

## Hybrid Tactics and Locative Legends: Re-reading de Certeau for the Future of Folkloristics

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In his call for a closer merger of the practice and performance approaches that have characterized European ethnology and American folkloristics respectively, Simon Bronner persuasively argues that a reconsideration of the role of practice theory in folklore studies and ethnology may offer a way to more richly understand the connections between individual past and present action and between the individual actor and the collective tradition. While Bronner builds his argument primarily on the work of two key practice theorists, Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens, folklorists and ethnologists would also benefit from a more detailed and robust consideration of the works of a different theorist, Michel de Certeau, whose work constitutes a different take on the idea of practice. I make this case partly because, as a wide body of scholarship already suggests, de Certeau's unique sensitivity to everyday operations within the totalizing forces of modernity make his work a natural basis for developing a rich understanding of vernacular cultures in our current heavily mediated and commercialized neoliberal societies (for example, Jenkins 1992; 2009; Manovich 2009). But perhaps more importantly, I make this case because de Certeau himself made what American scholars would call folklore and folklore studies a centerpiece of his intellectual opus. Despite the widespread popularity of certain Certeauian concepts in American folkloristics, the centrality of folklore and folkloristics in his work has been all but overlooked.

A close reading of de Certeau's corpus of scholarship reveals his longstanding interest in folklore along two distinct lines. First, tied to his critical historical evaluation of the development of scholarly epistemology in the context of modernity, de Certeau traces the emergence and evolution of the powerful ideologies that shaped the "modern" discipline of folklore studies, especially in France, and examines how this ideological process has operated on our understanding of culture more broadly. I make the case that de Certeau understood this work on the historical development of folklore studies as vital to the understanding of his larger theoretical program, both because he reiterates and reexamines these issues in a number of his significant works, and because he tied this same history to his critique of the history of secularism, a matter that--despite his professional move away from the clergy--remained a key issue for the Jesuit scholar throughout his career.

With this historical understanding in place, I will then discuss how it is tied importantly, if sometimes tacitly, to de Certeau's generalized framework for understanding the everyday sociocultural experience of individuals living within

modernity's terrain of power. Much of this discussion is drawn from his most famous work in the English-speaking academy: *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1988a), a work that is intimately tied to understanding of what he often refers to as "the popular," but which can easily be understood as analogous to what American scholars might call "folklore."<sup>1</sup> Deepening this discussion by linking it to some of his other more historical work, I will also present aspects of his broad framework within the context of the often overlooked second volume of this work, in which several of his colleagues discuss their ethnographic work within this broad frame.

Finally, I will offer a critique of de Certeau's generalized framework on the basis that it tended to overemphasize, or at least has often been understood in a way that overemphasizes the everyday experience of individuals in modernity, to the detriment of a richer understanding of the vernacular relations between the individual and the social. In that vein, I will discuss one of de Certeau's most well-known concepts, the idea of walking as a kind of expressive tactic, in the context of geospatial digital technology. Using two key examples drawn from geospatial digital technology use in the Boston area that reflect some of the diverse contexts in which vernacular expressions and everyday interactions take shape, I will show the way in which de Certeau's concept should be usefully expanded to make room for a more robust examination of vernacularity in both online and offline spaces, and how this expression, in turn, opens up space to reconsider one of the central concepts of performance theory: the event.

### **A Brief Take of the American Folkloristic Reception of De Certeau**

Since its publication in English, de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* has impacted a variety of works by American folklorists, especially those focused on the study of space and place or media. The concepts developed in *The Practice* (or its precursor essay "On the Oppositional Practices of Everyday Life," 1980), such as the distinction between strategies and tactics, as well as de Certeau's thinking on consumption and resistance, and movement in urban spaces, have frequently been cited in the works of American folklorists.<sup>2</sup> Despite this, its common use has not generally been linked to de Certeau's broader thinking about folklore or the history of folkloristics.

"The disproportionate success of *The Practice of Everyday Life*," writes Ian Buchanan, "has...cast a shadow over everything else that de Certeau has written, such that it is read either in exclusion of the rest of the oeuvre or as its hermeneutic keystone" (Buchanan 2000, 3). This is no less true in folkloristics than in other cultural disciplines. In large part, folklorists have been content to simply adapt Certeaudian ideas about consumption and expression, strategies and tactics, space and place, to the study of folkloric expression that takes shape within the institutional constraints of contemporary structures of power.<sup>3</sup>

This is not to say that folklorists have not made good use of these concepts, or that they have not occasionally dipped into other pieces of his scholarship. And certainly the concepts developed most prominently in *The Practice of Everyday Life* are among the most compelling statements of de Certeau's thinking about the "popular,"

“folklore,” or the “everyday” in his oeuvre. But, it is notable that de Certeau’s long and prominently placed concern for folklore and folklore studies has gone largely unremarked upon by the very scholars who might best be qualified to further develop or contend with his ideas.

There are exceptions, of course, to this general trend.<sup>4</sup> One of the most notable is Harris Berger and Giovanna Del Negro’s consideration of de Certeau in *Identity and Everyday Life* (2005). Though only developing a brief discussion of the application of de Certeau in the study of everyday life, mainly confined to his thinking about resistance and power, Berger and Del Negro do note of the two volumes *The Practice of Everyday Life* that their

[C]onnections with folklore studies are not accidental. A careful reading of volume one of *The Practice* reveals de Certeau’s awareness of both the classics of European folklore (Vladimir Propp and Antti Aarne; see de Certeau [1974] 1984, 19) and the early statements of performance theory in American folklore (Richard Bauman and Joel Sherzer; see de Certeau [1974] 1984, 81, 217 n.4). Likewise, in volume two of *The Practice* de Certeau et al. describes the methodology of folklore research as “the socioethnographic analysis of everyday life” and explicitly cites these methods as one of the bases of their project. ([1980] 1998)<sup>5</sup>

What follows in the next section, then, will not necessarily be revelatory to those folklorists who have long engaged with de Certeau’s theoretical program; instead, it will hopefully deepen and expand upon the existing readings of de Certeau’s work by tying it to other elements of his oeuvre. Notably, however, it will attempt to perform a kind of reversal of the dynamic noted by Buchanan: it will re-read *The Practice of Everyday Life* in light of other elements of de Certeau’s scholarship.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Beauty of the Dead: A History of Folklore Studies**

“In recent years, especially since 1960, scholarship in the service of popular culture has been of Marxist inspiration, or at least ‘populist’ in spirit,” de Certeau, Dominique Julia and Jacque Revel wrote in a 1980 essay, “but does the scientific *operation* it undertakes obey different laws than it did in the past? On the contrary, it seems to be dominated by the mechanisms of age-old excommunications...to conceal what it claims to show” (de Certeau 1986, 121).

This opening statement encapsulates much of de Certeau’s thinking about the history of folklore studies. Tracing its development in successive stages from the late eighteenth century to the “heyday of folklore” in France’s Third Republic (1870-1940), the authors argue that the eighteenth century aristocratic vogue for “the popular” concealed a powerful movement toward the domination of the peasantry. This movement involved both exotification and suppression, under a cloak of celebration. “The idealization of the “popular,” as they put it, “is made all the easier if it takes the form of a monologue. The people may not speak, but they can sing...The intent [of folklorists] is *both* to *collect*...and to *reduce* (de Certeau 1986, 122).

It is, then, the emergence of a conceptualization of and procedure for the preservation and study of folklore that signals the death of vernacular culture as an alternative locus of power, at least in the overt sense, to the culture of the elite. Folklorists, de Certeau, Julia, and Revel argue, in a dynamic Barbara Kirhsenblatt-Gimblett (1998, 299-300) would later refer to as part of “folklore’s crisis,” “arrive at the moment a culture has lost its means of self-defense” (de Certeau 1986, 123). This combination of obsessive preservation combined with the shattering dominance predicated on the insertion of power into the everyday gave rise to what the author call the “castrating cult of the people,” a designation that could just as easily be applied to de Certeau’s thinking about the contemporary cultural studies of the 1970s as they could to the study of the popular at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The governing ideologies driving the emergence of this obsession with the folk were not static, however, and therefore, in order to understand the development of the politics of culture in folklore studies, scholars must examine, at each point, its “subjacent postulates” (de Certeau 1986, 123). For instance, following the domination imbricated with the origins of folklore studies in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, by the mid-nineteenth century, the authors describe folklore as taking on a paternalist role vis-à-vis its subject. The collection of folklore by this time, embodied especially in the works of Charles Nisard (1808-1890), is not just a chronicle of its elimination by the elite, but a protective function executed by the elite on behalf of the incompetent peasant. In this view, de Certeau and his colleagues observe, “the people are *children* whose original purity it is befitting to preserve by guarding them against evil readings” (de Certeau 1986, 124, original emphasis).

Yet, in an odd twist of fate, the emergence of “folklore studies” as a fully formed professional disciplinary practice in France in the 1870s developed this paternalist logic into an even more complex ideological system:

[I]ts intent was to situate, reconnect, guarantee. What interested it was almost the opposite of censorship: reasoned integration. Popular culture was thus defined as patrimony, in accordance with a two-pronged grid that was both historical (the intrapolation of themes guarantees a historical commonality) and geographical (their general presence throughout a certain space bears witness to the cohesiveness of that space)...Thus secured, the popular domain ceased to be the disquieting world Nisard worked so hard to exorcize and confine less than a quarter century before. Folklore ensured cultural assimilation of a henceforth reassuring museum. (de Certeau 1986, 124)

This, then, is the basic outline of de Certeau’s historical critique of both the conceptualization of folklore and the discipline of folklore studies, as well as the core of his critique of cultural studies in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Interestingly, however, it is also the core of his larger understanding of the workings of modernity. As Tom Conley has observed, de Certeau saw a close link between the historical development of folklore studies and the larger ideological framework imposed by Enlightenment modernity:

Enlightenment comes of exclusion; what is “repressed” then surfaces in mystical expression....As time proceeds, areas that are associated with folklore – regional hagiographies, local legend, communal practices that resisted or took place alongside formal institutions posed by centralized power from without– become part of a mystical heritage. (Conley 1988, xii)

In other words, whether through an exotification of the “folk” or a conversion of religion into “mysticism,” modernity marginalized these alternative loci of cultural power. Not destroying them outright, they instead come to stand outside of formal structures of knowledge (and, thus, in some ways everyday experience) and can only be comprehended by the scholarly “monologue” that is produced to recontextualize them on behalf of the public.<sup>7</sup> For example, de Certeau, speaking of the history of economic, social, and political rationalization, points out that, through this process, “[a] rift is thus cut between reason and its ‘remainder’ -or between the discourses of *action* and the more or less exploitable mass of *sayings* lacking ‘force’” (de Certeau 1988b, 170-171, original emphasis).

It was within this larger understanding of the modern ideologies of secularization starting in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, then, that de Certeau would later place his critical history of folklore studies, an epistemological history he sees as in many ways analogous to the history of secularization and also placed within it. Understanding the situatedness of his critique here is crucial for several reasons. Most pragmatically, it speaks to the importance de Certeau attributes to folklore and folklore studies within the history of modernity by linking it to the area that was perhaps of the greatest interest to him: the de-centering of religion in modern life. As Ian Buchanan has observed, the religious dimensions of de Certeau’s work are both a key to its comprehension and often overlooked. “It is like a thorn in the side of strictly secular critics,” Buchanan writes, “they want to use his insights and methods but don’t know how to handle his religious conviction so they suppress it” (Buchanan 2000, 11). Developing a similar line of argumentation, Joseph Moingt argues that de Certeau’s entire historiographical project is founded on the basis of his rootedness in Christian teachings. Pointing out de Certeau’s understanding that “history...functions on the basis of absence that it works to fill,” Moingt argues that, “the whole *oeuvre* of Michel de Certeau is the story of the ‘Abrahamic journey’ that goes from the experience of God to that of the ‘quotidian’, this latter being the challenge thrown down to the former, but also its resource, when the experience of absence finds its being satisfied by the desire that maintains it” (Moingt 1996, 482-3, original italics).

De Certeau’s linking of the forces that broke apart religion as a viable alternative to the Enlightenment, to the forces that similarly shattered and suppressed folk culture, go a long way to suggest the importance that he accorded to the study of folklore and its disciplinary development in his larger intellectual system. On a broader level, however, this link is also important because the basic understanding of how the marginalizing structures inherent in modernity operated on religion and folklore, should now be expanded to all aspects on our everyday experience.

“Marginality,” as de Certeau has famously put it “is today no longer limited to minority groups, but is rather massive and pervasive; this cultural activity of the non-producers of culture, an activity that is unsigned, unreadable, and unsymbolized, remains the only one possible for all those who nevertheless buy and pay for the showy products through which a productivist economy articulates itself” (de Certeau 1988a, xvii). Therefore, it is only within this carefully developed historical framework, predicated on an understanding of the historical processes of the secularization and “folklorization” of culture, that de Certeau ultimately offers his familiar arguments about the everyday “ways of operating” from within the structures of modernity.

### **Local Stabilities and Locative Legends: Understanding De Certeau *on* Folklore**

To understand de Certeau’s theoretical program for the study of culture against the backdrop of his historical thinking is important both because of the richness it adds to our picture of de Certeau’s scholarship, but also because it highlights the productive aspects of his historical critique. As Ben Highmore points out, de Certeau’s thinking about the ideological constructions of the scholarly work in general, including the history of folkloristics and ethnology, were not simply morbid reflections on the past crimes of scholarship. Instead, de Certeau uses these observations as both cautionary tale and suggestive model for future scholarly endeavors. As Highmore puts it:

The epistemological position of [de Certeau’s] ‘scriptural economy’ is designed... to solicit two attitudes. One is a recognition of the unavoidable complicity that is attendant on all forms of scholarly work. This shouldn’t be self-flagellating guilt, but as an epistemological reminder, one designed to bring humility into the business of scholarly work and to increase an epistemological commitment to the real. The other attitude is an epistemological optimism that is not only aimed at the past and the ethical obligation to hear lost voices, but also aimed at the future and the possibility of a different archetectonics of the archive that might allow a multitude of voices to be much more than a chorus of roaring silence: to make culture hospitable to the voices that inhabit it. (Highmore 2006, 93)<sup>8</sup>

This “archetectonics of the archive,” Highmore points out, is predicated on tracing the existing silences in scholarly works. By exposing, in de Certeau’s terms, this “negative silhouette of the problematics displayed black on white in scholarly books,” scholars can explore a “geography of silence” or a “geography of the eliminated” (de Certeau 1986, 131). While acknowledging that “any organization presupposes repression,” de Certeau offers hope for the possibility that there may be a form of organization that does not function “according to a hierarchical social distribution of cultures” (de Certeau 1986, 136).

If de Certeau was hopeful about the possibility of finding paths to include previously excluded voices, even if only by tracing their absence, the actual inclusion of specific voices or the consideration of the diverse details of human sociocultural experience

does not loom large in first volume of *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Instead, this volume, as Pierre Mayol observes was largely, “working on objects carved out of the social field in only a speculative way (*the neighborhood, the everyday life*)” (de Certeau 1998, 8). This is, of course, part of what the second volume, written mainly by Mayol and Luce Giard but supervised by de Certeau, was intended to do: to particularize the general theory offered in the first volume.<sup>9</sup>

However, Ian Buchanan notes that one feature that makes de Certeau’s work distinct from other contemporary approaches is its attention to the general, standing outside of any specific politics of identity. “Unlike the current trend among cultural studies thinkers,” Buchanan observes, “de Certeau did not interest himself in the politics of identity...[his] interest was rather in the impersonal, the non-individual, that which spoke through the individual subject, rather than what he or she thought or had to say” (Buchanan 2000, 97).<sup>10</sup>

While it is true that de Certeau’s writing seems largely unconcerned with specific individuals (or the politics of identity after the fashion of Marxist-inspired cultural studies), we should also attend to the fact that his writings depict the conditions of modernity as largely fracturing cohesive social life.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, we note, the tactical practices to which de Certeau’s general theory (and even its application) pay so much attention are largely construed as individualized activities. Walking in the city, reading, cooking: all of these can be social activities, of course, but in de Certeau’s writings, they clearly are not. Instead, they stand in for a disappeared or disappearing sociocultural life. As de Certeau phrases it in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, in the contemporary situation, “[i]ncreasingly constrained [by technical systems], yet less and less concerned with these vast frameworks, the individual detaches himself from them without being able to escape them and can henceforth only try to outwit them, to pull tricks on them.” However, importantly he also observes that, “[t]hese ways of reappropriating the product – system, ways created by consumers, have as their goal a *therapeutics for deteriorating social relations* and make use of techniques of re-employment in which we can recognize the procedures of every day practices” (de Certeau 1988a, xxiv, original emphasis).

Picking up on this aspect in de Certeau’s work, Simon Bronner observes that a de Certeauian view suggests that, “[f]olk culture can be read in the reference to “local stabilities,” which... “break down . . . , no longer fixed by a circumscribed community” (de Certeau 1984, xx), [and hence] [f]olklore is a form of marginalised cultural production” (Bronner 2012, 36).

In one sense, then, as Bronner argues here and as we saw above, marginalized cultural forms, those such as religious thinking and folklore, which de Certeau saw as historically marginalized in similar ways, have now become the norm. In the current condition of modernity, *all* forms of everyday culture have become marginal, and hence susceptible to tactical use. And yet, building on Bronner’s excerpting on de Certeau, we should also see that with the breakdown of circumscribed community and local stabilities, everyday culture is executed only on an *ad hoc*, individualized

scale. As Yoni Van Den Eede has observed, the development and expansion of the technological systems of late modernity have played a crucial role in this process of pervasive marginalization, which in turn yields the possibility of a totalized dominance of the everyday. Pointing out that, even in the 1980s, de Certeau was taking note of the changing model of the strategic, Van Den Eede emphasizes that, “[i]t used to be based on a ‘proper’ that was separated from everything else, but now that proper becomes the whole....As a result of this, ‘[t]actics...are no longer embedded in communities and consumers are becoming ‘immigrants,’ for there is no longer an ‘elsewhere’ (Van den Eede 2012, 33).

In some places, of course, we do see suggestions in de Certeau’s writing that meaningful pockets of local stabilities continue to exist. Perhaps the best example of this is in Mayol’s description of the role of Robert the Grocer as a neighborhood fixture (de Certeau et al. 1998, 71-83). Yet, Highmore has usefully observed that there is a different quality to instances like those of Robert as they are discussed in de Certeau’s work. Rather than being examples of the continued flourishing of a meaningful and productive everyday social and cultural life within modernity, they instead seem to be construed as vestiges.

Within the terms of de Certeau’s theorizing about everyday life, the example of Robert’s store evidences a number of features. Significantly, it shows a tenacious ability to continue certain practices in the face of disruption. This can be understood both as a stubbornness in regard to modernization, as well as a ‘tricky’ adaptation of a modern form to ancient ends: the newly designed shop is made to fit the persistent practices of easy conviviality...For de Certeau this is not a generalized practice; its singularity must be insisted upon –this shop, these practices, here and now. (Highmore 2006, 110-111)

Certainly, as Highmore later points out, de Certeau was sensitive to the plurality of experiences, practices, and meanings within everyday life in modernity (114), yet this should be qualified by noting that the singularity of practices appears to carry with it an ambivalence about the permanence of these local stabilities. While pockets of local stability may endure by tactically retooling or operating covertly from within modernity, the lion’s share of tactical operation appears to be done on the level of the individual as a continually shifting response to changing conditions. After all, tactical action is a “therapeutics” for deteriorating social relations, not an antidote.

Even so, by re-reading de Certeau’s general theory in light of the changed technical systems of the early twenty-first century, we will see that even these individualized ways of operating have begun to merge in significant ways with the vestigial points of socialization originally laid out by de Certeau and his colleagues. In this merger, this coming together of individual tactical resistance and points of local stability, we may find a new pathway for the study of individual expression and social tradition that has been characteristic of contemporary folkloristics. To demonstrate this possibility, we should consider some ethnographic examples within which we can more concretely trace the contours of this merger.

### **Aggregation and Multiple Vernacularity: Reading De Certeau for the Future**

As Eric Gordon and Adriana de Souza e Silva have noted, as more and more elements of individual and social life have become “located or locatable” through the integration of digital technologies, especially mobile technologies, “geography becomes the organizational logic of the web.” This “networked locality” is reflected not only in the increasing prevalence of locative or location aware technologies, but also in the ability to engage with highly localized, place-specific information across geographic distances (Gordon and de Souza e Silva 2011, 2-3). The two examples that follow, a Twitter post pulled onto a hyperlocal news site in Boston and a series of posts on a neighborhood Facebook group, represent different possible configurations of net locality. This range of configurations offers a suggestive set of contexts in which we can usefully expand upon de Certeau’s notion of walking in the city in the context of the geospatialized experience of the everyday.

Example One: On her way home to her apartment in South Boston, MA, one night in May of 2013, Alison Rush spotted a large opossum scurrying across her front stoop. Like many city dwellers, Alison was excited to see such a large wild animal in a densely urban neighborhood like Southie. She quickly snapped a picture of the creature with her phone and posted the picture to her Twitter feed, where it could be viewed by the friends and acquaintances who follow her there. Within ten minutes, her Twitter followers (as of early 2016, Rush had less than seventy followers) were commenting on the picture, sharing their experiences with opossum, joking with Rush, and offering her advice for what to do with the creature.

In addition, she and several of her followers tagged the post to Adam Gaffin, a hyperlocal journalist in Boston whose site, Universal Hub, serves as a kind of clearing house for local news and discussion. The site offers readers a customizable stream of local news, drawn both from mainstream news sources and from various social media, including personal blog and Twitter accounts. These streams can be filtered by topic, but also by neighborhood or location. Within an hour, the picture of the possum and a link to her Twitter post had been placed on the Universal Hub feed with the headline “Fat and Sassy on the Steps of Southie.” By the next morning, the users who frequent the site were discussing other places they had seen opossums in the neighborhood, untangling the tricky linguistic history of the term “opossum” vs. “possum,” and sharing various verbal and visual opossum-related jokes.

Elsewhere, I have suggested that the geospatialized sociocultural interactions enabled by digital technology, of which these two sets of interactions are a clear example, force scholars of culture to reexamine our conventional understanding of the spatio-temporality of culture (Buccitelli 2013). We can no longer afford to think of “digital culture” as something set apart from everyday cultural production and reception in other realms; neither can we continue to overlook the important ways that the interactions enabled by these technologies have retooled the conventionally understood boundaries of space and time in everyday life. Instead, we find that the

diverse and layered use of these technologies in everyday life has opened up the possibility for intensely localized and geospatially-marked interactions that extend across space and time.

In this example we find that, the initial poster has recorded in digital spaces her reaction to what in physical spaces was a minor and ephemeral experience, but one tied deeply to its physical location. In doing so, she makes the cultural dimensions of the event open to an almost endless series of vernacular multiplications. For instance, by sharing the pictures on Twitter, Rush opens up the experience to reception and discussion by personal acquaintances on their personalized Twitter feeds. Here it becomes perhaps part of the basis for the ongoing social relationships developed among her relatively small group of followers. In a second process, by tagging Gaffin, Rush moves to convert her experience into informational points on the larger conceptual map in the culture of the local community and, as such, to a point which can give rise to a moment of shared cultural production outside of their personal circle of acquaintances.

Another dimension of these examples, however, illustrates what I have elsewhere suggested is the tendency of digital platforms to enable the temporal extension and durability of what in offline spaces might otherwise be much more temporally condensed and ephemeral discursive events (Buccitelli 2012). While discussions in face-to-face settings are unlikely to occur continuously over the course of thirty-six hours, digital contexts routinely involve discursive exchanges that stretch over longer periods. Also, the extended performance events, unlike many face-to-face performances, leave a durable record that can be accessed at later points, and in doing so form the potential seeds for future performances as well.

Example Two: Just after 9AM on February 11, 2016, a young woman living in East Boston announced on an East Boston Facebook group that she had just gotten a job at the nearby Edward Lawrence Logan Airport, a longstanding but controversial fixture in neighborhood folk geography (Buccitelli 2016, 16). Noting that she needed to be at work at 3:30 AM, she asked for help finding the best walking route from her home on Paris Street to the airport entrance. Congratulating her, other people in the group also offered her detailed advice, often based on their own experiences as workers at the airport, of the shortest walking routes, which parks were closed at what times, which public bus lines would be running, as well as private hotels that offer shuttle services that she could take advantage of.

By the afternoon, local women were also interjecting into the discussion concerns for her safety, being out on the streets at such an early hour of the night. An initial burst of conversation on this topic mainly between four women [P1-4] and later by a man [P5], which lasted for just over an hour, was then followed by many more comments in the ensuing hours.

P1: At 3:30 am? Take a cab!!

Like · Reply · 1 · February 11 at 7:18pm

P2: I would not be walking in the community at that hour. Women have been attacked in the wee hours.

Like · Reply · 7 · February 11 at 7:35pm

P1: I'm with you [P2]

Like · Reply · February 11 at 7:41pm

P3: LISTEN TO [P2]!!!

Like · Reply · 3 · February 11 at 8:10pm

P4: I would take a cab myself but she asked for walking directions

Like · Reply · February 11 at 8:18pm

P1: It's too dangerous to walk there isn't a job in the world that's worth losing my life for or getting hurt for!!

Like · Reply · February 11 at 8:21pm

P4: See if there is someone at your job who can give you a ride. I'm sure you aren't the only one who has to report in at that time

Like · Reply · February 11 at 8:22pm

P5: I walked my wife to the bus stop, then walked back to bed lol

Like · Reply · 4 · February 11 at 8:23pm

P5: Now i drive her in as often as i can

Like · Reply · 1 · February 11 at 8:23pm

The posts following this conversation continued through the night, presenting further information and narratives about experiences walking in the neighborhood, different possible routes, and issues of personal safety. The final post the following morning, made by a local man, offered both a similar set of commentary on his daily walking practices, his previous experiences walking in the neighborhood, and commentary on crime in the area.

P6: When I walk from the shaws area, i walk east along grove street to the East Boston Greenway, then north to the East Boston Memorial Park and right across to the Airport Shuttle that runs all night. That walk is usually well lit, and not gates to close. I have never seen anyone threatening or anything like that when I do that walk at odd times. I think there is a way into the the Memorial Park from Porter street if Grove street is too far south.

Like · Reply · February 12 at 7:34am

Along with these comments, the poster also uploaded a digital image of a map showing the walking route he described. This last move underlines the reversal of the situational dynamics between examples one and two. In the first example, the Twitter poster, Alison Rush made use of digital technologies to both record her experience of personal movement as it happened, and to convert that experience into multiple social situations in which discourse or narrative could take shape. By contrast, in this example, the original poster used a digital social space to engage in a conversation with other local people about their tactics of movement through the neighborhood, in the hopes of informing her own tactical practices. Here, rather than tactical movement giving rise to multiple discursive spaces, the latter will (potentially) give rise to the former.

Although the emerging dynamics I have outlined are taking shape through the cultural instrumentalization of newly popularized technologies, there is an obvious overlap with de Certeau's discussion of the tactics of walking in the city. Through their tactics of spatial movement in urban neighborhoods, de Certeau famously posited, individuals form spatial narratives by movement through, or consumption of the text of, urban geography. These narratives form a locus of individualized everyday resistance to the powerful institutional forces that have generally shaped urban geographies (de Certeau 1988a, 91-110).

While de Certeau envisioned individual tactics of walking in the city as a kind of remediation for the loss of these vernacular social sites of cultural production, the conditions we find emerging through the overlay of digital spaces on to physical spaces suggest not just a reemergence of a single set of vernacular sites, but a situation of multiplied vernacularities. Note, for instance, that in situations like the ones described above, subjects articulate their own forms of resistance through their personal tactics of walking, while also simultaneously engaging in several social processes of discourse and narration that reinvest urban spaces with social meaning. First, by creating an annotative layer of digital information that is editable and accessible through mobile devices such as smartphones and PDAs, a subject's individual tactical movements through the urban landscape come to shape the course of everyday physical movements for others who access and respond to these annotations through their own physical movements. People make choices about where and how to walk based not only on information but also narrative and discourse about local spaces that they receive digitally. These choices then can be continually annotated on digital representations of physical space or in geospatially-keyed accessible forms in digital spaces. Hence, the activity of walking, which, in the context of de Certeau's original treatment appeared to have limited, if any, potential as a social form, now takes on a dimension of sociality through its ability to *aggregate* vernacular annotations by multiple subjects based on each person's consumption and re-articulation of *both* institutionally structured spaces and the everyday movements of previous subjects through these spaces, as Casey Schmitt has similarly observed in his elegant study of the "tactical trail" in this volume.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, by creating streams of locative discourse on their mobile devices through social technologies such as Twitter, Facebook, and Foursquare, many users now track their own physical movements through urban space while simultaneously discussing these movements with other people. Accordingly, we might also use examples such as these to usefully expand our consideration of performance to accommodate cases in which we see everyday individualized tactical practices, de Certeau's classic instances of "poaching" or "walking in the city," as now coming together, sometimes simultaneously, with social performance events, which are both, in turn, made part of the aggregation of localized social knowledge that forms a key component of the "shapeable, contestable norm within which social agency can be enacted" (Bronner 2012, 40). This hybrid tactic of "walking in the city" is thus constitutive of a nearly endlessly multipliable set of vernacularities<sup>13</sup>, layered everyday operations that can bring together

[K]nowledge of surroundings, daily trips, relationships with neighbors (politics), relationships with shopkeepers (economics), diffuse feelings of being on one's territory (ethology), so many indices whose accumulation and combination produce and then organize the social and cultural apparatus according to which urban space becomes not only the object of knowledge, but a *place of recognition*. (de Certeau et al. 1998, 13)

While Robert's shop in Croix-Rousse appeared to be a singular instance of "stubborn" and covert conviviality in the face of a modernity that is overwhelmingly destructive of local social relations, the new possibilities for social encounter that are opened in the digital spaces surrounding these digital annotations at least indicate the *potential* for a renewed or reinvigorated set of "local stabilities."

In other words, these vernacularities, because of their ability to aggregate and layer everyday individual tactical action *and* give rise to social discourses and performances, might offer a route to *reconstitute* rather than "substitute for" "local legends...[which] permit exits, ways of going out and coming back in, and thus habitable spaces" (de Certeau 1988a, 107).<sup>14</sup> The possibility of multiplying and aggregating everyday tactical practices through the increasingly pervasive and deep integration of digital technologies into our daily experiences surely has broad ramifications that must be studied carefully.

### **Conclusion: Multiplied Vernaculars, Performance, and the Event**

Of performance, a key epistemological category in American folkloristics, Bronner, following Elizabeth Fine, has observed that:

[W]hile variations exist in the use of performance, for most American folklorists applying the concept, the important principles are that: folklore is identified as aesthetically marked events (rather than textual items) situated in an observable, specific frame or stage conducive to artistic communication (usually small groups and settings set apart from ordinary life); performers take responsibility for presentation

of this artistic material to an audience; performers strategically shape expressions in response to the immediate context and personal motivations, public purposes, and collateral effects; and perceptions of the meaning of the performance may vary with different segments of the audience and performers, and in different times and settings, and those perceptions are valid and discoverable in ethnographic observation. (Bronner 2012, 30)

Although a useful corrective to the often overly textual methodologies that held sway at earlier moments in American folkloristics, performance approaches have frequently been criticized for their overemphasis on the particularity of performance events (for example, Jones 1979; Bronner 1988, 97; Dundes 2005). While the unique features of any given performance are, of course, deeply relevant to understanding how meaning emerges in this context, the interconnections between these events and previous performances, or everyday practices have not been as extensively considered. Bronner has suggested that

The criticism of performance of neglecting the past and empirical evidence may be obviated with considerations of historic predispositions and precedents while preserving the ethnographic observation of symbolic communication in the socially constructed frames of practice. (Bronner 2012, 40)

To this, however, I would like to add another dimension. While a consideration of the “historic predispositions and precedents” through a practice-oriented view of performance helps to place a single performance within the appropriate social framework of everyday practice, we should also consider the ways in which digital technologies are increasingly commonly aggregating, multiplying, and layering both practices and performances both at a single temporal point (the initial temporally extended discursive event) and across time (the durable trace).<sup>15</sup> So a key question for further consideration, which will require further attention than can be given here, is how we might appropriately rework of our understanding of the event, and its attendant relation to everyday practices in heavily mediated environments.

Through a re-reading of de Certeau’s larger scholarship on folklore and folklore studies, we can more deeply appreciate his understanding of the conditions of modernity. Folklore is not simply something to which de Certeau’s work could be usefully applied, but in fact, a key feature of his larger intellectual program. By understanding folk cultures as alternative loci of cultural power that have been marginalized by the same disciplining of knowledge that has contributed to secularization, de Certeau articulated a historical vision of the processes, in which folklorists themselves were complicit, which have de-contextualized these loci of cultural power from their social centers. These have, in turn, produced conditions under which the bulk of everyday social and cultural experience exists in marginality, punctuated by vestiges of “conviviality” which recall the possibilities of public socialization that have nearly vanished from the contemporary experience. It is against this backdrop that we find the individual centrally positioned in de Certeau’s work, as the key actor in everyday

life: an isolated and marginalized figure whose tactics offer brief possibilities for re-engagement within a larger framework of social disintegration.

Finally, understanding de Certeau in this way calls our attention to the ways in which the processes of tactical action highlighted in his works form the basis for an exploration of the ways in which individualized tactical action and renewed social discourses and performance are merging together in the newly available everyday cultural situations enabled by digital technologies. Defined by new expressive conditions which include the temporal extension of performative events and the durability and accessibility of much of the previously ephemeral expressiveness of the everyday, a close examination of these situations will help to expand the folkloristic and ethnological understanding of the ways in which the performance event in an expanded temporal framework under current conditions is now potentially keyed both to individualized spatial practices and to durable and accessible previous performances (often concerned with a discussion of tactical practice). Under these conditions a single situation can become simultaneously event *and* text, individual *and* social, ephemeral *and* lasting. Therefore, following the question of how to reconceive our understanding of the event, a second question emerges: to what extent do these shifting dynamics offer the possibility for a genuine reconstitution of the largely disappeared local stabilities of folk culture? While not assured, it is at least possible that folklorists and ethnologists could play a role in this process of reconstitution similar to the role that de Certeau saw them playing in its destruction. In demonstrating and carefully articulating the productive merger of individual and social in the emergent tactics of the everyday, folklorists might indeed “allow a multitude of voices to be much more than a chorus of roaring silence: to make culture hospitable to the voices that inhabit it” (Highmore 2006, 93). “These arts and practices have always kept existing, though often in an unconscious way, to unexpectedly resurge of late,” Van Den Eede observes, “our task is to stimulate this resurgence” (2012, 37).

### Notes

*I would like to offer my thanks to Casey Schmitt for his advice, expertise, and great patience in helping me prepare this essay.*

- 1 The relationship between folklore and “popular culture” has, of course, been the subject of much discourse in folkloristics. Although I have observed elsewhere that his writings on the subject have not always been adequately understood (Buccitelli 2014), Richard Dorson’s influential mid-century writings (Dorson 1950; 1976) did much to centralize this question in American folkloristics. More recently, however, a steady stream of scholarship has questioned more conventional understandings of this relationship, especially in the context of mass media (See for example, Bluestein 1994; Dégh 1994; Koven 2003; 2007; 2008; De Caro and Jordan 2004; Frank 2011; Foster and Tolbert 2016). While this debate is a crucial one, it is somewhat tangential to the discussion here. Throughout his work, de

Certeau discusses the notion of “popular culture” mainly in the sense that this term was used by the historians of everyday life in the Medieval and Early Modern periods who were de Certeau’s intellectual contemporaries, given his training in France in the 1950s in the history of Early Modern mysticism. Thus, although he does offer some critiques of Marxist schools of popular cultural studies, de Certeau’s usage of the term seems to primarily be concerned with the forms of culture that would fall within the conventional purview of folkloristics.

- 2 *The Practice of Everyday Life* was published in French in 1980 as *L’Invention du Quotidien*. The English translation was first published in 1984. I will cite to the 1984 English translation in this essay. “On the Oppositional Practices of Everyday Life,” written by de Certeau and translated by Frederic Jameson and Carl Lovitt, was published in the journal *Social Text* in 1980. It is described in an editorial note as “an excerpt from Michel de Certeau’s forthcoming book, *Pratiques quotidiennes. Pour une sémiotique de la culture ordinaire*” (3, unnumbered footnote). For a discussion of the history and significance of this title change, see Buchanan 2000, 8-10. See also Timothy J. Tomasik’s brief discussion of the origin of the English title in his translator’s note to volume 2. For examples of works by American folklorists which employ concepts from de Certeau drawn from either the 1980 essay or the 1980/1984 book, see Motz 1998, 342-349; Tangherlini 1999a, 152; 1999b, 99-103; 2000, 47-62; 2003, 137; Koven 2007, 186; Berger and Del Negro 2005, 6-7, 20; Evans 2005, 124-127; Kenny 2007, 318; Landwehr 2007, 133, 141; Berger 2009, 126; Hertzfeld 2009, 135; Miller 2011, 999; Herbergs 2011, 871. Non-US: Narváez 2003, 131; Welz 1999; Paloque-Berges 2010, 124.
- 3 Even more specifically, Nigel Thrift has observed that “Walking in the City,” the seventh chapter of *The Practice of Everyday Life*, has been “anthologized or extracted almost to distraction” (Thrift 2004, 41).
- 4 See, for example, Noyes (2012, 16) for a brief discussion of de Certeau’s thinking about the history of folklore.
- 5 Berger and Del Negro appear to have transposed the date of the beginning of de Certeau’s research efforts on the project (1974) with the publication date of the two volumes of *The Practice of Everyday Life* in French (1980), but their basic commentary and page references to the English translations are accurate.
- 6 While not common in folkloristic work, a growing body of scholarship, most notable Ben Highmore’s *Michel de Certeau: Analysing Culture* (2006), has been attempting to complicate the received understanding of de Certeau in the English-speaking academy since Buchanan made these comments.
- 7 Here we see a dramatic difference between de Certeau’s views about the historical relations between folklore and modernity and those of Marxist critic Luigi Lombardi-Satriani. In his 1983 critical survey of Marxist writing on folklore, Jose Limon characterizes Lombardi-Satriani’s view as being that, “[f]olklore actively contests the hegemony of dominant social orders and it does so in two modes. First, folklore has the capacity for direct contestation; that is, it can directly symbolize and “name” the class enemy in the manner of political jokes and protest songs. However, and of greater interest, we are also told that folklore can also offer indirect contestation “by its presence.” That is, subordinate classes produce a number of autonomous behaviors (largely in the generic realms of ritual and material culture) whose very existence limits the total hegemony of parallel products and behaviors

- emanating from the dominant social order" (Limon 1983, 45-6).
- 8 Stephen Harnett made a similar observation about the productive aspects of de Certeau's work in his 1998 essay "Michel de Certeau's Critical Historiography and the Rhetoric of Maps." Harnett writes: "[D]e Certeau's critical historiography moves us beyond the postmodern injunction against Truth and Transcendence, and, thus, toward a productive combination of the strengths of both rhetorical and philosophical investigation. Indeed, I argue that what makes de Certeau so important, in terms of advancing contemporary debates regarding the relationship between philosophy and rhetoric, is that by engaging in a philosophically informed discussion of historiography, he is able to explicate more fully the importance of rhetoric while grounding this examination in pragmatic, historical studies that advance the breadth of our perspectives on philosophy, rhetoric, and actual historical moments" (285). See also Poster 1992, for further discussion of de Certeau's relationship to poststructuralist thought and the potential his work offers for moving his study of culture beyond the mainline poststructuralist framework.
  - 9 This is one of the reasons that it was unfortunate that a publisher's decision led to the first volume being published independently of the second, and years before. This breaking up of the original work has likely contributed to the tendency to read volume 1 as a self-contained work that functions totally independently of the second volume.
  - 10 Buchanan uses the term "non-individual" here, as I read it, to mean more or less a non-specific individual subject. Van Den Eede (2012, 31), following others, has called this de Certeau's "everyman" or "man without qualities."
  - 11 This is terrain he shares both with other practice theorists, such as Giddens, and with Marxist thinkers as well. For instance, Jose Limon has pointed out of William Fox's scholarship on folklore and technology that "Fox, like Jameson, suggests that the reorganization of society in advanced capitalism has led to the erosion of those social groupings that sustained folklore" (1983, 47).
  - 12 The distinction between the vernacular and the institutional has long been a key feature of many folkloristic studies, including those employing practice, performance, or rhetorical studies frames. For example, Bauman 2008, 33, even argues for the idea that this is a defining feature of folklore studies. But here we see something of the dynamic outlined by Howard (2008a; 2008b; 2010); Manovitch (2009, 324) and (Van Den Eede 2012, 39-40), in which in mediated environments the bright line between vernacular and institutional begins to soften, creating the possibility of what Van Den Eede calls "strategic tactics."
  - 13 Along slightly different lines, Trevor Blank has argued that the pervasive integration of digital technologies in everyday life has resulted in a hybridization of vernacular expression, "the process by which 'real world' discursive practices significantly influence, and are reciprocally influenced by, virtualized discursive practices". Importantly, Blank further observes that these discursive practices "shape the dynamics of interaction across corporeal and virtual context" (Blank 2013, 107). For discussions of concept of hybridity in folk cultur, see also Kapchan 1993; Garcia Canlini et al. 1993; Garcia Canlini 1995; Kapchan and Strong 1999; and Stross 1999.
  - 14 Cultural scholars have, of course, long argued that mass media texts have offered similar opportunities for both creative production, as well as social discourse, though they have often skipped over the moment of individual tactical consumption, in favor of a focus on

the social. See for example, Silverstone (1989) and Jenkins (1992) for discussions of these dynamics in the context of television. Conquergood (2002, 145) offers a brief reflection on the potential for this kind of reconstitution.

- 15 In a certain sense, I am advocating working along both synchronic and diachronic lines of inquiry classically defined by Saussure (1983 [1916]) in the context of linguistics.

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