semantically similar ("doctor" when trying to remember "nurse") or phonetically similar ("hearse" when trying to remember "nurse"). In the anagram, the "theme word," which is never explicitly articulated, shows up in phonetic clues (syllables, rhymes, etc., derived from the theme word) and semantic clues (the poem itself is, after all, "about" the theme word to some degree). Unlike rhyme, which is a mnemonic device available to the listener, the anagram is for the exclusive use of the poet, as potential fragments of the poem war with each other in the memory of the working poet for survival in the final product.

Mnemonic studies have historically been associated with oral poetry or Classical/Medieval literature and learning, rather than modern literary culture. Gronas, however, insists that "literature is *still* mnemonic" (2). Gronas's

theoretical framework and analysis are far reaching, but, as he admits, his chosen test-case (Russian literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) is particularly suited to a mnemocentric approach, and even involves a larger degree of “orality” than is normally expected in modern Western literature. Still, the major premises of his study are clearly relevant to a wide variety of fields. “Making memorable” is a productive reframing of the functionality of conceptual metaphor, and is, of course, applicable anywhere language is used, whether spoken or e-mailed. Gronas’s refinement of the “cultural memory” theory of canon (canon as cultural mnemonic) is just as relevant across the board, and his analysis of “micro-canoncity” via memetics both recalls the formula hunting of the mid-twentieth century oral theorists (from Parry and Lord to Magoun and Kellogg) and looks forward to new ways to approach the informal dispersal of “minimal units” on the internet, where the word “meme” is already a “meme” in its own right. While the chapter on Sausurean anagrams may seem obscure, Gronas argues convincingly for a connection to the cognitive phenomenon of priming, and from that develops a theory of the creative process which could be reasonably integrated into work on anything from formal (metrical/rhymed) poetry, to oral epics, to hip-hop. The degree to which his work is relevant to the study of free verse and other ostensibly “non-mnemonic” or “non-oral” texts is perhaps an open question, but Gronas makes a convincing case for the usefulness of a mnemocentric approach in a variety of fields.

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*Communities of Play: Emergent Cultures in Multiplayer Games and Virtual Worlds.* By Celia Pearce and Artemesia. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009. Pp. xiii + 327, forwards, acknowledgements, photographs, games cited, works cited, index.

*Communities of Play* is an elegantly written, yet supremely accessible, book in which Celia Pearce examines emergent fan cultures in contemporary digital gaming. Drawing from her own experiences as a player, game designer, and scholar, Pearce constructs an ethnographic study of a fan group centered on the video game *Uru: Ages Beyond Myst*, and the diaspora, which has emerged since the game’s demise. This study reveals the power of play and its impact on culture, while simultaneously giving an interesting and much needed twist to the study of diasporic communities and the immigrant experience, allowing us to follow these fields of research into virtual worlds. She asserts that “although the worlds may be virtual, the communities formed within them are as real as any that form in proximal space” (17).

Pearce utilizes an ethnographic approach centered on an eighteen-month study of the Gathering of Uru (colloquially known as TGU), a neighborhood (or hood) within the game that formed in 2003 and lasted well beyond the demise of the game, coalescing into what she identifies as an online diaspora. She illuminates how the forced exodus of game players affected members of TGU, and how these newly dispossessed were able to find alternative spaces to reconvene and examine their communal anxiety over their separation from their virtual homeland.

She explores the complicated system of community formation and maintenance in virtual worlds and how online community structures work together in a colloquial decision-making process, which has been shaped by virtual, historical, commercial and aesthetic principles. Pearce pays particular attention to the distinctive conventions of *Uru*, including elements such as virtual geography, eventually conflating the ideas of communal identity and virtual space into the shared notion of identity as place. Though no explanation as to why the game was shut down was ever given by the game's developer or publisher (Cyan and Ubisoft respectively), she does explore the community's narrativized response to the removal of their space.

The author dutifully acknowledges her place in the world, as both participant and scholar of this community. Yet she does not get lost in the idiosyncrasies of the community in an auto-ethnographic sense and eschew quantitative or theoretical approaches. She is careful to examine technical distinctions such as the difference between the MMOG (massively multiplayer online game) and the MMOW (massively multiplayer online world), and thoroughly explores the contrast between lucid (created by game designers) and paidiaic (created by players) world constructions. She ably combines participant observation as a qualitative research measure with more sociologically quantitative methods, and this methodological approach impressively demonstrates the importance of studying contemporary online communities and emergent cultures in both ethnographic and sociologic contexts.

The book offers a clear, concise, and accessible text for the reader detailing the intersection of technological, personal, and cultural contexts through which play and its diasporic community are imagined, constructed, maintained and consumed. It is divided into five parts (Play, Community, and Emergent Cultures; The *Uru* Diaspora; Playing Ethnography: Research Methods; The Social Construction of the Ethnographer; and Beyond *Uru*: Communities of Play on Their own Terms), each further divided into easily digestible chapters that focus on specific aspects of this dialectical contextual intersection.

There are possible dangers associated with Pearce's methodological approach, namely the difficulty of studying a group to which she is so closely tied; and it could be said that the study borders, at times, on a becoming more a passionate fan manifesto than legitimate scholarship. Yet this potential criticism also works to Pearce's advantage as this approach ultimately highlights the strengths of participant observation in online fieldwork. The relatively narrow, yet statistically significant, scope of this study allows the author to emphasize the individual and communal importance of play as cultural foundation. Pearce asserts that communities of play, centered on play practices which she separates from other types of folk practice, warrant their own models of community formation and maintenance, particularly within the context of technologically mediated play. While focusing on play, she is simultaneously able to underscore the vital role of technology, history, and aesthetics in the development of virtual communities and diasporas. The

closeness of the author to her subject is perhaps one of the greatest strengths of the book as Pearce refuses to risk essentialism by offering us a simple quantitative study that relegates shared expressions of play and community to mere numbers or generalizations. Instead, she supports sociological methodologies with an incredibly focused and detailed qualitative study, which allows her to explore more deeply the cultural contexts that create emergent cultures.

This weakness-turned-strength is also what makes *Communities of Play* such an important addition to the fields of diaspora and virtual community studies, especially as the interest in communities in online spaces is continuing to grow (Bainbridge 2010; Castranova 2006 & 2007; Nardi 2010; Taylor 2009). While the example provided in the study is about one fairly unique virtual community existing as diaspora, this book is not, in essence, about the Gathering of Uru. Instead, this book is about *how* to approach a subject that is at once intensely personal, intensely cultural, utterly dynamic and continually emergent. Pearce provides an invaluable model for studying emergent communities in a contemporary context that stresses the complex networks and contexts, which create practicable models of community and play. This study allows us a form through which we are able to better understand virtual communities as accelerated forms of emergent cultures. Indeed, the intergame immigration recounted in this book is expedited by the communicative properties of the community's medium: the Internet. *Communities of Play* is an important addition to the fields of game studies, fan studies, popular culture,

folklore and diaspora studies, and should be read by anyone hoping to undertake an exploration of communities in virtual spaces. This work has uses well outside its intended field and has applicable lessons that are of value to any interdisciplinary scholars, from cultural anthropologists to historians to video game designers. It is accessible enough for use in the undergraduate classroom, challenging enough for the most invested scholars, specific enough to be of use to virtual ethnographers, yet broad enough to be of use to other fields of studies as well. *Communities of Play* is an exemplary work that lays a firm foundation for expanding the study of play and community, particularly in online worlds.

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*Jokes and Targets*. By Christie Davies. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011. Pp. ix + 314, acknowledgments, introduction, references, index.

The study of humor is serious business, but it requires far more than simply collecting the text of a joke in order to fully understand its meaning and social significance. A joke's performative context—who told it, why, and how the joke was transmitted, received, and subsequently passed along—is equally important. However, the overarching social contexts that presage a joke's (or body of jokes) utterance offer the greatest insights into its creation, content, and audience. With *Jokes and Targets*, sociologist Christie Davies has compiled a fascinating, straightforward, and comprehensive look into the social histories of several major joke cycles about specific targets, or "groups of people who are the butt of jokes upon whom a conventional comic script pins some undesirable quality" (6), in an effort to reveal and contextualize the origins behind a myriad of these popular jokes.

Utilizing an interdisciplinary framework, Davies shares compelling insights into why popular joke targets have attained such longevity in joke cycles. He does not concern himself with tracing particular jokes back to their original creators—such a task is futile—but rather how the historical events and social contexts that facilitated their creation, dissemination, and popularity ultimately rendered the jokes meaningful. Among the broad groups Davies profiles are dumb and desirable blondes; the oversexed French; Jewish men and women; men who have sex

with other men (hetero- and homosexual alike); greedy American lawyers and the U.S. legal system; and the Soviet Union. Additionally, Davies offers an interpretive overview of the numerous occupations, ethnic groups, and social classes that have been humorously pegged as "stupid" or, conversely, "canny" in popular joke cycles over the years.

Following an excellent introduction in which the author provides a brief literature review of humor scholarship and outlines *Jokes and Targets'* key ideas and terms, Davies is quick to lay the theoretical groundwork for the book. Davies's writing is somewhat dense, and at times his propensity for expansive detail obfuscates his argumentation, which is perhaps most evident in the more theory-laced beginning and concluding chapters of *Jokes and Targets*. This is not to say that the author's prose is indecipherable—on the contrary, it is quite accessible throughout most of the book. However, he is clearly at his best while deconstructing representative case studies of popular targets and their social and historical origins. In doing so, Davies presents the contextual intricacies of each target with effortless mastery, providing complete and often amusing explanations for why jokes about these particular targets exist. Most convincingly, he surveys historical French cultural attitudes and preferences about sex (and how they were viewed by other Westerners, namely Americans and the English) in order to explain and contextualize the preponderance of sex-themed jokes about the French (76-112). The author's discussion of the gender roles, sexual preferences, and occupational/religious expectations of Jewish men and women (113-153) is

also exceptionally compelling due to the sheer breadth of source material and Davies's provocative interpretations, as is his inquiry into why political jokes about the Soviet Union managed to persist among those living behind the Iron Curtain, and why those jokes were especially meaningful to those joke tellers under the control of totalitarianism (213-252). Finally, Davies concludes with the contention that "stupid" jokes are "always told about those on the edge of a country or a cultural or linguistic area, with the tellers being at the center" (254), which he supports with commodious explanation and illustrative examples in the book's closing pages.

Despite the overwhelming strength of *Jokes and Targets*, there is room for a brief complaint. Davies is quick to dismiss the inherent integrity of joke materials collected online, claiming that "studies of humor that rely on the internet alone are often badly flawed" and that "editors and website compilers are always tempted to take and adapt jokes from other sources in a way that produces jokes that bear no relationship at all to their new setting. Those who send the sites jokes by letter or e-mail can be equally guilty of distortion" (14). While there is some truth behind Davies's rationale, especially in the case of self-proclaimed "joke websites," it is unfair and misleading to suggest that such distortive practices reflect how most people interact with humor online; for one, joke compilation websites are not even the most popular source for joke seekers to acquire or post new material. In any case, the Internet should not be conceptualized as a mere static archive, but rather a dynamic locus for vernacular expression. Increasingly, individuals tell jokes through social

media in ways that are analogous or complementary to oral communication practices; people interchangeably use technology *and* face to face interaction to share humor with peers and community members. More, not less, study of Internet-based humor is necessary. Even though Davies does acknowledge the benefits of using the Internet for humor research and cites numerous Web-based materials throughout his research, his general characterization of humor on the Internet seems somewhat antiquated, which is an unfortunate diversion from his otherwise sterling work.

Nevertheless, *Jokes and Targets* is well worth the price of admission. It is a valuable addition to Davies's existing and esteemed corpus of humor research, standing favorably alongside *Ethnic Humor Around the World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), *Jokes and their Relations to Society* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1998), and *The Mirth of Nations* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2002). On its own merits, *Jokes and Targets* is essential reading for scholars of humor, who will surely appreciate the detail and care of the author's work. Given the volume's comprehensiveness and wealth of bibliographical resources, it would be especially valuable to scholars in the humanities or qualitative social sciences who are newer to the study of humor. And with its interdisciplinary appeal and accessible prose, *Jokes and Targets* could be adapted easily into advanced undergraduate and graduate courses about humor, especially those focusing on its social dimensions, as well as other relevant course offerings in sociology, history, American Studies, and folklore, among others.

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*Japanese Demon Lore: Oni from Ancient Times to the Present.* By Noriko T. Reider. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2010. Pp. 208, introduction, footnotes, bibliography, index, illustrations.

A man stands on a bridge. He is awed in the presence of the beautiful woman before him. Just as he is about to surrender himself to her embrace, she changes. Suddenly he is confronted by a hideous, horned, slaving demon whose hunger is not for sex, but for his flesh. Such scenes of sudden transformations are ubiquitous in Japanese demon lore, which, in the centuries of living memory, has contained creatures called *oni* who feed on human flesh and, as often as not, provide object lessons for the hearer of the tales.

Dr. Reider's book on demon lore is timely in several senses of the word. Not only does she take the reader through Japanese demon lore over its entire recorded history, but in discussing the evolution it has undergone over time, she also touches on how changing mores and perspectives have influenced the understanding and interpretation of demons in general and *oni* in particular. This expanded point of view also speaks to the current popular portrayal of historically evil or trickster figures as sympathetic, misunderstood, and even romantic (such as in the television series *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer* or *Twilight* films). This work also raises the question of how much impact Japanese culture, and especially Japanese pop culture, has had on Western society.

The book starts with a general definitional overview of the place of *oni* in Japanese culture. *Oni* are a type

of demon from Japanese folklore, who have been imbued with Buddhist characteristics in the time since that belief system established a foothold in Japanese spirituality. Reider provides a linguistic breakdown of many of the *oni* specific terms, which demonstrate this apparent bridge between the early Shinto/animistic beliefs of the islands and the Buddhist influence.

While they are horrific in appearance—possessing horns, fangs, superhuman height, and so on—and cannibalistic in nature, they have never been wholly evil. *Oni* have conventionally represented the marginalized and counter-hegemonic in Japanese society, serving as object lessons for teaching normative social behaviors. For example, instructions on how to defeat *oni*, as well as to resist those aspects of our nature which may lead us to become them, have been their primary purpose. In other words, they have functioned as demons do in folklore the world over.

This latter point is demonstrated most poignantly in chapter three, "Women Spurned, Revenge of Oni Women: Gender and Space," which examines, among other features, "ugly women," wives, and others who are rejected by men and become *oni* in order to take their revenge. Some of these shunned women successfully destroy husbands and mistresses. Most *oni* are killed for their pains. Reider's reading on this aspect of *oni* lore looks at both the actions of the marginalized—the unattractive women—and those who have flouted conventions such as marriage. *Oni* are equally often portrayed as outcasts, or even outsiders. For example, during World War II, *oni* not only took on their traditional forms, but

the term was also applied to the ultimate outsider: the leaders of American, Russian and Chinese forces (107). This demonstrates the essential folkloric nature of the *oni* inasmuch as their *lore* is contextually adaptable as culture and context requires.

Reider provides snapshots of *oni* lore from the earliest recorded Japanese folklore all the way through the present. In this study, she provides a very thorough cross-section of their characteristics—such as the ability to alter gender and appearance, as needed, the kind of person who may become an *oni* (as they are not all born demons), and narratives of how they are defeated. She also shows how the presentation of demons in folklore and popular culture has changed over time, stopping at different eras in Japanese history to discuss the alterations specific characters and characteristics have experienced.

What is particularly interesting to me is how *oni* have become increasingly sympathetic figures in modern popular culture. More and more, audiences are asked to view *oni* characteristics and behaviour, such as gender bending, demon shape and cannibalism, as, if not “good,” at least not wholly bad and misunderstood. This makes them popular characters in anime and manga, two kinds of media that have made and are continuing to make a strong impact on American popular culture. How much this changing view on *oni* colours the current Western view of “creatures of the night” (such as vampires, as beings with the same moral potential as humans) is hard to say. *Oni* can be grouped in a similar class with vampires if blood sucking is viewed as analogous

to cannibalism, but in both cultures such “demons” have become multi-faceted beings in recent decades that their status is quite variable.

However, as an academic work, the book makes several leaps in logic regarding the origin of *oni*, other aspects of their nature, and the way they functioned as social controls. This may be a result of cutting for space or insufficient footnoting, but there are a few areas where more information would have made for a more informed reading. For example, there are several areas in which, after recounting a story of an *oni* with a “straw raincoat of invisibility,” Reider notes that:

This *kyogen's* *oni* ...probably descends from the Japanese line of *oni*.... The treasured hat and cloak with the power to make their wearer invisible might have been a main source of the *oni's* power of invisibility (25).

There is far more discussion of shape-changing and gender disguise in her study than of invisibility, but, regardless, she provides little more evidence of this statement than the above. However, this gloss does not detract overmuch from the total quality of the work.

On a personal note, having dealt in my own research with liminal spaces, I cannot help but be fascinated by the number of *oni* encounters that take place on bridges. Whether this is simply characteristic of the examples Reider chose, or part and parcel of the way *oni* straddle more than one world, especially as cultural Others, there is no way to determine from this book, and, at the very least, I would like to have seen an acknowledgement of this seemingly disproportionate fascination with a space between.

These criticisms aside, *Japanese Demon Lore* is an excellent overview of *oni* that explores *oni* lore and legends and tracks their evolving characteristics through history. While the narratives and *oni* artwork make this book worth reading, Reider's discussion of the Japanese view on the marginalized and those who refuse to follow social conventions, such as obeying the orders of the emperor, keeps the work interesting for both the academic and lay reader alike. The work is very informative and presented in a style that is sophisticated but also relatively jargon-free, making for wide audience appeal.

For the student of Japanese folklore, mythology, and religion, it is an excellent addition to a collection and as a good study aid. It stands up well next to works on the supernatural like Gillian Bennett's *Alas Poor Ghost* (nee *Traditions of Belief*), Barbara Walkers's 1995 collection *Out of the Ordinary*, and the works of Elizabeth Miller unraveling the myths and folklore of Dracula from the reality. Reider additionally analyzes the ideographic nature of the Japanese written language to illustrate how the *oni* have been and are understood. This last aspect can be a little difficult to understand for non-speakers/readers, but is still fascinating as both a linguistic lesson and an example of the evolution of written Japanese.

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*Thomas Kinkade: The Artist in the Mall*. Edited by Alexis L. Boylan. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. Pp. 283, introduction, notes, bibliography, index, illustrations.

By the time of his unexpected death earlier this year, the paintings of American artist Thomas Kinkade (1958-2012) could be found in one in every twenty homes in the United States, to say nothing of countless medical waiting rooms and office lobbies (*Art and Design*, *New York Times*, April 27, 2012). Yet few of us have ever seen an "original" Kinkade. His reputation rests instead upon reproductions of his original paintings, which typically depict either cozy English-style cottages amidst verdant gardens, sturdy lighthouses perched at sea's edge, or quaint streetscapes of towns and cities circa 1930 to 1960, all painted in his signature style of dappled pastel colors rendering dramatic light effects. Kinkade's success has made him something of a household name, but it has also engendered the hostility of critics who deride him for pandering sentimental kitsch to a mass public. Refreshingly, the contributors to *Thomas Kinkade: The Artist in the Mall* avoid judgment and take the artist's popularity and ubiquity seriously, and, as a result, they are able to offer a series of probing and insightful essays that analyze Kinkade as a cultural phenomenon.

The volume consists of eleven essays, each addressing a specific topic, from Kinkade's art-historical pedigree to the latent political and religious content in his imagery. Each author crafts a compelling, well-researched argument, employing high standards of scholarly rigor. What

ultimately distinguishes this volume, however, is the cumulative impact of all eleven the essays on the reader, who gains a depth of insight, not just the breadth that is more common to monographs. I attribute this to two factors. First, the authors all pursue, more or less, the same methodology, an approach editor Alexis L. Boylan identifies as that of “visual culture studies.” Whereas traditional art historical scholarship focuses on canonical works of art and attributes their meaning to an artist’s intentions and goals, these scholars seek to understand the diverse ways in which widely circulating, non-canonical, and commercially produced images are employed by everyday people to generate, reify, and sustain their worldviews. By privileging reception over production, this method acknowledges that meaning in images is generated through viewership and is therefore bound up with cultural values. Second, but related to the first, the arguments made by the authors speak to each other in subtle and surprising ways so that the volume acquires an unexpected intellectual richness. Indeed, by the time the reader has turned the last page, it is evident that the Kinkade phenomena is a force to be reckoned with, as it intersects so many aspects of contemporary American life, including consumerism, neo-conservatism, evangelicalism, urban planning, memory, nostalgia, and aesthetics.

While summarizing each essay is not possible in this brief review, an indication of the kind of insight offered by the authors—and visual culture studies methodology more generally—can be had by delving into one of the book’s common themes: the paradoxical nature of the Kinkade phenomenon,

and the social and ideological work that the images do for their viewers. To Kinkade’s appreciators, the imagery of his painting appears historically correct, evocative of specific memories. Yet these memories are an ahistorical fantasy, mirages of some earlier, more easeful time when the anxieties engendered by the market economy and globalization did not exist. Paradoxically, this fantasy can only be most fully “realized” through the purchase of a Kinkade; thereby appreciators must actively participate in the potentially debilitating consumer ethos from which they seek refuge. In fact, Kinkade inverts the commonly held view that the market corrupts art. For the artist and his followers, just the opposite is true; his popularity in the marketplace testifies to the authenticity of his “art,” and market ideology validates the fantasy the “paintings” perpetuate.

Beyond history, this fantasy extends to politics and religion. The paintings make no overt political statements, but nonetheless promote a social vision of neo-conservatism by presenting as an ideal a prettified mid-twentieth century neighborliness, where benevolent white middle-class families share “traditional” views of domesticity, community, and nationalism. This community ethos is contradicted by the isolation of the domestic structures in Kinkade’s landscapes, to say nothing of the actual gated community built in Vallejo, California that was inspired by Kinkade’s painted ideal. Similarly, the paintings eschew overt religious iconography, but his fans nonetheless see in them an expression of the artist’s born-again relation to God, and, by extension, a Christian message of hope and inspiration. Yet, as these authors make

clear, full participation in Kinkade's pastel kingdom is predicated upon middle class patterns of consumerism—and a desire to live in pre-civil rights America.

Finally, the paradoxes extend to Kinkade's relationship to the art world. While he was alive, he positioned himself against the clichés of alienation and elitism associated with art found in white-walled galleries. He instead painted familiar subjects in a soothing, legible, quasi-Impressionistic style, and his commodified reproductions were—and continue to be—sold in homey, shopping mall-based galleries replete with sofas and fireplaces, and staffed by friendly, picture-loving people. He thus presented himself a populist providing an art accessible to all, regardless of income or education. However, prices for his reproductions are not uniform, but increase significantly the closer they mimic—through actual hand-painted accents applied to them—the painterly qualities of the original. The artist also hid among his houses and foliage symbols that make reference to his personal life—a visual code recognizable only to his most ardent enthusiasts. Both strategies emulate the art world he deplored, fostering an elite group of Kinkade connoisseurs who collect the “highest quality” reproductions and who are knowledgeable enough about the artist to “read” a deeper meaning into his imagery. In the end, these and other paradoxes make *Thomas Kinkade: The Artist in the Mall* a compelling read for any scholar interested in understanding the ways in which people use images produce, maintain, and even contest cultural values.

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*Still, the Small Voice: Narrative, Personal Revelation, and the Mormon Folk Tradition.* By Tom Mould. Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2011. Pp. xi + 388, introduction, appendix, notes, works cited, index.

*Still, the Small Voice* explores the cultural significance of personal revelation narratives in Mormon culture. While not a Mormon, Tom Mould carefully researched and clearly articulated an emic view of this pervasive, important practice and its relevance to Mormon worldview. Mould's study includes ethnographic fieldwork with a ward in North Carolina; access to three archives: the Fife Folklore Archives at Utah State University in Logan, the William A. Wilson Folklore Archives at Brigham Young University in Provo, the Utah Humanities Research Foundation Records at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City; and finally the published records of church members and leaders in journals and magazines. Mould admits to the regional limitations of his research, but does an excellent job broadly outlining this important practice in Latter-day Saint culture and offering interested scholars many avenues for further research.

Chapter 1 situates personal revelation narratives within the Mormon tradition as both intensely personal and fundamentally public. Because these narratives recall religiously affirming experiences and act as such in their own right, Mould correctly identifies them as a significant and often overlooked source for studying Mormon culture. Mould mentions, and I agree, that folklorists have too often focused on the fantastical,

monstrous, and superstitious rather than the far more common, “though sometimes less spectacular encounters with the divine” (55). And that is exactly why this kind of study is long overdue. For instance, three Nephite stories have been a mainstay of Mormon folklore scholarship for decades, but as a Latter-day Saint myself, I can say these are rarely shared. Tom Mould’s research, then, is more reflective of everyday Mormon experience. Personal revelation is central for Latter-day Saints because it sits at the intersection between their spiritual and temporal lives, in which they ask God for help in their daily lives.

With his focus on writing the everyday reality of Latter-day Saints, Mould’s analysis is rooted in Richard Bauman’s performance theory. To uncover the framework, esthetic response, and culture-specific contexts, Mould relies on thorough rhetorical analysis of these memorates. The importance of the narrator, audience, and historical and cultural contexts that give rise to the narrative form are prominent in every chapter. While speaking of genre in Chapter 3, Mould shows how author and audience expectations center on proving the divine in everyday life. That concern connects to the founding of Mormonism and is itself a central tenet of belief: that God speaks to people today. It shows how Mormon tradition and cultural life are arenas for performing one’s beliefs. In Chapter 4, Mould uncovers the various rhetorical purposes these memorates are put to: instructing, forming connections with ancestors or progeny, and “performing” one’s membership in the Latter-day Saint community. These “retroactive” revelations in the narrative

tradition show how Mormons interpret spiritual and deeply personal experiences in culturally informed ways.

Mould notes how blurry the lines are between genres and how overlapping the functions of these narratives can be. The personal revelation genre blends aspects of personal experience, legend, and sometimes even myth. Chapter 5 explores the cloudy division between experience itself and the personal and cultural forces at work in the interpretation of that experience by Mormon believers. Chapter 6 then explores the often overlapping but conveniently separated modes of oral and written narratives. Mould makes a strong case for vibrant oral and written traditions that coexist with abundant points of contact and cross-pollination. Here, as in other places, Mould’s strength is his inclusiveness. He focuses on the material without tiptoeing around outliers or apparent contradictions, and rather vigorously chases them and finds how they fit into the highly personal, but culturally informed, tradition of personal revelation.

While Mould’s material is well documented, and his analysis is spot on, his claims are more suggestive than conclusive. In Chapter 5, for instance, Mould notes that women typically receive revelation about premortal existence while men more often receive revelation about the afterlife. It is a tantalizing detail about future orientation and possible gender and cultural influences on what has been seen as a very broad cultural marker in America. These and other details in *Still, the Small Voice* open up many avenues of research for major themes in folklore and cultural studies. Mould himself outlines many of these

avenues in the afterword, but in many of the concluding sections of his chapters, I wanted him to push his analysis further than he seemed willing to. Whether this was out of respect for his informants, due to the sheer size of his study, or the endless implications of his subject, I am not sure. Still, his overall conclusion about personal revelation's importance and how its meaning is shaped culturally and dialogically between experience and expectation rings true to my experience in the tradition and my training as a folklorist.

Folklorists and Mormon scholars alike should find ample use for *Still, the Small Voice*. While the book is primarily folkloric, the pervasiveness and centrality of personal revelation narratives in Mormon culture and experience makes this book a great companion to other studies, such as Terryl Givens's touchstone publication *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture*. Mould's treatment grounds personal narratives not only in their contemporary context, but also in their historical prototypes and religious Ur-forms, so the student of Mormon culture should find numerous revelations of their own in Mould's well-documented treatment. For example, Chapter 2 outlines the inherent tension between sharing and not sharing personal spiritual experiences that Mormons must navigate with muted language to avoid ridicule, embrace humility, and share what is seen as proof of righteousness without appearing self-righteous. The act of narration brings all these culturally relevant forces to almost every performance of these commonly shared stories.

Being a member of the group Mould analyzes, I found his treatment kind

and his conclusions spot on. While my experience diverges somewhat from some of the details (not every ward has a Bishop assuring timid testifiers that "there are no coincidences," for instance), Mould, who admits of giving only a regional treatment, has presented a very broad and far-reaching portrait of Mormon cultural life in America today. His work is well researched, clearly presented and should open up many promising paths of inquiry for folklorists and students of Mormon culture.

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*Performance and Politics in Tanzania: The Nation on Stage.* By Laura Edmondson. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007. Pp. x +175, acknowledgements, introduction, glossary of terms, notes, references, index.

All the world's a stage." These words have never been more apt than in describing Laura Edmondson's much needed contribution to performance scholarship in Tanzania. Positioning herself strategically among three performance companies in the post-colonial, post-socialist nation-state, Edmondson has created a stellar multisited ethnography that comprehensively and confidently explores the complex and often paradoxical relationships between global affairs, state agendas, nationalism, popular culture, ethnicities, urban and rural communities, gender, and individual and collective identity/agency.

Her introduction sets the stage by providing glimpses into the performances of three distinct Tanzanian performing companies—Tanzania One Theater (TOT), Muungano, and Mandela—presenting the reader with a visualization of the many differences to be found against the "Western tendency to homogenize African ritual and performance" (9). Edmondson reveals the underlying forces at play connecting them—and the Tanzanian people—together, and in doing so argues that "the uniqueness of Tanzanian popular culture theatre calls for theoretical approaches that push beyond oppositional models of resistance or capitulation" (6). In creating her own theoretical approach, she provocatively

introduces and employs such terms as collaborative nationalism, alternative nationalism, strategic nationalism, and cosmopolitan nationalism to describe cultural expressions that demonstrate the "continuous cycle of collaboration, complicity, and conviviality" to be found within Tanzanian theatre (7). She asserts that the negotiations of national identity are neither top-down nor bottom-up, but rather a mix of direct and indirect collaboration among the many players.

Edmondson is careful to provide the historical context in which the performance companies emerged. In her first chapter, she discusses the post-colonial development of performance in Tanzania, revealing the complexities of identity construction amid a transitional, liminal period from colonialism to statehood, and socialism to post-socialism. The reader is vividly shown various aspects of performance, including the influence of China, which provided overseas *sarakasi* (acrobatics) training to Tanzanian artists to arouse sentiments of socialist identity. Another aspect is the effects of *ngoma* (dance), whose performance via the National Dance Troupe initially divided the poor and upper classes when the elite pushed to marginalize its performance, believing it to be a representation of the subaltern and consequently embarrassing to the nation. The elite advocated for drama instead, in an attempt to combine the country's precolonial tradition with their "modern leanings" (22). These three aspects of performance—drama, dance, and acrobatics—formed the tripartite model, whose intended purpose was to propagate the government's concept of *ujamaa* ("familyhood") by molding a

sense of nationalistic identity through representations of Tanzania's precolonial heritage, its colonial history, and its socialist future.

These national troupes of dance, drama, and acrobats which formed the tripartite model disintegrated in 1981 as a result of competition among cultural troupes, who existed alongside the national troupes as an alternative branch of nationalist performance. Edmondson also describes the effects of the 1980s, the war with Uganda, and the pressure from the International Monetary Fund to liberalize the economy. This resulted in the general consolidation of performance into three companies—Tanzania One Theater (TOT), Muungano, and Mandela—as well as a handful of cultural troupes, who worked to construct and reconstruct, define and redefine what it meant to be “Tanzanian.”

Edmondson asserts that the three companies did not engage in this conversation as equals, but rather within a competition of resources. Tanzanian One Theatre (TOT) became affiliated with the ruling party, receiving better equipment and a reputation of modernity with its performance “collud[ing] with the ruling party’s (CCM) agenda to shape the terms of post-socialist national identity through the guise of popular culture. TOT’s image as a trend-setting, hip alternative to Muungano resonated with CCM’s anxiety to shed its image as the old guard, unable to ‘move with the times’” (43). It was within the frame of this new model that identity was recreated during the 1990s, with performances reflecting the new cultural trends and hybridization resulting from increased interaction with the West. Power and morality were

re-conceptualized on stage, shaped by capitalism and competition to part from the old nationalist ideals as performance transitioned from promoting unity and justice to instead portraying reality with instances of offenders getting away with acts of violence.

She also discusses women, gender, and class relations in this new national context. For the former two, she examines the role of tradition in women’s agency and negotiation during this time of complexity among a broad spectrum of players and interests. In presenting traditional practices as forms of identity expression and agency for women, the author argues that “[t]his strategy refutes the notion that modernization is equated with female empowerment, for it depicts tradition as a resource rather than simply as a means of oppression” (99). She still gives credit where it is due, however, discussing in one of her many detailed performance examples a skit in which actors depict the rape of a woman and molestation of a child, equating their respective vulnerabilities, and in so doing conveying the message that it is not women’s “fault” when they are sexually assaulted.

For the latter, she examines the dichotomies of rich and poor, and urban and rural. She explores how all three performance groups portray these relationships differently in terms of synthetic nostalgia and syncretic nostalgia, which she posits as speaking to the balance of tradition with its invention, counter-invention, and reinvention. In one example, the author argues that the newly-introduced electronic music provided a sense of unity among competing ethnic groups, acting as a

common denominator throughout the various performances of “tradition.”

The book’s final chapter describes one of the performance group’s ascension to the top of Tanzanian performance popularity and the role of East African nationalism, Tanzanian democracy, and popular culture in the new millennium. “Democracy in the hands of Tanzanian politicians might indeed have become a dull affair,” she declares, “but...it persisted as a messy and vibrant force that theoretical frameworks and narrative closures could not possibly contain” (140).

Edmondson seamlessly communicates the powers involved in such processes of cultural negotiation and leaves little to be desired for a multisited examination of Tanzania’s culturally influenced political development. Her research is solid, her theory sound, and her writing style enjoyable. *Performance and Politics in Tanzania* will make a valuable addition to any scholar’s library.

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