

CULTURAL ANALYSIS

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY FORUM ON FOLKLORE AND POPULAR CULTURE

Volume 4

Bjarne Rogan

An Entangled Object: The Picture Postcard as Souvenir and Collectible, Exchange and Ritual Communication

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An Entangled Object: The Picture Postcard as Souvenir and Collectible, Exchange and Ritual Communication

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Abstract

The picture postcard craze went hand in hand with the rise of a new consumer culture, a more affluent society, and a new middle class. Modernity is the common denominator and the frame of reference. However, these cards served a multiplicity of uses and functions including as collectibles, ritual communication, and gift exchanges, and were enmeshed in a tangle of relationships. What characterized the craze for the picture postcard a century ago and guaranteed its enormous spread and popularity was precisely these enmeshed functions, concrete as well as symbolic, and the many layers of meaning invested in the postcard. Few material items are more aptly characterized as "an entangled object" than the picture postcard of the Golden Age.

Indeed, there is one who corresponds with me too, but he's so foolish that he writes letters. Did you ever hear about anything so ridiculous? As if I care for a good-for-nothing letter! I cannot put a letter into my album, can I? What nonsense! When I get a real boyfriend I will simply insist that he send me the nicest postcards there are to be bought, instead of pestering me with those dull letters.

(Reflections of an anonymous Norwegian girl, "Brevkort og Backfischer" 1903, 41)

One of the most striking consumption phenomena at the beginning of the 20th century was the craze for the picture postcard.¹ The vogue started between 1895 and 1900 and faded out between 1915 and 1920. These two decades have been called the Golden Age of the picture postcard, and with good reason. The hunger for cards seized both young and old, males and females, in Europe and the USA, and on other continents as well. Except for the mania for the postage stamp, there had never been up to that time a more pervasive and ubiquitous fad for a material item. Roughly estimated, between 200 and 300 billion postcards were produced and sold during this Golden Age.²

The Picture Postcard—an Icon of Modernity

The picture postcard has been the object of several studies. Its production and



The picture postcard was collectible no. 1 for young girls.
Norwegian postcard from 1910, entitled "From the Postcard Shop."

distribution, iconography, and semiotics have been analyzed by—among many others—Carline (1972), Ripert and Frère (1983), Ulvestad (1988), Schor (1992), Bogdan and Marshall (1995), and Geary and Webb (1998). I have discussed the collecting of postcards during the Golden Age myself in three articles (Rogan 1999, 2001a, and 2001b). Nevertheless, research perspectives on the postcard phenomenon have tended to be rather narrow and removed from their broader social and cultural contexts. Their iconography, representational and ideological connections, production techniques, distribution networks, and collecting modes—however fascinating—are only a part of the story. It is not pos-

sible to explain the enormous popularity of this non-essential material item and the billions of cards sold and mailed every year unless we also consider the card as an exchange object, a gift, and a message carrier. What triggered my curiosity about these things were (a) the fact that my research material—present-day collections of postcards from the Golden Age—often contain 50% or more of unused and unmailed cards, and (b) that the written messages generally contain very little information. It struck me that scholarly interest has concentrated on the picture side of the postcard, and that little work has been done on the significance of what is on, or not on, the other side of the card. In this essay, I shall look at both

sides of the postcard, at the messages inscribed by their users as much as at the imagery, and discuss these in terms of exchange ritual and communication.

Aesthetics and communication, ritual and symbol, technology and business, play and action, imagination and remembrance, desire and materiality, commodity as well as subjective experience. . . There seems to be no end to the perspectives that may be applied to the picture postcard, even if few of us will go as far as Östman when he stated that, "I. . . maintain that small, nice, mostly valueless picture postcards do have a very important function not only for the study of what is at the bottom of our discourse, but even for a deeper understanding of Man; the picture postcard stands—in a way—at the center of humanness" (1999–2000, 8). Östman himself approaches the phenomenon through a discourse analysis of a functional-pragmatic kind; he is, however, more convincing when it comes to the linguistic-textual analysis than in understanding the postcard as a material object and an agent of action (e.g., as a collectible, a gift).³ An integrated theoretical approach would have been desirable, but is it really possible? So many different theories may be applied, depending on whether the focus is on the postcard as a collectible, a gift, a souvenir, a medium of communication, etc.

A holistic approach to the postcard should take account of the embeddedness of the object in contemporary culture. My point of departure is the postcard not "at the center of humanness" but rather as "an emissary of its culture," or as T.S. Eliot once put it: "Even

the humblest material artefact, which is the product and symbol of a particular civilization, is an emissary of the culture out of which it comes" (T.S. Eliot 1948, qtd. in Briggs 1988, 11). A century ago, the picture postcard meant much more, and very different things, than it does today. It arose out of new technologies and production processes, as a result of industrialization in the latter half of the 19th century. The postcard craze was a response to a new desire for things, created by an unprecedented access to commodities for broader population groups. It was a response to a longing for colorful images, made possible by new reproduction techniques. It was an answer to modern communication needs as mass tourism began to take off on a burgeoning scale. Furthermore, it satisfied new leisure habits, like the collecting interests of women—a group which until then had had few opportunities of finding an accepted outlet for such desires (actually, postcard collecting was started by women). In short, the picture postcard went hand in hand with the rise of a new consumer culture, a more affluent society, and a new middle class. All these developments seem to have coalesced in the picture-postcard boom. Modernity is the common denominator and the frame of reference.

A Golden Age

The illustrated postcard craze, like the influenza, has spread to these islands [Great Britain] from the Continent, where it has been raging with considerable severity.

(The Standard, 1899)

The popularity of the picture postcard rose steadily through the 1890s, as appearance, colors, and printing techniques improved. From the turn of the century, the number of dispatched cards exploded. Europe was virtually flooded with picture postcards; metaphors like "an inundation" and "the letting out of waters" were used by the press, as well as terms like "influenza" and "pest." In 1903, a British paper predicted that within ten years Europe would be buried beneath postcards, as a result of the new "postcard cult." That year around 600 million postcards were dispatched in Great Britain alone. In Germany the number exceeded one billion, and the same quantity is reported from the USA. Japan lagged a bit behind, with only half a billion. England passed the billion-card mark in 1906. It is estimated that seven billion cards passed through the world's post offices in 1905 (Carline 1972; Ripert and Frère 1983).

These numbers do not include all the cards that were bought and put into albums—as souvenirs or as collectibles—without being mailed, during the Golden Age. The collecting zeal followed the same trend, and there is reason to believe that the number of cards bought but not mailed was not very much lower than the enormous numbers that were put in the mail. In 1900, *The Times* reported on this new collecting "mania," adding that it had not yet reached the same heights in Britain as it had in some other countries. Within less than a decade, however, the mania had spread all over the world—even if the picture postcard business in Africa and Asia was probably intended mainly for Western con-

sumption—a conclusion that is based on the fact that most picture postcards from these parts of the world are found in European and American markets and collections today (Geary and Webb 1998). Specialized postcard shops and exchange bourses grew up in most major western cities, but cards could be bought virtually everywhere.

The popularity of the picture postcard was due to several factors, which, analytically, can be sorted into the following four groups. In practice however, any card might fall into several of these categories:

- *The aesthetics of the card.* As a cheap pictorial item in a world where other colored pictures were still rare and expensive, the motif in itself was of high importance. The pictures gave visual pleasures, information about distant places and famous persons, opportunities for longing and dreaming, and pretexts for discussions in the family and conversations at social gatherings, as for example in the very common habit of keeping postcard albums for guests to look at. Postcard albums were the "coffee-table books" of the turn of the century (Rogan 1999) and the cards, with their colorful visual representation of the world, symbolized modernity at large.
- *The card as a souvenir.* The enormous number of all sorts of cards (apart from collections strictly speaking) secured for posterity

in chests and drawers, in recesses and attics, tells its own tale about the drive to uphold the memory of persons, places, and events. All the congratulations cards, but even more the large quantities of cards with local and tourist motifs, testify to their value as souvenirs—souvenirs of persons, of places where someone lived, of sites visited, or of travels undertaken.

- *The card as a collectible.* A new collecting vogue, that of picture postcards, swept over the Western world around 1900. The ordinary collector once more had access to a new, cheap, and ubiquitous pictorial item, as in the early days of stamp collecting. In the first years, collecting postcards was primarily if not exclusively the hobby of young girls and women. There were even collector clubs for ladies only. From around 1905 the men entered the scene and took over the clubs and the journals, which proliferated during the Golden Age.⁴ Close reading of advertisements in British postcard journals confirms that in 1900 the great majority of collectors were women. A similar reading in 1906 shows that men had taken over, outnumbering the women by about five to one (Carline 1972, 66). However, albums that have survived and other scattered evidence indicate that postcard collecting on a more mod-

est scale remained a predominantly female activity (Rogan 1999, 2001a). Women collected motifs like views, landscapes, portraits, and works of art, but men started when more modern motifs appeared, like humorous cards, actresses and "posed beauties," ships, locomotives, and other tourist and transport topics. Serious postcard collecting (as opposed to other postal history collecting, i.e., stamps and philately) claimed aesthetic ideals rather than serial or taxonomic and scientific ones. In the collector's journals, the new, serious (male) collectors sharply criticized the old (female) practice of filling up albums haphazardly. The new (male) elite advocated specialization, the intelligent selection of beautiful or interesting cards, and annotated albums (Rogan 2001a, 2001b).

- *The card as a means of communication.* The driving force behind the postcard, from a postal history point of view, was the need for a practical, cheap, and quick medium for sending short, simple messages. Writing letters was for the elite, not for ordinary people, and for women more than for men. The telegraph, introduced in the 1860s, was until around World War I an expensive way of communicating, mostly used for business purposes. The resistance to open messages that anyone could read was strong—not

least in the upper class, letter-writing milieus, but also from postal authorities. It gradually diminished, however, from the 1870s on, steadily allowing more space on the postcards for the picture and the message.

The above factors—the cards as aesthetic objects, as souvenirs, as collectibles, and as a communication medium—may be termed the "pull" factors. To this should be added some "push" factors, i.e., the rapidly expanding postcard industry, the publishers, agents, and sellers, their advertising and efforts to sell their products.⁵

The Rise and Fall of an Industry

The postcard industry became a big business that quickly created finely meshed, worldwide networks. It became a major economic sector, employing in France alone around 30,000 persons by 1900 (Schor 1992). However, Germany was the leading country for postcard production from late 19th century until around 1910. Hundreds of German companies, some with several factories, produced billions of cards every year. Some of the large postcard factories employed as many as fifteen hundred workers. About thirty of these German firms expanded into the international card market, producing cards with motifs from Norway to the Pacific. Pre-1910 North American postcards were produced mainly in Germany, as were most cards with motifs from the British Empire. Competition was fierce among the producers, and industrial espionage was common; secu-

rity became a major concern, with factory workers sworn to secrecy and visitors kept to a minimum. Each factory developed unique color formulas that were closely guarded as trade secrets and often protected by patents and trademark registration (Woody 1998).

As the types of cards grew more numerous, many firms specialized in products for the tourist industry (*Gruss aus-*, *Greetings from-*, *Souvenir de-*, *Hilsen fra-* cards, and later types), collector's sets, etc. With the economic potential in local view-cards, some German firms accepted millions of small contracts from local clients to document localities—thus creating a historical visual record that encompassed the world. Also, the development of small, inexpensive cameras permitted amateur photographers to make their own photographic postcards; smaller pictures were sent in with mail-order postcard contracts, rephotographed at the factories and conformed to the standard size of postcards—a practice that has been revitalized in the last decade.

The success of the German postcard industry in the early years of the 20th century was due partly to low labor costs but mainly to its hegemony in printing processes. After 1910, the skills of the German printing industry were dispersed when many young printers emigrated to Great Britain, the United States, and elsewhere. But towards World War I, the Golden Age of the postcard was approaching its end. The reasons are complex, but the war itself was a main factor: international as well as national tourism declined markedly, and industrial wartime production was directed

towards more essential, non-luxury objects. When peacetime trade resumed, most postcard companies were out of business. The reduced demand for postcards after the war was not only due to new communications media like the telegraph and the telephone. Another important factor was that the collecting mania was over or its focus had moved on to other items (Woody 1998).

If Germany was the leading postcard producer, British publishers were more active on the distribution side, importing cards from Germany and distributing them through their worldwide networks. As for aggressive advertising, the British postcard publishing company Raphael Tuck and Sons offers a case in point. When Tuck began publishing postcards in 1898–99, they launched a competition with big prizes to those who collected (or rather hoarded) the greatest number of their cards within the space of two years. Duplicates were accepted as long as they bore different postmarks. When the entries were judged, the first award went to a lady from Norwich who submitted over 20,000 cards. Another lady received a special award for a collection of over 2,000 cards from one single series. In a new competition in 1904, it was once again a lady who won the first prize for having collected over 25,000 Tuck's cards, but this time with a gentleman in second place. The enormous quantity of postcards produced, sent, collected, or simply kept created a serious problem: how to dispose of them. Among other things, the use of postcards for papering walls was advocated (as had been done fifty years earlier for postage stamps). In 1906, Tuck

made the disposal of postcards the subject of their third and largest competition, with the title "Home Decoration." Prizes were awarded for the best use of postcards for decorating tables, screens, cupboards, overmantles, etc. The first prize was given for a table mosaic, the second for a screen creation, the third for a decoration of bellows. All the prizewinners were ladies (Carline 1972, 64, 69).

There is not enough space here to discuss all the different types of cards that poured onto the market. Generally speaking, the earliest cards (the "pre-postals") were congratulations cards, then came topographical cards (tourist and local cards) and art reproductions, comic cards, erotic cards, and a long list of types of topical cards. What strikes an observer today is the way that types and functions crossed each other. There were for instance specialized seasonal greeting cards (for Christmas, Easter, Whitsuntide, for birthdays, etc.), but a tourist card, a portrait, a summer scene, or a humor card could also serve as a Christmas or a New Year's card. During the Golden Age, every sort of card might be used for almost any purpose. It seems as if the message (however insignificant it might be, see below) was just as important as the motif and the occasion.

Topographical Cards: The Local Card and the Tourist Card

Two of the most voluminous categories of postcards, to the extent that they may be distinguished from each other, were the local cards and the tourist cards. Local postcards depicted various themes of special interest or immediate importance



Tourists writing postcards in Stockholm, Sweden, 1909.

Photo: Anton Blomberg, Stockholm Stadsmuseum.

to local consumers, i.e., the inhabitants of a region, a town, or a village. Buildings, streets, markets and fairs, shops, or even the interiors of shops were typical motifs, as were activities of every sort on the local level. Factories, even small plants and workshops in the countryside or the village, were favorite themes. The small dairy factory, the local wine cooperative, the village vinegar or potato starch factory, and the local sulphur or bone meal factory were topics that abound in French collections, as do the school house, the first automobile in the village, the policeman, the postman, the milkman, etc. In Norwegian collections, harbors, scenes from fisheries and whaling, the canning industry, etc., play the same role. The variety of local cards is amazing, and there is hardly any village motif that has not served for a postcard.

These postcards were indeed often idiosyncratic in their depiction of local themes, as stated by Geary and Webb (1998, 2). A favorite local theme was

monumental buildings, among which churches and hospitals have a prominent position. One would perhaps think that motifs like mental asylums would be rather rare on postcards. However, Bogdan and Marshall (1995) have collected nearly 1,700 different postcard depictions of American mental asylums, and they believe these are only a fraction of the postcards produced with such motifs.

In this collection more than half the cards have never been mailed. Among the 47% that carry an inscription, less than the half comment upon this special motif. Even an asylum card could be used for a simple, everyday message or a sign of life. An even more special motif, seen with modern eyes, relates to the French experience of World War I. I have found in French postcard collections several depictions of crippled persons sitting in dog-drawn carts; the person depicted had had postcards made of themselves (by means of the mail-order system mentioned above), which they sold to earn a living. The inscriptions on all these local cards, to the extent that they have been mailed and not only bought as souvenirs or collectibles, seldom make mention of the pictorial theme.

In contrast to these locally idiosyncratic motifs stand the conventionalized and stereotypical motifs of the tourist cards. The tourist industry and early mass tourism from the late 19th century

onwards strongly influenced postcard production, and the postcard industry found one of its most profitable outlets in the emerging mass tourism. Typical motifs on these cards are landscape views, snowy mountains, waterfalls, fjords, glaciers, churches, cathedrals, castles, hotels and passenger ships, as well as folkloric themes like national costumes, folk dance scenes, peasants harvesting, etc. Cards could be bought in most kinds of shops, in libraries, in restaurants and railway stations, aboard steamers, from coachmen and street-corner vendors. Tourists are reported to have bought, written, and sent cards in large numbers, as an integral part of the travel experience. From reading travel accounts from the turn of the century, one gets the impression that the cards bought and sent were as important as the sites visited. A British tourist in Germany in 1900 reported that, "[y]ou enter the railway station, and everybody on the platform has a pencil in one hand and a postcard in the other. In the train it is the same thing. Your fellow travelers never speak. They have little piles of picture postcards on the seat beside them, and they write monotonously" (G.R. Sims qtd. in Carline 1972, 64).

We get the same impression from travel accounts from Norway, and especially from authors who participated in mass tourism cruises. From a hotel on the western coast in 1901, a German tourist wrote:

When I entered the hall with all the interesting Nordic wooden carvings, I found the room filled with people, who without exception sat writing.

And what did they write? Picture postcards!! Oh, scourge of all scourges in this century. Like a pest you have fallen over us, and you pursue us into the most desolate valley. No one is safe from you. You are capable of spoiling the most beautiful voyage, the most picturesque landscape, the most serene fjord, the highest lookout point. . . . And what does the tourist do, when your call wakes him up from his silent contemplation of nature? . . . He digs deep into his pocket, brings out his purse and buys, more or less grudgingly, 2, 4, 6, 10, or 20 postcards, according to the number of friends and family. Instead of enjoying the marvelous view of the landscape . . . the tourist sits down and with an unusable pencil scribbles some unreadable lines.

(Laverrenz 1901, 60–61, qtd. in Brudvik 2001)

This tourist's critique of modern times was more rhetorical than really felt, however, as he himself admitted having written and sent fifty-two cards at the last stop in a Norwegian harbor. His excuse was that this was a duty that one should not forget lest one run the risk of turning old friends to lifelong foes. On this occasion, he reports, every single passenger from the cruiser was standing on the road in front of the little local post office writing cards, using house walls, tree trunks, etc., as writing desks. Other tourists along the Norwegian coast relate the same story (Brudvik 2001). Cards could be bought on board and in all ports. Another German, who did a North Cape cruise in 1899, reports that the number of postcards sent from his ship came to

around 20,000—which meant an average of fifty cards for each of the four hundred passengers on board (Haffter 1900). Other tourists again report that the "floating postcard shop" often ran out of cards, just as several of the small, local post offices were emptied of stamps. In one case, a small post office in a desolate Norwegian fjord ran out of postage stamps when 6,000 cards were delivered from one single passenger steamer (Brosi 1906, 148). This is "the age of the picture postcard," an English cruise tourist concluded, adding that tourists no longer needed to remember the views and places visited—it was sufficient to bring home the postcards (Klinghammer 1903).

The Collectible and the Gift

Dear Stanley, I am sending you this postcard. I hope you will like to put it in your postcard album. I hope you are well from your loving Auntie Nellie Rudgley.

(Message on a tourist card with motif from the western coast of Norway, sent in 1906 to England, on a "divided" card with room for longer messages)

"Have you got anything for me, please?" The postman smilingly discloses the contents of his sack to the girls, who beam with joy. "I got 17. How about you?" "Oh, only 15 . . ." Father grumbles something about postage costs and the poor postmen working doubly because of this idiotic collecting craze. But to no avail. . . . Soon after he finds himself eagerly



Postcard sent in 1900 from The Hague to Paris. As the other side of the card was reserved for stamp and address, any greeting or message had to be written on the picture side. The longer the message, the more detrimental to the picture. The inscription (quoted in the text) is about exchange: it confirms the reception of other cards, promises to send more cards, carrying cancellation marks from the depicted sites.

advising them on how to place the postcards in the albums.

(Reflections of an anonymous Norwegian girl, "Brevkort og Backfischer" 1903, 41–44)

The British tourist in Germany in 1900 (cited above) noted on his cruise down

the Rhine that at each stopping-place a waiter was sent ashore with a large consignment of cards for the post. He was astonished to learn that they were mostly addressed by the passengers to themselves in order to secure the appropriate postmark; collectors liked to have their postcards carry a cancelled stamp (Carline 1972, 64). In France, collectors could bring their cards to any post office and have them cancelled without sending them, whereas the British post office refused this concession, to the dismay of British collectors.

To have the correct cancellation was a main concern for tourists in Norway as well. From the ports where the steamships called, we have reports of thronging at the post offices, long queues, and sweating postmasters applying stamps and cancellations as fast as they could (Brudvik 2001). On their arrival at the North Cape, this practice would culminate. In 1897 a Danish tourist reported that the two hours passed on the plateau were spent writing cards. The visitors were allowed to have them cancelled there with a postmark stamp reading "Nordkapp," brought along from the ship, as there was actually no post office on the plateau. Then the cards were brought back to the ship and delivered to the nearest post office (Andræ 1919, 100). On a cruise on the German ship *Auguste Victoria* in 1899, one of the crew, who served as a "Postmaster," had to carry 4,000 cards up to the plateau of North Cape to have them cancelled there. "The poor man showed me his hand afterwards," a German tourist reported, "it was full of blisters from the stamping" (Haffter 1900, 53). A few years later, tour-

ists on the plateau found a postmark stamp and a stamp pad on a table on the plateau; they were now allowed to do it themselves for the price of ten cents a card (Lausberg 1912, 348).⁶

Why this fad for cancellation marks? There were probably two reasons. One was to authenticate the object, which was important to the collector, especially to the male collector focusing on postal items. The other reason was to authenticate the travel experience, i.e., the fact of having been to certain places, which was of importance to the souvenir gatherer and probably also to those tourists who wanted to impress family and friends at home (Belk 1997).

It is obvious that many of the cards were gifts to collectors or exchange items. If we turn to the inscriptions on the cards, phrases like "Sent with affection to swell your collection," "Add me to your collection," etc., are common. In the following (exceptionally) long inscription, the exchange aspect appears clearly:

Thank you a thousand times for the card from . . . and the two from Robinson that I received recently and gave me much pleasure. Two friends will be going to Rotterdam and Amsterdam for the Pentecost. I will profit from their journey by furnishing them with cards from those places, so they will carry cancellation marks from the towns they represent. I leave on the 9th for Bruxelles, from where I shall not forget you. [. . . greeting + signature]

(Postcard with local motif, sent in 1900 from The Hague to Paris. French inscription.)

The two following inscriptions show that it must have been common for tourists to take on commissions for collectors. In both cases the tone is formal and the polite *vous*-form is used; the receivers are not close acquaintances:

Madame, I hope that among the series of cards that I send you I will chance to find something that will bring you pleasure. I start by sending this old church in ancient gothic style [. . . Formal greeting and signature]

(Postcard with tourist motif, sent from Stavanger, Norway, to Paris in 1903. French inscription.)

Madame, I beg your pardon for my long delay in answering your latest cards, for which I will express my thanks. I will do my utmost to be more regular in my correspondence next time. [. . . greetings + signature]

(Postcard with tourist motif, sent in 1903 from Stavanger, Norway, to France. French inscription.)

There are many cards with similar inscriptions. In order to facilitate exchange quite a few postcard exchange clubs were established at regional as well as national and international levels. A French club founded in Nancy in 1900 with the special aim of promoting international exchange counted as many as 2,400 members in 1904 (Ripert and Frère 1983). The members exchanged both used and unused cards, but the clubs probably also served as contact centers for the type of exchange that the above

inscriptions represent. It was also common that collectors sent cards as "gifts" to themselves, as the Rhine tourist witnessed (above). A corresponding case, observed by Geary and Webb (1998, 8), was a French colonial civil servant who during the years 1900 to 1925 sent postcards to his parents back home, asking them to keep the cards for his future collection.

The proportion of cards intended primarily for collections, as exchange objects, or as gifts to others or to oneself, must have been high. In addition to cards like those cited above, where the inscriptions clearly disclose the collecting context, there are all the blank, unused cards we find in present-day collections. Moreover, many cards containing ordinary greetings were also essentially items of exchange between collectors. In collections of Golden Age cards that I have studied, with motifs from Norway (from one much visited fjord), from France (local cards from one *département*) and from Egypt (motifs from Alexandria), all collected in the 1980s and 1990s, I have found that the percentage of unused cards ranges from above 50 up to 70, with the highest percentage for tourist cards. Others confirm this result. In the collection of (local) asylum cards referred to above over half of the approximately 1,700 cards were unused (Bogdan and Marshall 1995).

Cards that are bought and kept unused are more likely to survive than used cards, so we cannot infer from these cases that more than half of the cards produced during the Golden Age were bought with the sole intention of keeping, rather than sending, them. However, knowing

the collecting fad of this period, which definitely included mailed cards (including, for example, those mailed in order to procure a cancellation), one may ask which is more amazing: that the percentage of *used* cards that have survived is so low, or that the percentage of *unused* cards is so high? My conclusion so far is that the card had an important function as a gift, whether it was in used and imperfect form or in unused, mint condition, whether it was a gift to other collectors or a gift to oneself. And—as rules

of reciprocity would have it—gifts to other persons entail gifts in return.⁷

Back Page Becomes Front Page

In order to approach the inscriptions on the postcards, a brief account of the formal postal rules and the design of the postcard is necessary (Ulvestad 1988, Rogan 1999). The design of the card played a major role for the form and the length of the message, and consequently for its contents. From the 1870s to the 1890s the postcards went through sev-



Local card with a scene from the Main Street in Tromsø, Norway, sent by an English tourist in 1905. The card is of the old type; the recto or front side contains only the address of the receiver and the stamp. What we see is the verso or back side, with the picture and a small margin for messages—in this case only a signature. A sign of life, perhaps even meant for boasting, maybe also a collectible or an exchange object, but carrying no further information to the receiver.

eral phases, from the prepaid, pictureless stationery card, to cards with pictures and postage stamps.⁸ From the late 1890s—the beginning of the Golden Age—the postcard's front side or recto (as it was called by the postal authorities) contained only the address of the receiver and the postage stamp, and the back side or verso was more or less covered by the picture. Messages were not allowed on the recto side, only on the verso—which they had to share with the picture. This meant that there was only room for very short messages (plus a signature), in a corner or on the margins, unless you wrote your message across the picture—the only solution for longer messages. This physical frame is important because it imposed limitations on the use of the card. The postcard could not serve as a medium for substantial messages, and overwriting the picture was not a good solution for the aesthete or the collector. Longer messages had to be sent by ordinary, closed letters.

The final phase started just after the turn of the century—in 1902 in Great Britain, 1903 in France, 1905 in Norway, 1907 in the USA—when the recto or address side was divided into two parts: one half for the address and the stamp, and the other half for the message, as on modern postcards. From then on, the picture was allowed to spread out on the whole of the verso. The authorities still stuck to the recto-verso terminology, but for the ordinary consumer the hierarchy between the two sides had been inverted; the back side had finally become the front side, and the address and the message were relegated to the back side. This left more room for writing, although the

space still allowed only fairly short messages. The picture postcard remained the perfect medium for short communications.

Ritual Communication

Arrivé bon port [+ signature] (Tourist card from Egypt to France, 1904)

En ballade [+ signature] (Local card sent within France, 1908)

Je ne pourrais pas écrire avant 8 jours [no signature] (Tourist card from Norway to France, 1905)

The brevity of the inscriptions is striking. We shall have a look at the inscriptions of a few collections of cards from the Golden Age, all of them new collections gathered in recent years. Of a small special collection of thirty-six old tourist cards from Alexandria, only ten had been through the mail. The great majority of the mailed ones (eight out of ten) had extremely short inscriptions, like "Arrivé bon port," "Amical souvenir," "Bonne santé," "Remerciements," "Souvenir lointain," "Amical bonjour," "Salutation," or a signature only—even if some of these cards have a divided back with room for longer messages. Another small collection of tourist cards, from a Norwegian fjord, shows the same pattern: out of twenty-one old cards only eight had been mailed. Six of the eight cards had very short inscriptions, of the above type. Of the four long inscriptions in these two collections, two contain complaints of not having received return cards from the addressees ("Ns sommes étonnés de ne pas avoir de vous

nouvelles. Pas une seule carte"). That is, the mailed cards are either short signs of life or metatexts on communication. Of another series of forty cards, all sent in 1904 by a tourist in Norway and addressed to three different members of his family in Paris, thirty-two contain nothing but the signature, seven very short inscriptions, and one an inscription of about twenty words. A possible interpretation is that these forty cards are gifts to a collector, either himself or one of the family members back in Paris. All the same, these cards served as signs of life as well.

The above sample is small, but others confirm the result. Geary and Webb have examined two collections of cards sent from Africa to Europe (consisting, respectively, of thirty-four and thirty-five cards) and they observe that "[m]ost cards carry no message; three or four simply state that a longer letter had been delayed" (1998, 7). A contemporary observer, a German tourist in Norway, confirms these findings. He added the following remark to his observation of his fellow travelers writing cards on every possible occasion (quoted above): "Don't worry about writing too much. Your words are of no importance. The receiver does not want anything but the picture, whether it comes from the north, south, east, or west; it doesn't matter whether it's a phototype, a collotype, or a lithography. Most publishers are smart; they produce cards where you cannot write much more than your name. That's how much space there must be left for the cards to be bought . . ." (Laverrenz 1901, 61).

Local cards too might have short in-

scriptions (much shorter than the space demanded), as indicated by a study of cards from a French *département* (l'Ain), even if there is a higher number of longer inscriptions among these. What is striking, however, is the exchange aspect:

My dear Léontine, Thank you very much for the short message you sent me. I was pleased to have it. (+ signature)

My very dear little Annie, I hasten to answer your letter, which I received yesterday evening. I was very happy to have news from you. . . . (+ signature)

I received your card, which pleased me. . . . (+ signature)

Dear Father and Sister. I write you this short card to tell you that I have arrived well and to say hello to you. (+ signature)

There is something automatic and ritualistic about most of these inscriptions, whether they carry a signature only (in some cases not more than the initials) or a few words in addition. It is like a handshake or a simple phrase—"Good morning," "How do you do," or any other everyday ritual. These inscriptions are almost void of *information* but they are still *messages* with a strong expressive value.

Communication theory may shed some light on the function of these cards. In order to draw a clearer line between mass culture and popular culture, folkloristic theory has pointed to the distinction between messages that carry information and messages that are primarily activities in themselves (Eriksen 1989).

The first communication form is *linear*, with a sender, a receiver (or a group of receivers in the case of mass communication), and a piece of information of some sort, the intention being that one person or one group *informs* another person or another group. The second type has been described as *circular*, encompassing people who have a fairly close social relationship; the purpose of such communication acts being to *confirm* or mobilize an already existing social relationship; hence the term "activity-oriented" communication for the latter, as opposed to the first type, "information-oriented" communication.⁹

It has been pointed out that activity-oriented communication presupposes a clear set of common references and that the purpose is often merely to confirm these (Eriksen 1989). To make the message short and economical is one way of demonstrating this form of cultural competence. The aim is not to provide new information, but to refer to what is already shared; the most successful communication is the one that is least redundant. A postcard inscription like "Arrivé bon port" ("Arrived safe and sound") presupposes that the addressee knows that the sender has left on a journey and probably also most of the details of the itinerary. The same applies to all the cards with only a greeting—a "Bonjour," a "Salutations," an "Amical souvenir," etc.—or with nothing but a signature or a set of initials. Their information component may very often be reduced to that of a sign of life; they can be translated to a "Hello, I'm alive" and "I haven't forgotten you." They include a "Wish you were here," whether literally expressed or read

between the lines. Inscriptions like these do not transmit information external to the sender; they are more or less identical to the sender.¹⁰ They are social tokens more than informative messages.

Whether the postcard contains a short inscription, a signature, or a set of initials, the redundancy—normally an important element when information is transferred—is reduced to a minimum. These are cards exchanged between people who know each other well and for whom the context is known.¹¹ No card is totally void of information; after all, they state that the sender is or was alive at the moment of mailing. But the main function is to keep up reciprocal social contacts ("reciprocal" communication is perhaps a more accurate term than "circular" in the case of postcards). In the same way, cards sent between collectors, with little or no text, also have this secondary, social function of keeping the network going, as if stating "I'm still interested in your collecting activity and I'll help you enhance your collection." Marshall McLuhan's old catchphrase, "the medium is the message," still seems valid for some types of communication.

Due to its predominantly social aim, the postcard may be viewed as a form of ritual communication. A ritual may be identified by three characteristics, namely repetition, institutionalization (the act must be familiar and predictable), and expressivity.¹² The last characteristic makes it possible to draw the line between rituals on the one hand and (utilitarian) habits and routines on the other. From the point of view of semiotics, the ritual act—e.g., sending a



Three typical tourist cards from the North Cape, dating from 1905 or earlier. The back sides contain nothing but address and stamp, as prescribed. One card carries a signature and a date only. The second is unsigned but has the following inscription: "Another for your collection; one J. V. gave me last night." The inscription on the third card is "We're alive. All well at home. Thanks for the card you sent me" plus signature. This means three signs of life, at least one exchange object, and one metatext on communication.



postcard—may be seen as a signifier of some symbolic content: the signified (in our context, a sign of life or a confirmation of friendship). What makes a routine a ritual is when the expressive value (the signified) enters the foreground. The intention of the performer and the interpretation of the observer and receiver are the essential criteria in distinguishing a ritual from a routine. The postcard often has high expressive value. It represents a practical realm, that of messages and information exchange, but its informaa strong value of sociability: the mobile phone call and especially its text-messaging capacities (including the recent technology of transmitting visual or photographic messages). Its popularity was shown on New Year's Eve 1999, when—remarkably—the main Norwegian net operator registered three million text messages in a total population of four million. Recent research among young people aged between thirteen and twenty confirms the fundamental role played by text messages for keeping in touch and confirming social relationships (Johnsen 2000).

The mobile phone has two characteristics in common with the postcard (and which distinguish it from the ordinary, permanent telephone): it is a communication system based on *individual* access to the medium (you seldom share a mobile with others), and the text-messaging system allows communication *independently of time and place* (you can send a message from wherever you are at any time, day or night). The mobile, its text messaging capacity, and the omnipresent availability it offers are described by

young informants as essential for belonging to, and maintaining membership in, groups and networks. Just like the postcard message, the mobile text message is asynchronous (unlike the direct telephone conversation), and because space is limited, it is minimalist and non-redundant. It is used mainly to send short emotional messages (often coded, in personal variants, as postcard messages were also often sent in abbreviated form), jokes and gossip, or drawings; consequently it has little information value but a high expressive and symbolic value (Johnsen 2000). These rather non-essential messages (from a utilitarian point of view) require responses within a short time-frame, in accordance with the principle of gift giving and immediate reciprocity—unless you want to punish someone by demonstrating his non-belonging or to mark your own superiority. The text message may be said to have the same relation to a telephone conversation as a postcard does to a letter.

An Entangled Object

Around 1900, the Western world experienced a craze for postcards, a fad that lasted two decades and spread to most of the world. There is a striking contrast between quantity and banality, i.e., between the enormous number of postcards produced and sold during the Golden Age (probably at least 200 or 300 billion cards) and the use of them, as we can infer from the considerable number of examples that have survived until the present. Half of the surviving cards are blank (not mailed) and a substantial proportion of the used (mailed) cards—for topographical motifs probably more

than the half—carry short, banal greetings or only the signature of the sender.

However, these cards served a multiplicity of uses and functions and they were enmeshed in a tangle of relationships. Aesthetic appreciation of the picture motifs lay behind the postcard's popularity in general (the symbolic and representational aspects of the images have not been treated in this article), and the aesthetic dimension certainly played a major role in its widespread use for greetings, in its function as a souvenir (including the role of the tourist card to authenticate the journey, and consequently as a status claimer), and in its enormous popularity as a collectible. For a short period, the picture postcard eclipsed the world's number one collectible, the postage stamp. The two latter uses—as a souvenir and as a collectible—are closely entangled, even if some theorists have seen them as separate functions (Stewart 1993).¹⁴ These more or less enmeshed uses entrained the cards in a complex exchange and gift economy with reciprocity as a central principle.

But it was not only the imagery, or the card as a picture carrier, that counted. The card as a physical object had two sides. The exchange and gift economy of the card also included the inscriptions. According to classical gift theory, a gift cannot be understood as a property relationship to a material object, but must be seen as a function of a social relationship: a gift is an object that tells us something not about itself, but about the relationship between donor and receiver (Mauss 1923–1924).

Even if communication was the *raison d'être* of the picture postcards, they sel-

dom carried a substantial, linear message—i.e., new information—from the sender to the addressee. As a communication medium, the card carried messages more or less void of information; they served mainly as a sign of life and a reminder of social relationships. The picture postcard was predominantly a carrier of what has been termed "activity-oriented" communication, the purpose of which is to confirm, mobilize, or strengthen social relationships. This form of communication presupposes a set of common references and some shared knowledge. To confirm this was a main purpose of the cards. There was no room for redundancy: the shorter the messages, the more convincing the confirmation. For the cards to function as social glue, the exchange principle was immediate reciprocity.

For the first time in history, the picture postcard offered the opportunity of activity-oriented communication over long distances and on journeys, in a much easier and more efficient way than the closed letter. Today, e-mail messages fulfill the same function, to some extent; and mobile phone text messages to an even greater extent. The great difference, however, is that these modern electronic messages do not function as aesthetic objects, or as souvenirs, or as collectibles. What characterized the craze for the picture postcard a century ago and guaranteed its enormous spread and popularity was precisely these enmeshed functions, concrete as well as symbolic, and the many layers of meaning invested in the postcard. Few material items are more aptly characterized as "an entangled object" than the picture postcard

of the Golden Age. This humble material artefact was—to paraphrase T.S. Eliot—an emissary of the culture of the turn of the century.

Notes

¹ This article is based on a paper I gave at the 8th Interdisciplinary Conference on Research in Consumption, Paris, July 26–28, 2001. Translations of quotations and postcard inscriptions from Norwegian, French, and German are by the author. Thanks to professor Reg Byron for language revision. An earlier version of the Paris paper has appeared in Norwegian (Rogan 2002).

² No one has yet ventured to calculate the total number of postcards produced during the Golden Age. A rough estimate is possible, however, which departs from Carline's estimate of 7 billion cards passing the world's post offices in 1903. It is generally acknowledged that the craze culminated around 1912. Available statistics of dispatched cards from the Norwegian post authorities are as follows: 1879: 166,000 cards; 1900: 3,570,000; 1904: 8,831,000; 1905: 12,400,000; 1910: 17,040,000; 1920: 15,569,000; 1935: 8,912,000. The yearly average number of mailed cards between 1900 and 1920 is 11,500,000, or almost twice as high as the figures from 1903. In the international context, this translates to roughly 14 billion cards a year or more than 250 billion cards during this twenty-year period. If the proportion of unused/undispatched cards is estimated at 25% of all cards produced—probably a conservative estimate—the total number of postcards produced during the Golden Age may have surpassed 300 billion cards. However, Norway may not be the best index for such estimates, as the country lagged somewhat be-

hind in the first years of the century: in 1903/04 the British sent around fifteen cards per inhabitant (600 million cards for about 40 million inhabitants), the Swedes ten cards per inhabitant (48 million cards for ca. 5 million inhabitants), and the Norwegians less than four cards per inhabitant (ca. 9 million cards for ca. 2,4 million inhabitants). The rough estimate should perhaps be reduced to something between 200 and 300 billion cards.

³ The same criticism may be leveled at other versions of (functional-pragmatic) discourse analysis of cards, like Jaffe 1999.

⁴ Great Britain had six postcard journals during the early years of the century, most of them of the ephemeral sort, and France had sixteen. Similar journals flourished for a short period in many European countries, the USA, and South America. Few, if any, survived the Golden Age.

⁵ The terms "push" and "pull" factors are borrowed from migration studies, where they are commonly used to explain the double motivation behind the decision to leave one's country in order to settle in another.

⁶ An even more "authentic" way of canceling the cards on the North Cape cruises, according to popular rumor, was to let the midnight sun burn a hole in them by means of a magnifying glass (Lausberg 1912, 348, 410).

⁷ To decide whether the unused cards were primarily travel souvenirs or primarily collectibles, it is necessary to have a look at *old* collections. Old collections are rare, however, as they have often been dispersed by later collectors.

⁸ The picture postcard, as we know it from the beginning of its golden era, had two fore-runners, both of which were collectibles, one for (male) philatelists and the other for (female) card collectors. The first was the pre-

paid, pictureless stationery card that was introduced around 1870 by postal authorities, the other the (seasonal) greeting or congratulations card with a picture that had to be sent in a closed envelope. The stationery was originally a purely philatelic object. The second phase started when private, pictureless cards (i.e., not issued by postal authorities) with postage stamps were allowed by postal authorities in the 1880s, the third phase in the late 1880s when the authorities accepted a small vignette picture in one corner, and the fourth phase when the picture took over most of the back side of the card (the verso), leaving only a small place for the message. These transitions and the merging of the two collectibles into one took place at different times in different countries, but towards the end of the 1890s the postcard had become a collectible in its own right, and it was no longer a branch of philately.

⁹ As pointed out by Eriksen (1989, note 2), this activity-oriented communication form corresponds closely to one of six functions that Roman Jakobson has ascribed to the (linear) communication act, namely its phatic function: "The phatic function is to keep the channels of communication open; it is to maintain the relationship between addresser and addressee: it is to confirm that communication is taking place."

¹⁰ It may be added that from the point of view of performance theory the writing and sending of a card with a personal, handwritten inscription, even a stereotyped inscription or a signature only, mark the presence of the sender; the card represents personal presence and individuality. These theoretical arguments, however interesting, apply rather to contemporary contexts than to the turn of the 20th century, when handwritten messages were the rule and printed ones the exception.

¹¹ If the context is missing, such messages may even function counter to the intention.

Some thirty years ago I received a postcard from my father with a minimal inscription (only "Hello, I'm fine"), sent from Hawaii. Living away from home myself, in another European country, I had not been in contact with him during the last month or so, and I got quite upset by the card. What on earth was he doing on the other side of the globe? As far as I knew, he had no business there, he could not afford a holiday like that, and it was totally unlike him to make a trip like that alone. It kept me up one night, wondering if he had gone nuts and left my mother and the rest of the family. From a phone call home the next day I learned that he had a professional mission there. But my lack of knowledge about the mission (as a hospital doctor he was sent to accompany a sick, disabled person back to Norway) and the totally unexpected card taught me a lesson about the function of postcards: If you don't know the context, a minimalist message does not work!

¹² See among others Rogan 2000 for a discussion of rituals. The stress on expressivity is borrowed from Edmund Leach 1968. See also Rothenbuhler 1998.

¹³ See also Rothenbuhler 1998, 22–23, on ritual communication as communication without information. His text contains some interesting points of view, although he does not include the important social function that Eriksen (1989) discusses.

¹⁴ While I appreciate Susan Stewart's (1993) arguments regarding the distinction between the souvenir and the collectible and her discussion of the one as a metonym (or rather a synecdoche) and the other as a metaphor, I disagree with her conclusion. A collectible always functions as a souvenir, and a souvenir may easily end up as a collectible.

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Responses

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Dear Bjarne

Greetings from Liguria! I'm sitting in an airy hotel lobby in Italy, looking at a general store across the street. It has a couple of racks of postcards—you know, the stand-alone carousel type—and, in the two weeks that I've been here, not a single person has stopped to scrutinize the selection. You probably think I'm pretty sad, spending my entire vacation staring at a desolate postcard emporium, but I think it's kind of appropriate, since postcards are pretty sad too. Compared to the glorious heyday of deltiology, so cogently described in your article, picture postcards have come to a very sorry pass. Bypassed by email and cellphone text messages, they coagulate on rusty carousels outside rundown stores in fly-blown holiday resorts. How art the mighty fallen.

Actually, the sad fate of these mementoes to modernity makes me think of Martin Amis's novel, *The Information*, where he expounds on the slow but inexorable descent of the novel itself. Or its subject matter, rather. First it focused on gods, then demigods, then kings, then aristocrats, then merchants, then the working classes, then the criminal classes, and then, finally, the grubbier group of all, writers themselves. Amis, admittedly, owes this notion to Northrop Frye—his "theory of modes" in the *Anatomy of Criticism*, to be precise—nevertheless the degenerative tra-

jectory our latter-day anatomist describes is strikingly reminiscent of the retrogression of picture postcards. Recent books like Martin Parr's *Boring Postcards*, a "celebration" of the anodyne accomplishments of the once mighty genre, are surely the equivalent of Amis's final fatal stage, as indeed are scholarly articles on the subject. The surest signifier of a bankrupt cultural phenomenon is its academization, institutionalization, pantheonization (and the use of unnecessarily pretentious words to describe it).

Of course, I'm not referring to your wonderful article, Bjarne! I really enjoyed reading it. It's terrific, arresting, epochal. Whatever. You know, I actually thought I was reasonably familiar with the history of deltiology, until I read "An Entangled Object." I was particularly struck by your references to the gender divide in postcard collecting, if only because my own as yet unpublished research on the consumption of greeting cards shows that the gender divide is still there. Very much so. Gender equality may obtain in most walks of life—theoretically, at least—but not when it comes to buying and sending greeting cards. Men, in the main, have no time for that kind of thing. They consider it suspiciously unmanly. Women, by contrast, possess a carefully calibrated conception of who among their circle of acquaintances warrants a card, and the kind of card they're entitled to—hand-crafted, generic multi-pack, etc. (E-cards, incidentally, are totally unacceptable; sending one is tantamount to insulting the recipient.)

Okay, then, having scattered a few piastres of academic approbation and having taken the opportunity to trum-

pet my own learned endeavors, such as they are, convention demands that I temper my enthusiasm, qualify my comments, and generally demonstrate that I'm better read than you. Well, I'm afraid I can't temper, I won't qualify, and I'm not better. I like your article just the way it is.

That said, I'm a little bit surprised you don't mention how postcard-mania was just one among many consumer society crazes, or fads, at the outset of the twentieth century—bicycles, dolls, ragtime et al. Postcards may have been the craziest craze, I don't know for sure, but it definitely wasn't alone. Indeed, I've just finished reading David Lodge's latest novel, *Author, Author*, which discusses the "Trilby" fad that erupted in the wake of George du Maurier's eponymous best-seller, published in 1894. All manner of Trilby-related merchandise, from hats and socks to sausages and stage-plays, quickly flooded the market, much to the chagrin of du Maurier, who was at the center of the memorabilia maelstrom. His impecunious confidant, Henry James, wasn't best pleased either. But that's another story.

Secondly, you seem a tad surprised by the brevity of the written messages on the obverse of the cards you've studied. But surely we've known, since at least George Zipf's 1949 classic *Human Behavior and the Principle of Least Effort*, that all sorts of social phenomena, communications included, exhibit a "power law" or Pareto-like effect. As Philip Ball explains in his recent book, *Critical Mass*, this effect is typified by a large number of short messages and a small number of long ones. I suspect this is as true of

emails and cellphone text messages as it is of postcards (the present "postcard" is an exception to the rule, naturally!).

It would have been nice, finally, if you'd said a little bit more about the transgressive side of postcards. It seems to me that there's always been a carnivalesque aspect to postcards, right from the earliest days and notwithstanding their latter-day elevation to the academic firmament. I'm thinking, for example, of the "tall tale" cards of the late-nineteenth century, which depicted grotesquely oversized farm animals and agricultural produce. I'm thinking of Gilroy's bawdy picture postcards, which were part and parcel of the English seaside resort "experience." They still are, to some extent. I'm thinking also of Jacques Derrida's *La Carte Postale*, which takes as its point of postmodern departure a bizarre postcard that Frère Jacques allegedly found in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

In fairness, Bjarne, you do mention the "sporting" side of postcards, the quasi-pornographic pictures that did so much to stimulate men's belated interest in collecting activities. I feel, however, that there's much more to be said on the subject. Postcards are usually bought in and sent from liminal locations, after all, and they unfailingly reflect their locale. Locales, in actual fact, like airy hotel lobbies in Liguria, Italy . . .

Wish you were here.

Ciao

Stephen Brown

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Bjarne Rogan's essay about picture postcards comes at a time when research on the subject is approaching a juncture. As the author summarizes, initial studies have been published giving an overview of the topic. In recent years the interest in picture postcards has moved from the sphere of collectors into an academic forum, emerging from the philatelic realm to produce a great deal of literature, both historical overviews and case studies. The majority of scholars have concentrated on postcards as commodity and object—how they were made, collected, purchased, sold, exchanged, and distributed to the different genders and to many classes of society. The photographic image itself has been a primary inspiration for much of the research, addressing the source and authorship of the photograph, contexts of its production, and the evolution of phrases and captions. This is especially true in case studies of postcards with images depicting non-western cultures formerly under colonial domination around the world. Issues to do with subjugation—blatant racism, pornography, violence, and the perpetuation of stereotypes—are the unsettling part of the discourse. Exchange, collecting, and key postal regulations have been addressed, some extensively. Therefore, the wide range of the publications about picture postcards referred to by Rogan is to be expected.

This research also parallels the increased investigation into the creation of photographic images, especially those

made by non-indigenous visitors from a variety of professions. Many of these postcard is about the image. Regardless of whether this small piece of paper was mailed or canceled at a postal facility or not, our understanding of the phenomenon is based on the relation of the image chosen by the sender for a specific recipient at a unique point in time. The transmission of emotion and information (either personal or emblematic) is initially reflected in the choice of picture or subject. Often, but not always, the words inscribed on the card emphasize, identify, contradict, or compliment the image—they refer to the pictorial component and have implications unique to the participants. The language and reception of the entire object is coded in very unique ways. It is acknowledged that the evolution of abbreviated inscriptions has been formed by space limitations and regulations of worldwide postal regulations, thus creating coded, stock phrases. Still, the verbal minutiae often refer to the picture.

Investigation into the complex form of communication embodied in picture postcards increasingly focuses on turning them over and acknowledging the messages written by senders. In this context, Rogan is correct in using as the point of departure for his analysis the premise that the picture postcard acts as "an emissary of its culture." The effectiveness of the postcard to communicate information or an idea through the representation of a place in a very specific image and format is powerful and concise. The conflation of pictorial formulae and standardized phrases may certainly serve as a vehicle for the transmission of percep-

tions about a particular culture. One might ask whose culture is transmitted—the one represented by the image or the sender? Probably both. It should be taken into account that a standardized rubric of communication through which the sender's position in the exchange is conveyed may have been used. Rogan notes specific phrases on postcards—"Sent with affection," "Add me to your collection"—that indicate the relationship between the recipient and sender.

As an object, the picture postcard is a vehicle that both represents and "carries" culture. As an arena of ritual communication it seems that context—once again—is everything. The interpretation of the length and type of message written by a sender on a card must always be interpreted in the entire context of the relationship between the two parties. The brevity or length of a specific message can be interpreted in a cyclical way to imply or anticipate a specific response, or, indeed, no response at all. Rogan describes cards with messages called "a sign of life" and calls them "social tokens more than informative messages." One could also take the alternative view that these cards do provide information about the state of the sender "alive," "well," "happy," and that therefore they are also informative.

However, they do seem to be outside of the exchange if they do not elicit a reply and if the recipient does not send a card back to the transient address, but keeps (or collects) the card. Alternatively, a deferred exchange may occur when the recipient waits until s/he is traveling and then reciprocates with a card to which, in turn, an immediate reply is not antici-

pated or expected. Other exchanges are unreciprocated, the addressee never traveling and sending a postcard in return. The play involved in these obligatory arrangements is not always inherent in the messages written on the cards. Rogan discusses the systems of exchange and reciprocity that postcards operate within and which are subject to complex networks of status and obligation. We see how the postcard as commodity had different values among its early collectors (canceled or not, inscribed or blank) and Rogan notes that it operates within a very distinct social system of communication. In addition to the theorists Rogan cites, it would be interesting to further unpack the picture postcard transaction within discussions of gifts and commodities. Discussions by Kopytoff, Appadurai, and others that Rogan notes come to mind. Postcards certainly operate within complex social, linguistic, and cultural structures that carry obligations and reflect the position of the writer, photographer, and recipient. How do the postcards navigate those systems and change along the way as they move from one location to another? Rogan's interesting article reminds us that there are indeed multiple avenues to investigate relating to the impact of these small pieces of paper that have been sent all over the world.

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The Arab Ear and the American Eye: A Study of the Role of the Senses in Culture

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Abstract

This article is a translation (with a translator's preface) of an essay by Sharif Kanaana on the significance of hearing in Arab culture. The analysis is based on Alan Dundes' "Seeing is Believing." Proceeding along the same lines as Dundes and using similar procedures, the author seeks to establish the hypothesis that in Arab culture the ear is more significant than the eye as a guide to belief. While "Seeing is Believing" is about American culture, in using its categories as a basis for the study of the Arab ear, this article brings to the fore its implicit comparative perspective. The theoretical point at issue is the determining power of culturally established cognitive patterns.

The dialogue between the two articles (Kanaana's and Dundes') is an instance of intercultural communication, which could not have come into being without the decisive role of translation. The translator's preface and response explore the reciprocal discursive connection between translation and ethnography, given that both of these, as disciplines, have to grapple with the problem of

how to interpret the Other for a domestic audience. The analysis elaborates upon the metaphorical significance of the eye in Arab culture, showing that the Arab fear of the eye may be justified in view of the manipulative power that resides in images. Translated in terms of culture, it may be that the reliance on the eye breeds a need for visual stimulation and constant change, while reliance on the ear leads to reliance on tradition and fear of change.

Translator's preface

My contribution consists of three parts. The first is this introduction; the second is a translation of the better part of an article by Sharif Kanaana, and the third is my response. The original article appeared in the year 2000 in Kanaana's book on Palestinian folklore, *Min Nisi Qadimo . . . Tah!* ("He Who Forgets His Past . . . Is Lost!"). The ellipsis is part of the original title, which is a Palestinian proverb. I translated this piece not only for its cultural contribution but also because of its attempt to establish a dialogue based on shared scholarly interest, and that dialogue in turn cannot take place without translation. Therefore, the translation is itself the completing process of that dialogue. Additionally, and with respect to this dialogue, the significance of Kanaana's piece lies in its uncovering of the comparative methodological implications of the essay on which it is based, Dundes' "Seeing is Believing" (1980).

Dundes' article is based on the assumption that verbal folklore articulates or reflects world view, or both. While I think that the assumption of realistic mimesis (that is, trying to read world

view from folktales or proverbs) can, and frequently does, lead the inexperienced into aberrant views of a given culture (Orientalism being an outstanding, and pernicious, example of this process) it seems to me that the exemplary areas of behavior singled out by Dundes, and by Kanaana in turn, do lead to accurate conclusions. To cite one specific example from my own experience, as a person who belongs to a "hearing is believing" culture, I always find it disconcerting when American friends use the seeing metaphor to refer to concerts—e.g., "I saw the San Francisco Symphony last night." Though as a student of language I understand that this is American usage (and no one can argue with usage), the culturally Arab part of me still thinks that this formulation is a distortion of experience. Perhaps we can use translation metaphorically here and think of this process as a translation in terms of one sense of something that takes place primarily in the domain of another.

Turning now to the specific details of that dialogue, we note that the two articles taken together resemble a circle, or a necklace, with Kanaana beginning where Dundes left off. The points that Dundes makes in bringing his article to a close are the very ones taken up by Kanaana at the beginning of his study. In his last paragraph, Dundes specifically raises the question of the cultural relativism of language:

With human observations expressed in human language, one simply cannot avoid cultural bias. . . . Cross-cultural comparisons of sense categories may not only reveal critical differences in the specific senses, but also

whether or not the apparent priority of vision over the other senses is a human universal.

Kanaana unravels the implications of this in a number of ways: first, methodologically, by using the same categories as Dundes does to undertake a cross-cultural comparison of the senses, showing that the "apparent priority of vision over the other senses" is not a human universal. And, secondly, by placing Dundes' formulation within the context of the translation of culture, as we shall see below in more detail. With regard to the first problem, Kanaana uses the issues brought up by Dundes at the end of his essay to raise rather large philosophical questions (which he admits are impossible to answer) at the beginning of his. Thus in taking up Dundes' "challenge," by undertaking a cross-cultural comparison based on the very categories proposed by Dundes, Kanaana opens out the horizon of the discussion by showing that, if we are to avoid the Orientalist pitfalls, we must take Dundes' questions, his doubts and hesitations about the gravity of cultural misrepresentation seriously enough to be aware of their consequences in relation to Arab culture.

* * *

Every field of knowledge has issues and problems that are appropriate to it. The issue, which I shall be addressing in this research, is of the type that usually engages anthropologists, but it has also been addressed by folklorists, sociologists, and others concerned with the social sciences.

Anthropologists see their function as the understanding of other cultures, the translation of the spirit of the cultures they study, and the transfer of the way indigenous peoples see their world and culture to the anthropologist's own world and culture. But there is always an anxiety—and therefore some contention—concerning the degree of truthfulness of what they transfer to their own culture: to what extent do anthropologists actually transfer another culture without imposing on it their own cultural perceptions?

Let us take an example. Every language is a part, or offspring, of a culture. It came into being so that members of that culture can communicate in terms of concepts and understandings appropriate to their culture. Is it therefore possible to speak of another culture in our own language? And when we do so, does that culture remain itself, or do we in the process recast it in terms of concepts appropriate to our own culture?

Let us take another example. Do the modern sciences that came into being in the West represent absolute truths or are they just expressions of modern Western culture? And when we try to arrive at an understanding of another society or culture by reference to modern Western social science, are we then not recasting it in the conceptual terms of these sciences?

The question I am addressing here is of the type dealt with by students of human culture, especially those among them who are concerned with subjects that are relevant to different cultures. We can reformulate the question as follows: Living human beings must interact with the environment in order to survive; otherwise, we would not be able to survive. Human perception of the environment takes place through the agency of the senses, which receive impressions from the environment. There is no other access to the environment except through the senses. Therefore, human beings' perception of the environment, their understanding of it, and their interactions with it depend on the five senses. So culture is the sum total of the ways humans learn to interact with the environment in order to survive. But these do not depend on the senses in equal measure, and different cultures do not utilize each of the senses to the same degree, for cultures may differ in their reliance on any particular sense. It is said, for example, that Western culture prefers the sense of sight to the other senses. The dependence of this culture on sight may reach such an extent that information available to other senses, such as touch or smell, may be ignored in favor of the sense of sight.

These considerations do not apply solely to ordinary individuals in daily life, but also to the student and the researcher, including the anthropologist, from whom we expect an understanding of the cultures s/he brings to the attention of the Western world. If it is true that the Western person depends principally on sight, then the picture that anthropologists and other students of the

Orient draw, for example, of Arab culture is bound to be doubly distorted, since these scholars are likely to highlight the features of this culture that emphasize the sense of sight, and these in turn will be perceived by Western scholars in relation to visual data as a result of their primary dependence on the sense of sight. The distortion increases if the culture under study shows a preference for one of the other senses, such as touch.

Scholars of the Orient have written thousands of books, theses, and dissertations about the Middle East, Islam, and Arab/Islamic culture. Their writings exceed by far what Arabs and Muslims have written about themselves, particularly in the modern age. Most of what the world today knows about Arab/Islamic culture, even much of what Arabs and Muslims know about themselves, has come by way of the writings of Orientalist European and American scholars.

If what we are saying is true, or at least close to the truth, and when we ourselves try to describe our culture and society in order to make them available to the rest of the world, is it not reasonable to suggest that we will find many complex features of this culture which were not perceived or discussed by Western anthropologists and Orientalists because they were not related to the sense of sight? Furthermore, is it possible that, generally speaking, the differences between cultures would depend merely on a culture's emphasis or dependence on one sense rather than another?

We will not be able to provide satisfactory answers to these questions here, but I will propose a simplified assumption,

namely, that Western culture is structurally more dependent on the sense of sight than Arab/Islamic culture, and that this culture in turn is more dependent on the sense of hearing than Western culture. I will not be able to prove this supposition, but I will try to show that it is a reasonable one, and worthy of further exploration.

In an article published in 1972 in the *Natural History Magazine*, entitled "Seeing is Believing" [reprinted in Dundes 1980], Alan Dundes discusses the significance of the sense of sight in American society. Here is the opening paragraph of this article:

Whether from early memories of playing "peek-a-boo," "showing and telling" in school, or learning the opening phrases of the national anthem—"O say can you see"—the primacy of vision in American culture is affirmed again and again as infants grow to adulthood. Americans are conditioned from childhood to believe that "what you see is what you get."

Dundes ends his article with the thought that cross-cultural "comparisons of sense categories may not only reveal critical differences in the specific senses, but also whether or not the apparent priority of vision over the other senses is a human universal." As far as I know no one has taken up the challenge posed by Dundes, and he himself has not pursued his research further, whether in relation to American or other cultures. The fact of the matter is that this is a difficult subject: it is much easier to talk about it than to study it in relation to observable in-

stances of behavior.

Dundes' article highlights those aspects of American behavior, which the author says show a clear preference for the sense of sight, and it discusses them as representative aspects of American culture as a whole. What I shall do here is proceed as Dundes does and demonstrate, with reference to some of the same practices which he maintains show a clear preference for the sense of sight, that in these and similar cases the Arab person prefers to rely on hearing or another sense altogether.

Of course, Dundes does not establish that Americans do not rely on senses other than sight in the many aspects of culture that he does not address in his essay. Similarly, if I succeed in this essay in showing that the Arab person relies more on hearing than on sight in respect to many aspects of culture treated by Dundes, this, in turn, does not establish that Arab individuals do not rely on sight or some other sense in many or even most aspects of Arab culture. I will now take some of the examples used by Dundes and explore the extent to which they apply to Arab individuals and culture.

As we can see from the quotation, Dundes mentions that a game in which adults play with infants whose age does not exceed a few months is called "peek-a-boo." Arabs play the same game with infants, saying "ba'ayni." I have had occasion to observe this game among both communities, and I came away with the impression that the element of surprise for the American child arises from the successive disappearance and reappearance of the adult face, and that the word

"peek-a-boo" does not play a large role in surprising the child, attracting his/her attention and producing laughter. While, among Arabs, the element of surprise depends to a large extent on sound, for the word "ba'ayni" is spoken in rapid rhythm and at an elevated pitch—far louder than when Americans say "peek-a-boo."

Similarly (as mentioned by Dundes) one of the initial methods of teaching American children when they enter school is called "show and tell." In this game the teacher asks each pupil to bring an item from home which s/he then shows to the other children, describing it in some detail while pointing to the parts of that item and the way it is put together and used, and such like. Education here takes place as a result of seeing and speaking. What, then, are the initial methods of education for the Arab child? Until the recent past, education took place in the small schools known as the *kuttabs*, which are run by religious sheikhs. The sheikh in these schools, or the teacher in many modern schools, begins by saying something in a loud voice, and the children repeat after him or her, also in a loud voice. This is repeated until the children learn what is being taught by heart, without any sort of visual cue or even (in most cases) without understanding the meaning of the information being communicated, regardless of whether it has to do with reading, teaching the Qur'an, poetry, or arithmetic. Thus we see that the preferred method of traditional education in Arab/Islamic culture is by means of hearing and speaking, and not by seeing and speaking, as in the West.

Parents also resort to the same method

of teaching their children from the earliest stages of childhood, before the children are admitted into kindergarten or school. The American mother teaches her child language by pointing to things and talking to the child about them, encouraging him or her to use them and discover their parts and how they work. The Arab mother, on the other hand, teaches her child language by pronouncing the words, letting the child repeat after her without pointing out the things to which the words refer. She, for example, will teach the child to repeat the names of the family members, and the names of animals and birds and the sounds that they make. She may teach the child songs, sayings, or sentences with abstract meanings, or even the numbers from one to ten without explaining what the numbers mean or without pointing to things in the process of counting. Thus, the child learns the numbers in order by heart without learning how to count tangible objects or how to use these numbers, repeating them all from one to ten when he or she hears a number or even the first sound of a number. This way of teaching children, by making the child repeat what he or she knows from hearing the very initial sound of a number, is widely used by the Arab (Palestinian) mother to show off her child and his or her cleverness in speaking to friends, neighbors, and relatives. A mother might say to her child, "Come, show daddy what you learned today!" But the child does not understand what is required and does not respond to her request. The mother then follows this up by making the first sound of what she wants the child to say, for example: "I" (Aaaaaye), and the child

continues with, "love daddy a lot." Or the mother might say, "Come, darling sing 'Allah,'" and the child continues with "lives O Abu Shusha!" Or the mother might say, "Come show us how well you can count! Come on, 'Waaaan,'" and the child would continue with "Twoooo, threeee . . ." and so on.

We note also that the Arab mother conditions her child to undertake actions or bodily movements upon hearing the auditory cues associated with these movements, without showing concern for the child's understanding of the meaning of these requests or orders. The child's response then becomes automatic upon hearing the auditory cues. The mother might say something like, "*Dah! Dah!*" and the baby would make a movement with its hands, which the mother explains as a form of dancing. Or she might say, "*Heedo, Heedo!*" and the infant would attempt to stand up. Or she might say, "*Daadee, Daadee!*" and the child would start moving its feet as if to walk.

Dundes says that American culture relies on the sense of sight so much that Americans perceive the world around them through this sense. We might therefore say, metaphorically, that Americans see the world around them but do not hear, touch, smell, or taste it. This orientation to the world is illustrated in daily expressions. Let us observe how Dundes does this, and whether or not it, or something different, would apply to the Arab individual. Thus, the American, Dundes says, uses sight metaphorically to express understanding in such expressions as "I see" or "as I see it." Americans in general express their understanding of any idea by saying that they "see" it. For

Arabs, this use of "seeing" is comprehensible, but they do not need to use the sense of sight metaphorically. If for some reason a person had to resort to using the senses to express an understanding of something, then hearing would serve the purpose as well as, or better than, seeing. For one to say, "I hear what you're saying," meaning "I understand what you mean," would be more acceptable and in greater accordance with common usage than saying, "I see what you mean." But in either case, it would be preferable to say, "I understand what you're saying." On the other hand, if we want to make sure that the person whom we are addressing understands our meaning, the question, "Do you hear me?" is more appropriate than, "Do you see what I'm saying." "Do you understand what I'm saying?" would be most appropriate of all.

Americans, Dundes also says, are empiricists, and their empiricism favors the sense of sight more than the other senses. Americans do not trust or become convinced of anything until after they have "seen." Once they "see," that, in itself, is sufficient and there will be no need for further proof by means of the other senses. Americans say, "Seeing is believing" or "I saw it with my own eyes," asking others to "see for themselves." When an American doubts the veracity of what is said s/he might say, "That I've got to see." On the other hand, the Arab's trust of the sense of sight is, in my view, far less than that of the American because the Arab casts doubt on appearances, which may be deceiving. If an Arab wants to make sure of the veracity of what is being said s/he might say, "I

heard it with my own ears," or "His words stuck in my ears." If an Arab, for example, were to doubt the truth of what is being said, s/he might ask the interlocutor to confirm what had been said, by giving his or her "word" that it is true. If s/he wants to go further, s/he might request the other person to verify what was said "on your honor (*sharaf* or *dhimma*);" or s/he might ask him to swear in the name of God, or on the Qur'an. But s/he will not insist on "seeing with his/her own eyes" because "only a shit[head]—*il-khara*—does not believe until s/he sees."

The difference in dependence on the different senses between Arabs and Americans comes out clearly in relation to shopping. Americans hesitate before buying something "sight unseen." Before buying something they may wish to "look it over," but they would not normally touch the merchandise or examine it with any of the other senses. An American shopkeeper may have a negative reaction to a customer's touching the merchandise, and if the buyer were to try tasting or smelling it, that would be considered unacceptable, especially if the merchandise comes already wrapped. True, an Arab will not buy "fish in the sea," but when the fish is put in front of him/her what does the Arab person do? It is certain s/he will reach out with his/her hand, feel it, and turn several fishes over before finally picking one, lifting it up, and turning it around, making sure to press its flesh, smell it, and examine its eyes and gills. This will continue until the customer picks what s/he wants. It may be thought that all this is necessary because fish spoil quickly, but Ar-

abs will do this with everything, even prepared foods. They do not find it embarrassing to touch the merchandise, feel it with their hands, and frequently even taste it. If the merchandise is of the type that can emit some kind of sound, then the Arab will try to get a sound out of it by shaking it, thumping it, or tapping the fingers on its surface. A watermelon, for example, which the American might not assume would emit any sounds, might be lifted up between the Arab's palms, brought close to his/her ear, and pressed with his/her palms in order to listen to sounds inside it. It might not be bought until a large number had been similarly checked.

Because Americans depend largely on sight for evaluating an item of merchandise, there now exists in the United States a huge packaging industry that costs the American consumer billions of dollars a year. The purpose behind packaging is to make the item appear better and bigger than it in fact is. I do not believe that packaging would be equally successful among Arabs. An Arab consumer faced with a packaged product is likely to squeeze the box, shake it, bend it, or (often) even empty it.

In his article, Dundes also uses as evidence expressions from tourism. Americans travel for the purpose of "sight-seeing" as they move at top speed from one town to another in order to see the greatest number of places and document their experience with photographs. They rarely enjoy their travels as they should because they are oriented towards looking, making no effort to get acquainted with local people, or to enjoy the unaccustomed smells of a place, its cuisine,

or music. According to Dundes, this emphasis on seeing the maximum number of places is based on the notion of quantity, or getting the best deal for the money spent on any particular activity.

Some medical expressions also support the emphasis in American culture on seeing, where patients wait for the doctor to "see them," as if doctors treat people by sight. In Arabic we say that a doctor examines (*yafhu*) or "uncovers" (*yakshif ala*) the patient, or may even "feel" (*yahiss, ya'iss*) or take the pulse of (*yajiss*) of the patient. A doctor may even write out a prescription upon hearing a description of the patient's symptoms from a relative, but it would not be acceptable for a doctor to prescribe medicine upon merely seeing the patient. We frequently hear people complaining about a doctor because "s/he doesn't do an examination, but writes a prescription after seeing the patient." Doctors who examine different parts of the patient's body and who ask a lot of questions and are willing to discuss the sick person's condition are preferred.

According to Dundes, Americans depend on sight to evaluate not only a person who is in their presence but also an absent one, based on his or her "public image," while for the Arab, the other person is judged according to reputation, that is what one hears other people say about them. Furthermore, Americans understand not only the present with reference to the sense of sight, but the future as well. Americans will go to a "seer" who looks into the unknown in an effort to find out what is hidden in that person's future, whereas the Arab will go to the "knower" (*'arrafi*) who knows

what is hidden, or to an "opener" (*fattah*) who will unlock the gates of the unknown.

Finally, Dundes says that Americans relate to each other through sight, because they normally prefer not to touch or be touched, except in a love- or sexual relationship. Meeting after long absence is usually accompanied by an exchange of greetings, or when relations are warm a mere handshake. Further, most of what is said during the exchange of greetings has to do with sight, such as, "It's good to see you," "See you later," or "I'll be seeing you," and so on. The Arab greeting, on the other hand, even among men, might involve embracing and kissing on the cheek. A person returning after a long absence or coming out of prison may be hugged and kissed ten or twenty times. Young men are not embarrassed to walk down the street holding hands or with their arms around each other's shoulders. Dundes mentions that there are no American expressions praising those who rely on the sense of smell, taste, or hearing, while we Arabs have good things to say about a person who listens (literally, "someone who hears the word") and we praise a person who has taste: our proverbs say, "The smell of a husband is better than having none," or "The smell of a mother brings [the family] together." When American youths see a beautiful girl walking down the street, one might say to the other, "Look, but don't touch," while the Arab youth will whisper in his friend's ear, "Smell, but don't taste."

In this essay, I have presented a number of perspectives that show differences between Arabs and Americans regard-

ing the degree of dependence on the various senses. While it does not constitute proof of the thesis, I believe it is sufficient to persuade researchers that it is valid and merits serious investigation.

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Responses

Ear and Eye in Cultural Dialogue

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First, a few words about translation. This is a fluent, literal translation that stays as close to the original text as possible without sacrificing readability. I have omitted some material that would be redundant to American readers, given that Kanaana is explaining their culture (as propounded by Dundes) to an Arab audience.

Another point that arises directly from the act of translation is the question of gender. While translating, I became conscious that the attempt to get away from exclusive reliance on male-oriented language-use was often awkward, not necessarily in terms of sentence structure (although it is true that structures like "s/he" or "him/her" could ruin the rhythm of a sentence—a risk I am willing to take for the sake of balancing the habitual orientation toward the masculine/male gender in writing), but in terms of the actual roles played by women in the respective spheres discussed by the authors. This reflection is perhaps more applicable to the American scene, and I wonder to what extent the "seeing is believing" attitude reflects a macho orientation towards the world: I am that much more of a man than you are, and I exercise my power over you by refusing to believe what you say and by making you "show me." Seeing, after

all, is a form of power. Some prisons are designed in such a way that guards can see the prisoners at all times. In the UK, there are CCTV cameras practically everywhere, and their use is increasing in the USA as well. In practically every American home there is a TV, and it would seem that most people are perfectly convinced that it is they who have power over the TV because they can switch channels (or turn it off), when, in fact, they are passive recipients of the TV image, which holds them in thrall and manipulates their visual field in quite violent ways that they have no way of controlling.

Remaining with the topic of translation for a moment, Dundes raises the issue of the categories used by Western anthropologists to describe other cultures: "If we are truly interested in how other people perceive reality, we must recognize their cognitive categories and escape the confines of our own" (1980a, 91). Kanaana raises the same issue, seeing it from the perspective of what is called "cultural translation" (though he does not pursue the "translational" side of the question). Yengoyan, in a way, makes translation the central theme of anthropology: "Translation and the tensions in translation have always plagued anthropology, be it in its scientific version or humanistic side, with the persistent question of how cultural translations can be made without destroying the very subjects which we are trying to convey" (2003, 25). The title of the book containing Yengoyan's article is *Translating Cultures*. Many years prior to its publication, in 1986, *Writing Cultures* began to grapple

with the textualization of culture and its translation. Here I can do no more than refer to Crapanzano, who sees translation as the central metaphor behind the entire ethnographic enterprise:

The ethnographer is caught in a second paradox. He has to make sense of the foreign. Like Benjamin's translator, he aims at a solution to the problem of foreignness, and like the translator . . . he must also communicate the very foreignness that his interpretations (the translator's translations) deny, at least in their claim to universality. He must render the foreign familiar and preserve its very foreignness at the same time. The translator accomplishes this through style, the ethnographer through the coupling of a presentation that asserts the foreign and an interpretation that makes it all familiar. (Crapanzano 1986, 52)

This coupling of the translator's and the ethnographer's tasks in the similarity of their intentions is quite apt (with a reservation about the validity of the assertion about style). If translation is the central problem of ethnography, by the same token ethnography is the (unacknowledged) central issue in translation studies. Recently, Venuti encapsulated this question as the basic theoretical issue in translation studies, in the polar terms of foreignization and domestication (1995, 20-24). This debate, of course, goes back to 1813, with the appearance of Schleiermacher's *Methoden des Übersetzens*, where he articulated the alternatives open to the translator in the following terms: "Either the translator leaves the writer alone as much as pos-

sible and moves the reader toward the writer [i.e., foreignization] or he leaves the reader alone as much as possible and moves the writer toward the reader [domestication]" (1992, 42). In one way or another, linguistic differences between source and target texts can be overcome; what cannot be overcome, however, is the cultural difference. The irreconcilable polarity holds in both disciplines, with culture remaining at the center: either the translator makes a native out of the reader, or he makes a compatriot out of the foreign author.

I would like to conclude with some general reflections on points arising from the discussion. First, it is clear that the dialogue between the eye and the ear can make a significant contribution to the prevailing discourse on the presumed split between orality and literacy. I agree with Kanaana that the Arab people tend to trust information received by the ear. This is borne out by my personal experience while teaching in Jordan, Palestine, and Tunisia. Despite handouts explaining due dates, exam times, and deadlines, many students always wanted to have verbal confirmation of the information. Yet, at the same time, Muslim Arabs consider themselves (as well as Christians and Jews) people of the book. The Qur'an was orally revealed; the very word Qur'an means "that which is recited." The Prophet's analphabetism is a firmly held belief among Muslims, yet the Qur'an's status as a book, as *the* book, seems to blur the difference between the oral and the written: one sanctifies the other. There is a need for research from an Arab/Islamic understanding on "oral-

ity" and "literacy." Dundes' recent book, *Fables of the Ancients: Folklore in the Qur'an* (2003), is a first point of departure for anyone undertaking such an inquiry. Though it does not address itself directly to the orality/literacy theory, it does show (incontrovertibly) the oral-formulaic structure of the Qur'anic text.

A second point that occurs to me in the debate between the ear and the eye is the Arab mistrust of the eye, which is not perceived as being simply an organ of sight but a symbol of desire and of the soul. If one were to choose an Arab person at random, throw the word "eye" at her/him, and ask what immediately comes to mind, I would be willing to bet that the majority would say "evil." The response to the "eye" in Arab culture goes beyond mistrust to fear. The eye is feared, I think, because it is perceived (as I mentioned above) that the gaze has power, and that power, in the form of envy, can cause harm (see in this regard the magisterial essay on the evil eye, Dundes 1980b.)

The gaze of the other is perceived to be too powerful to resist. This is the sense in which I was referring to the TV in the living room—as the gaze of a commercial other whose purpose is to turn the audience into passive consumers of advertisements, products, and propaganda. In American culture, there is a saturation of images. In the home, on the subway, on the bus, wherever you turn your head, it is impossible to get away from them. The only freedom from this saturation is blindness. It is precisely because, as Dundes says, the eye is perceived to be powerful that the belief system of those doubting Thomases—the

American public—who think they have access to the truth because they can see, can be very subtly manipulated by the simple technique of manipulating the image to which they are exposed without their ever suspecting it. In fact, though images are manipulated consciously all the time (and not always for a sinister purpose) I think that, by directing the gaze, the very essence of the image is manipulation. The TV masters who control what the American public sees are doing no more than working with the potential that already exists in the process of making an image.

The fear of the power of the eye may lie behind the Arab custom of offering as a gift any item of clothing or jewelry that has been openly admired by another person. Even asking about the cost of a new garment is potentially harmful. In Tunisia, for example, the figure given in response to such a question always includes the number five. That, of course, is the pentangle, the Hand of Fatima, which wards off the evil eye. Iconographically, the eye is frequently painted inside an open palm (the Hand of Fatima), and the purpose of the magic number five, as well as the open palm pointing upwards in a gesture of "Stop!" is to surround the eye and contain it.

The eye is not only a symbol of the soul, it also stands as the basic metaphor for desire. A common saying at our dinner table (four children and two adults) was, "The stomach doesn't get full; it's the eye that feels fullness." There are many other proverbs that confirm this fact, but it is sufficient to cite just one more, which I heard frequently as a child—a profound statement about life

and death: "Nothing fills the eye of a human being like a handful of dirt."

In bringing this discussion to an end, I cannot help wondering about the extent to which reliance on eye or ear makes one society innovative and the other traditional. The emphasis on newness in American culture is, I think, attributable to the constant stimulation needed by the eye in order to be satisfied. Unlike Arabs, Americans seem to believe that the eye *can* be satisfied, and the result of course is the glut of images to keep the eye happy. Reliance on the ear, on the other hand, seems to encourage conventionality and tradition, which is transmitted in an oral-formulaic manner, whether through fixed expressions like proverbs, sayings, religious dicta, or by narrative motifs and conventional behavior. True, the emphasis on newness is oppressive to the individual and certainly detrimental to the self-image of Americans gullible enough to want to reinvent their identities in terms of the images they encounter daily. Yet, equally oppressive is the Arab emphasis on tradition. The very title of Kanaana's book says it all: *He Who Forgets His Past . . . Is Lost!* True, the reliance on tradition has certainly helped the Palestinian people to maintain their identity in their places of exile. Yet at the same time this dependence on tradition and the fear of innovation, aside from its detrimental effect on individual freedom, has certainly been a major factor in the current Arab social, political, and cultural stagnation. The sad fact is that there seems to be no culture that has embodied a healthy synthesis of both those perspectives. You get either stagnation or globalization.

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Viewing, Shaking, Smelling, and Listening to Melons

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Translation has, in the course of the past decade, risen to be a central concept both in anthropological thinking and in thinking about anthropology. The *Anthropology News* made it its core theme for the 2002–03 cycle, numerous stimulating article collections have been published, and the marginalized field of translation studies, or at least one of its central theorists, Lawrence Venuti, have received sudden respect. Attention to the notion of translation is in many ways the logical continuation of the "writing culture" movement. Ibrahim Muhawi has himself explored the topic of translation (e.g., Muhawi 2000) and it is thus all the more fitting that Muhawi offers here an example of how the translator's customary invisibility (cf. Venuti 1995) can be counteracted in order to facilitate dialogue both with the author as well as with the readership in the target language. Muhawi spells out his intentions as a translator as well as his own reactions and additions as a folklorist to Sharif Kanaana's piece. The reader is thus in possession of a great deal more to respond to than if she had simply received a translation.

Given the foregrounding of the translation process in what is, in effect, a double-voiced contribution by author-scholar Kanaana and translator-author-scholar Muhawi, it may be fitting to begin with an account on the many layers

of "carrying over"—for that is the literal meaning of translation—involved in the present piece. In cognitive terms, scholarly endeavor entails numerous processes that can be likened to "translation" in as much as observations, interpretations, and a combination of individual knowledge contexts flow into the crafting of new propositions. The central argument proposed by Sharif Kanaana—cultures privilege different senses in enculturation and in communicating core values—takes its beginning from Alan Dundes' 1972 article "Seeing is Believing" (Dundes 1980). In terms of anthropological theorizing of translation, we thus begin with Alan Dundes' "translation" of ethnographic and archival evidence into scholarly analysis resulting in the said article. Then follows Sharif Kanaana's reading and "translating" of Dundes' propositions into his own linguistic and scholarly tradition. He "translates" his cursory and preliminary accounting of comparable Arabic phrases and proverbs as well as enculturating behaviors into a depiction of Arab sense-preference. This leads him to propose a basic contrast between the American privileging of sight and the Arabic privileging of hearing. This, in turn, he "translates" into a scholarly book chapter. Enter Ibrahim Muhawi who translates Kanaana's piece for an English-language readership. In addition, Muhawi opts to expand on his reading or "internal translating" of both Kanaana's argument and Dundes' initial article. Asserting the differential sensory privileging of Arab and American respectively, Muhawi goes far beyond Kanaana's suggestion that his thesis of a culturally variable "degree of

dependence on the various senses . . . is valid and merits serious investigation": Muhawi associates the sense of hearing with stagnation and the sense of sight with globalization.

While I would distance myself from the leap Muhawi chooses to make, perhaps such a provocation is indeed needed to foster interest in seriously researching the role of the senses in and between cultures. Central to such an investigation is, as I have argued elsewhere, ethnographic work (Bendix 2000)—but none of the three scholars implicated in the present piece claim to have done extensive ethnography to support his argument. Dundes' piece is based primarily on linguistic evidence: the selection of proverbs, phrases, and rhymes in American everyday speech does indeed point to an *ideological* privileging of the eye. Dundes does not, however, argue that Americans make better use of their eyes than their other senses. They simply profess, according to his text sample, greater trust in sight than in the other senses. We would need ethnographic documentation to truly understand how the different senses collaborate to bring about "belief" in American religious practices, just to take the proverb that also furnishes the title of Dundes' article. To what extent is "seeing" or "witnessing" a metaphor for a religious experience brought about by more than one sense, to what extent is the eye privileged? Of course, I am aware that Americans tend to use "Seeing is believing" outside the religious context. In terms of the arguments made, however, it is instructive to consider the religious context as a point of departure for ethnographies of sensory experience.

Kanaana assembles proverbial material that supports the hypothesis of a greater privileging of the ear in Arab discourse. Then he goes beyond the text-based only methodology employed by Dundes and brings in casual observances of practices relying on the ear rather than the eye, which he suggests might be probed more deeply. In this regard, I can only concur with Kanaana. His example of purchasing melons might serve as an example. Kanaana suggests that while Arabs will touch merchandise, "feel it with their hands, frequently even taste it" or seek to probe it for sound, when, for example, buying a watermelon, American shoppers, in Kanaana's assessment, will not do so, as the packaging interferes. Alas, America is a big country, just as the Arab world contains diverse cultures. There are plenty of farmer's markets in the USA, indeed, there is a renaissance of fresh produce markets in urban areas that do not submit to the "desensualization" entailed in the packaging described by Kanaana. I have witnessed many Americans of different social classes, ethnicities, and gender smelling, feeling, and shaking melons, tasting grapes, and pinching apricots. While there are shoppers submitting to the illusion of greater cleanliness, hygiene, and durability (which are, incidentally, the major cultural and ultimately legal reasons for packaging in the USA, not size) or the convenience and speed provided by packaged produce, there are others who for various reasons choose and weigh produce themselves. Produce markets in many corners of the globe arrange their wares to be a feast

for the eye, but what do we really know about the divergent cultural habits of relying on our complement of sensory skills to make a selection?

What should not be forgotten in ethnographic work on and with the senses is historical change. A view toward historical change would also preempt assumptions of unchanging cultural practices, as shimmers through Muhawi's final sentences (I would, however, strongly align myself with his depiction of the dilemma between identity and freedom entailed in the discourses about tradition). Research on the sense of hearing in European history, for example, offers ample evidence of the ear's superior place, for instance, in ancient Greek philosophy, medieval Christian ideology, and, briefly, pre-romantic and romantic aesthetics (Wagener 2003). Technological devices such as the walkman have, in addition, brought forth new listening practices across many societies and not exclusively in youth culture. Such historical transformations will surely also be in evidence in other culture areas. While I would caution against overly general suppositions concerning culture-specific privileging of one or another sense, the attention the senses ought to be given in cultural documentation and analysis arises out of this contribution by Sharif Kanaana and, by extension, Ibrahim Muhawi and Alan Dundes. Individual experience of the senses and cultural discourse about the senses are surely a central component of human experience, and Kanaana and Muhawi are to be commended for opening up a comparative discussion.

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Remembering the Second World War, 1945–1965: Narratives of Victimhood and Genocide

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Abstract

In many respects, ours is an era of memory and repentance. The great convulsion that was the Second World War is often at the center of such memories, although it is not the only historical focus. If ours is the age of apology, then the first half of the century in Europe was a time when self-proclaimed civilized societies justified or tolerated terrible experiments in social engineering in the name of ideologies. Consequently, the greatest danger in attempting to understand post Second World War memory is a cultural anachronism: the attempt to impose present-day moral expectations of what should have been remembered on what actually had been remembered. The question to ask is how, in the wake of such carnage, did Europeans' "inaccurate" memories help them interpret their post-1945 world? I would like to reflect on this topic, focusing on the score of years after 1945, by discussing two postwar memories: the notion of victimhood as well as the ways in which Europeans remembered the Jews after 1945, even while keeping silent about the genocide.

In many respects, ours is an era of memory and repentance. The great convulsion that was the Second World War is often at the center of such memories, although it is not the only historical focus. Apologies for the persecution of the Jews were heard from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (in 1994), the Vatican's half-hearted "We Remember" (in 1994), and the French bishops' "Declaration of Repentance" (in 1997). "Truth commissions" were established to investigate past regimes and crimes in democratizing Latin America, Eastern Europe, and South Africa. The United States government apologized to Japanese-Americans interned in the war, while the debate continues as to whether former slaves are owed reparations as well as an apology. The philosophical, moral, financial, and judicial aspects of reparations are a measure of our "age of apology" (Torpey 2001; Brooks 1999, 3–11; Ogletree 2002).

If ours is the age of apology, then the first half of the century in Europe was the age of murderous utopias to perfect society. It was a time when self-proclaimed civilized societies justified or tolerated terrible experiments in social engineering in the name of ideologies. Consequently, the greatest danger in attempting to understand post Second World War memory is a cultural anachronism: the attempt to impose present-day moral expectations of what should have been remembered on what actually had been remembered. The question to ask is how, in the wake of such carnage, did Europeans' "inaccurate" memories help them interpret their post-1945 world? I would like to reflect on this

topic, focusing on the score of years after 1945, by discussing two postwar memories: the notion of victimhood as well as the ways in which Europeans remembered the Jews after 1945, even while keeping silent about the genocide.

I use in this paper the notion of memory as a set of representations of the past that are constructed by a given social group (be it a nation, a class, a family, a religious community, or other) through a process of invention, appropriation, and selection, and that have bearings on relationships of power within society. I am aware that this is a broad and admittedly somewhat vague definition, but it suffices for the purpose of this essay, namely articulating general trends in postwar remembrance of victimhood and Genocide. A discussion of the theoretical and methodological implications of the notion of memory belongs elsewhere (Confino 1997; Confino 2004).

I

A heroic memory of the Second World War in the two decades after 1945 is familiar: the Great Patriotic War in Russia, the epic Battle of Britain, the resistance movements in France and Italy, the valiant saving of Danish Jews, and America's moral crusade that received a historical legitimacy in the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington (Tumarkin 1994; Garrard and Garrard 1992).¹ Even the state of Israel, which seemed to have nothing heroic to commemorate when it came to the war, constituted in 1959 a national Remembrance Day for the Holocaust and its Heroism (*Yom Hashoah Vehagvura*) (Segev 1993;

Almog 2002, chap. 2; Young 1990).² These heroic memories were fundamental to national recovery and to creating and sustaining national identity after the war. It is not exceptional for a war to be heroically commemorated. What is significant in the memory of the Second World War is that a second, no less important, memory was shaped that runs counter to heroic memory—one that emphasized victimhood as a pillar of national identity.

It is perhaps not surprising that after the Second World War the notions of victimhood, self-pity, and suffering became organizing metaphors to understand and explain it. Simplistic heroism could not quite capture the war experience, characterized by the humiliating occupation of proud nations, anguished or willing collaboration, forced labor, economic austerity, carpet bombing, persecution, deportations, extermination, and the transformation of combat heroes of previous wars into ordinary executioners.

The cases of France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, authoritatively analyzed by Pieter Lagrou in the *Legacy of Occupation: Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945–1965*, are illustrative. The three countries experienced military defeat and occupation that offered little in the way of national heroism. Collaboration and forced labor complicated the picture further. As a result, "glorification of the contribution of the resistance movements was the only basis available for a true national myth." But the resistance raised problems too. "The soldier-hero [of the Great War]," observes Lagrou, "was replaced by much

more controversial hero-types: terrorist guerrillas, often primarily engaged in an ideological battle" (Lagrou 2000, 26, 3; Conway 2000, 133–156; Huyse 2000, 157–172; Romijn 2000, 174–193). Moreover, some of the resistance fighters were foreigners, while others were communists who were viewed as anti-national by traditional patriots. The war thus lent itself only with difficulty to the construction of a uniform national narrative of heroism.³ And the reality of the war was that combatants, even broadly defined, made up only a minority of the victims of persecution. For the rest, "national memory imposed the paradigm of the martyr" (Lagrou 2000, 211). The martyred village Oradour-sur-Glane, whose entire population was massacred by the Germans in 1944, came to stand in France for the nation as a whole. *Déportation*, much more than *Résistance*, has developed into a central metaphor in postwar French memories (Lagrou 2000, 296; Farmer 1999).

It is not surprising that nations occupied by the Germans constructed a myth of martyrdom. But it is significant that the notion of victimhood became an organizing metaphor for perpetrators as well. West Germans, argues Robert Moeller eloquently in his path-breaking study *War Stories*, constructed a memory in the 1950s that embraced the war as part of their history but that simultaneously distanced them from the National Socialist regime. West Germans, like the French, Belgians, and the Dutch, remembered the war as victims. Expellees and POWs exemplified this memory. In the final months of the war some twelve million Germans fled or were expelled from Eastern Europe (Eastern

Prussia, Silesia, and Czechoslovakia). In 1950, eight million of them lived in West Germany. Their suffering became the leitmotif of Germany as war victim. In addition, of the more than three million German soldiers who were in Soviet captivity at the end of the war, one million died in captivity, and the last POWs did not return home until 1955, following Konrad Adenauer's historic visit to Moscow. As a whole, Germans focused on stories of their suffering while ignoring their crimes. "They represented a Germany doubly victimized, first by a Nazi regime run amok, then by communists, and they allowed all West Germans to order the past in mutually exclusive categories in which perpetrators and victims were never the same people" (Moeller 2001, 3, 173).⁴

Postwar national memory of self-victimhood existed in West Germany, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, but significant differences were evident among the countries. In West Germany, national victims were neither Communists nor Jews, but only "good Germans," such as expellees, POWs, or victims of Allied air bombings. Thus the category of postwar "victim" largely reproduced the Nazi definition of the national community, or "Volksgemeinschaft." Also in the Netherlands the category "victim" designated neither Communists nor Jews, though for reasons different than in Germany. The Communist Party did not participate in post-'45 Dutch governments and thus had little influence. More important, Dutch memory of the war was based on traditional and patriotic memory that defined victims narrowly as combatants. Those who did not com-

mit acts of resistance were largely excluded from the national memory (Lagrou 2000, 242–245). In France and Belgium, in contrast, memory was organized around the myth of anti-fascism, which was more inclusive. Victims of fascism were not all heroes, but they were all martyrs. Communists were viewed as national victims, testifying to the Communist political traditions and resistant activity, but Jews, who did not resist militarily, were not seen in this way.

Other nations, in different ways, also put on the mantle of martyrdom. Austria, as is well known, constructed a myth of itself as the first victim of Hitler; it ranks among the most imaginative constructions of the past in the twentieth century. Austrian provisional president after the end of the war, Karl Renner, stated that the vast majority of Hitler's followers were victims of historical consequences, economic dislocation, and coercion (Burkey 2000, 227–228).⁵ Poland justifiably saw itself as Hitler's victim (Steinlauf 1997). In Italy, the heroic memory of the resistance dominated after 1945 (Bosworth and Dogliani 1999, 1–9). At the same time, the fall of fascism in 1943, the civil war, and the German occupation shaped a coexisting memory: Italians generally viewed themselves as victims of German occupation, while the wide consensus around Mussolini's regime was silenced. A further myth of victimization was constructed around Italy's conflict along its northeastern border with Yugoslavia. The fascists talked of Italy's victimization by the terrible Slavs, and postwar governments picked up this rhetoric that fit well within anti-Communist Cold War discourse (Sluga 1999; Merridale 2000).⁶

Why did victimhood become a ubiquitous metaphor to understand the war? There are several ways to answer this question, all correct though none conclusive. Nations used the notion of victimhood to articulate their suffering at the hands of Germans, although this leaves unanswered the use of victimhood by the Germans themselves. The notion of victimhood was also used because it described accurately the conditions and experience of the war. This is true, but only half true. Remembering is not about getting the past right; it is often about getting it wrong, thus making the present bearable. In the reality of things people did suffer during the war, but this does not necessarily mean that people would remember the war as a tale of victimhood. Self-commiseration, in fact, is not the most attractive foundation for national recovery. Memory is always selective. The question is why did people choose to remember in the score years after 1945 one story of past suffering (the national story) while de-emphasizing others (the Jewish story and the Holocaust)?

It may be argued, indeed, that Europeans remembered the war using the notion of victimhood as a defense mechanism to avoid moral responsibility for their roles as Holocaust perpetrators, bystanders, and collaborators. Non-German Europeans found it easy to blame it all on Germany in order to forget the wide collaboration and the concentration camps on Polish, French, Austrian, and Czech territory (Judt 1992, 87). Similarly, many West Germans believed after 1945 that Nazism created many victims, among them also the Germans

(Moeller 2001).⁷ Victimhood, then, was a way to avoid moral and historical responsibility. This argument is not wrong, but it is not wholly satisfactory. It runs the danger of reducing victimhood to an instrument of manipulation, while making it a prisoner of political reductionism and moral functionalism. It also runs the danger of explaining victimhood in purely psychological terms, such as denial and trauma, thus viewing a historical problem as a psychological problem. And it views victimhood and responsibility as polarized along a single axis, where one replaces but does not commingle with the other. The argument that victimhood was used to avoid moral and historical responsibility only begs the question: Why is it that, in the mind of contemporaries, victimhood and responsibility were linked at all? Why did people need the notion of victimhood in order to avoid responsibility?

The idea of being a victim assumes that certain individual or collective rights were violated. Victimhood, I would like to suggest, may be linked to the notion of rights within a broader modern rhetoric of individual and group identity. In the modern era of "rights"—the "inalienable rights" to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, the Vindication of the Rights of Women, the right of self-determination, human rights, to mention but a few—victimhood seems to have emerged as a major component of identity as well. But what is perceived as a "right" for one may be viewed as a provocation for another. Your pursuit of happiness may well be perceived as an infringement on my "rights." "Rights"

and victimhood are not contradictory, but complementary within a general discourse of entitlement that is modernity. Some entitlements are innocent enough: shelter and food, for example. But others are potentially explosive, even murderous: the right to happiness, living space, self-determination, and free expression of identity. I am not arguing that a liberal, emancipatory notion of rights inevitably causes a notion of victimhood. There are no cause and effect relations between the modern ideas of rights and victimhood, but there are relations of affinity between the two. The idea that an individual and a group are entitled to express their (obviously subjective) inner essence leads, under certain circumstances, to the sentiment that this right for self expression is being violated, and that one is therefore a victim. Of course, not all sentiments of victimhood are equal: some victims are real, others are not.

Some notions of victimhood are based on tangible aspects such as territory (the German sense of injustice for the territories lost under the Versailles Treaty), property (the post-1945 lost estates of East Prussian landowners), or physical brutality, slave labor, and murder (the German treatment of Poles between 1939 and 1945). But there is always an intangible component in notions of rights and victimhood: the component of identity. It happens when one side experiences the actions of a second side as detrimental to its natural rights and inalienable character. For every perceived notion of victimhood there was a perceived notion of rights. By viewing the notion of victimhood as a counter-

part to the modern notion of rights, it may be possible to place postwar memory within modern European patterns of remembrance.

It is important to point out that victimhood, while coming in different guises, was appropriated in the last century by every ideological regime. It has become a fundamental aspect of the making of imagined national communities. It was used by the Nazis in the most horrifying case of the commingling between rights, victimhood, and identity. Hitler saw himself and Germany as victims of the Jews, who supposedly undermined German identity, purity, and racial-historical mission; this wholly imaginary worldview was the basis of Hitler's exterminatory rage (Gellately 2001, 75–76). It was common among democracies, as in the case of Germany, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands who remembered their role in the World Wars as a "community of suffering."⁸ It was useful under communism, whether in Poland and Czechoslovakia where the Nazi occupation was remembered, or in East Germany where the authorities preferred to de-emphasize the responsibility of German society and culture to the Nazi crimes by reducing it to specific social groups (the bourgeoisie and East Prussian estate owners were fascists whereas workers and communists were anti-fascist heroes), while emphasizing the victimization of Dresden and other cities by the Allied bombings (Koshar 2000, 162; von Borries 2003).⁹

In the score of years after 1945, the war memory was organized around the notions of both victimhood and heroism. Heroism was important for national self-

esteem, but, had it been the only mode of commemorating the war, it would have been too dissonant with the actual experience of the war, which was often anything but heroic. Victimhood embraced people's experience, but had it been the only mode of commemoration it would have left little by way of restoring national pride. Memory of the past is often a fictitious image whose aim is a better understanding of the present. In this respect, remembering inaccurately was fundamental to postwar memory of the extermination of the Jews. It is to this topic that we shall now turn.

II

For a long time, the study of how Germans and Europeans remembered the Holocaust was informed by a laudable moral urgency that asked, nonetheless, the wrong historical questions. According to this common interpretation, now in decline, after the war "National Socialism was treated for a whole generation with collective silence and wide-spread amnesia" (Benz 1990, 12).¹⁰ The repression thesis appears to be an exemplary case of the dangers of imposing a worthy moral cause on the vicissitudes and contingencies of historical and human affairs; it has been less successful in explaining Europeans' changing attitudes toward National Socialism than in providing a sweeping condemnation of the war generation. As a consequence, the repression approach was content with an explanation that ignored the complex negotiations between remembering and forgetting. It was founded, in a sense, on an explanatory framework that countered repression with atonement: in this

dichotomous relationship, Germans and other Europeans after 1945 (and until the 1960s, which was seen as the turning point) could either fully atone for their crimes or else they were repressing them. There was little middle ground between the two extremes. But this appears to be an imposition of our own moral values and expectations on a historical situation—and on an image of the past—that was significantly more complex. By focusing on sins of omission, a fundamental question may be ignored: just what exactly *did* Germans and other Europeans remember of the war and of the genocide? And if they remembered the war selectively, as we have seen, stressing national heroism and victimhood, then this raises the evident question: how did the genocide of the Jews fit within this framework of martyred nations?

In many ways, it didn't. Across Europe, the experience of one group of victims was not publicly acknowledged, let alone personally internalized, in the two decades after the war: the Jewish victims of genocide. In France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, the need to construct a heroic national narrative after the war marginalized the genocide (Lagrou 2000, 251–261). In West Germany, a basic moral unwillingness to face up to the genocide commingled with the urgent need to construct, from the total bankruptcy of German nationhood, a somewhat viable post-'45 collective identity. East Germany circumvented the issue altogether by viewing Nazism as a historical phenomenon determined by class, not race; the extermination of the Jews was thus not acknowledged as a particular historical event and problem. Also in Yugoslavia,

Poland, Russia, Italy, Hungary, and Greece, evasion was the norm (Bosworth and Dogliani 1999; Steinlauf 1997). The construction of postwar national identity also clashed with the fact that the Holocaust was a multi-national, pan-European event that did not conform to usual traditions of persecution.

But if notions of national victimhood and martyrdom did not include Jews, Jews still figured prominently in the postwar image of national recovery. This is a theme that calls for more research and articulation. Incidents of anti-Semitism were not uncommon in postwar Western Europe. It may seem shocking now, but here lies the danger of anachronism. Those who committed or supported crimes against the Jews during the National Socialist dominance in Europe did not change their views overnight. Anti-Semitic incidents ranged from anti-Jewish graffiti found in Courbevoie on February 19, 1945—"down with the war, down with the denouncers, the firing squad for all Jews"—to the arrest in the Netherlands of stateless Jews upon their return from Bergen-Belsen (these were Jews who arrived in the Netherlands in the 1930s from the Third Reich and had been deported during the German occupation) (Lagrou 2000, 255–6).¹¹ In Poland a pogrom in Kielce took place on July 4, 1946; the motivations for the pogrom were complex, though anti-Semitism and greed combined in a mixture already evident in the Holocaust. Kielce's Jewish population before the war was 18,200 out of a total of 58,200. During the war the town's Jews were exterminated, but in 1945 the population of the city returned to its pre-

war level when Poles from the rural surroundings moved into Jewish houses and took over Jewish property. When the war ended and 304 of Kielce's Jews returned, Poles were afraid of being "dispossessed" of their new property as well as of their perceived space and identity. Forty-two Jews were murdered (Melezin 1999).

The Jewish absence was evident in postwar societies (Bartov 1997). The murder of the Jews was used in several separate but linked ways. On the one hand, it became immediately a recognized moral yardstick by which to measure suffering. The West Germans' use in the 1950s of Jewish suffering was the most revealing: they appropriated it by claiming that "Jews and Germans had experienced the same forms of persecution." Expellees deserved compensation, argued Adenauer's Justice Minister Thomas Dehler, because they, like the Jews, had suffered the destruction of political rights, property, and life. Significantly, the language used by West Germans to bolster their victim status was similar to the language used by the Nazis to victimize the Jews. The head of the Ministry for Expellees, Refugees, and the War-Damaged spoke of "final solutions" against the expellees (Moeller 2001, 32-33). This rhetoric provided West Germans with self-justification and selective memory. It was also a measure of larger memory trends.

Immediately after 1945 the murder of the Jews became a canon of sorts (formula is perhaps a better term) to talk and think about victimhood and injustice.¹² But this canon was made neither with the self-consciousness nor with the mo-

tivations of present-day Holocaust commemorations. West Germans' use of the Jewish extermination to describe their own suffering goes beyond selective memory. It points to a sentiment of commingled guilt and anti-Semitism: the knowledge that by killing the Jews one acted beyond the moral pale, while at the same time perceiving the act as justified and necessary on various grounds. There was neither remorse nor penitence in the West German's comparisons of Jewish and expellees' suffering. The moral non sequitur of this view is jarring: Germans never mentioned who was responsible for the suffering of Jews who now became a model of sorts for their own suffering.

In this respect, this 1950s West German discourse showed remarkable continuity in terms of argumentation and historical analogies across the divide of 1945.¹³ The postwar discourse created the dissonance between Germans who had caused the suffering of the Jews during the war, while using this same suffering as a model to construct their own post-1945 sense of victimhood. The Third Reich discourse created the dissonance between Germans who started the Second World War in which they exterminated the Jews, while blaming the war on the Jews. Hitler viewed Germany as the innocent victim of the Jews. This sentiment reached its height when Hitler blamed the war on the Jews. In his January 30, 1939 speech to the Reichstag he made his famous prophecy that if the Jews will be successful in bringing a war again, as they brought the First World War, "the result will not be the Bolshevization of the earth and thereby

the victory of Jewry, but the destruction of the Jewish race in Europe." This prophecy was thereafter repeated often, by Hitler, Goebbels, and Nazi newspapers and radio. Hitler reiterated it on April 24, 1942, in the last Reichstag meeting in the Third Reich, when he presented Germany again as an innocent victim of the Jews (Gellately 2001, 83, 147, and chap. 6; Sauer 2003). His final words, in his will, reiterated the theme.

At the same time, while the murder of the Jews was used as a yardstick of sorts, it was also viewed by Germans and East Europeans as one incident in a universe of atrocities committed by many sides in the 1930s and '40s. According to the East Prussian expellee Hans Graf von Lehndorff, "we are experiencing nothing unusual, nothing different from what millions of people have experienced in the past years." Maria Zatschen, an expellee from Czechoslovakia, observed that "what a bad comedy all this is: nothing is original, a copy of the Hitler regime, again and again we have to hear: 'just as you have treated the Jews.'" And Czech guards explained to an imprisoned German university professor that their model for handling of Germans was Hitler's concentration camps: "pictures of these camps were displayed at the entrance [to the internment camp]. It would have been possible to make similar pictures in our camp as well" (all examples are from Moeller 2001, 78). It is reasonable to interpret these views as proof of Germans' knowledge of the crimes against the Jews, and their refusal to face up to them. The West German postwar historical project of documenting the expulsion of Germans from Eastern Eu-

rope recorded many such comparative, selective stories whose aim was to dilute German crimes. This interpretation is true and insightful. But my concern is that it is insightful from a particular kind of perspective that remains focused on the recollections as a reflection of some other, "real," intentions. By analyzing utterances as expressions of hidden agendas, of power, denial, selective memory, and concealed intentions, we run the risk of failing to listen attentively to what people in the past tell about themselves, often in simple words. Interestingly, if the repression approach runs the danger of ignoring signs of remembrance, while arguing for a postwar complete silence concerning the Holocaust, then the current emphasis on memory runs the danger of interpreting selective remembrances as a similar refusal to remember Germany's crimes. Paradoxically, the result of the two approaches is the same, and only the mechanism is different: in the repression argument people repressed in order to forget the murder of the Jews, while in the memory argument people remembered selectively in order to forget the murder of the Jews.

The Germans and Czechs mentioned above perceived the atrocities of all sides as linked, comparable, and emulated. This perception may be interpreted as repression and/or as selective memory, but it should also be viewed for what it tells us clearly: that in the immediate postwar rhetoric the murder of the Jews was understood and acknowledged as an integral part of the inhumanity that was Europe in the 1930s and '40s. This and other assertions by contemporaries

provide a reminder of a period that now may seem distant, even strange and immoral, of a period before the Holocaust became "the obsession of our age" in North America, Western Europe, and Israel (Bessel 2002). The contemporary status of the Holocaust as a moral compass in public and popular culture has also generated a view of the Holocaust as unique and for many incomprehensible. But the historical comprehension of the Holocaust has itself a history, which cannot possibly be one-directional. Utterances that made the Holocaust part of a larger whole may seem to some a dishonest attempt to trivialize. But it may just be that in the future—and, I believe, it will come sooner than we think—when the Holocaust will be fully acknowledged as part of European history, the obsession about whether the Holocaust was unique will seem a peculiarity of present-day culture.

The exterminatory utopian experiences of Germans and East Europeans in the 1930s and '40s, whether as perpetrators, victims, or both, made it thinkable for them in the years after the war to link the murder of the Jews with other inhumanities. This did not fit with the experience of France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. While the non-Jewish population of these countries bonded by the sheer force of a humiliating war experience, they did not suffer extermination or brutal racial occupation; silencing the genocide was thus a preferred avenue on the way to an untainted national recovery. It is not surprising that the murder of the European Jews generated specific national memories as well as multinational memories based on shared re-

gional experiences. The Holocaust was a pan-European event.¹⁴ Memory and silence were common across national frontiers; the inability to own up to the past was not a German trait, but a European one.

The difficulty of integrating the murder of the Jews into a meaningful post-war national identity is perhaps best illustrated by the case of Israel. There, the silences, noises, and anguish of memory were all evident. The Yishuv, the Jewish community in Palestine, and later the state of Israel, struggled to include the genocide within a heroic Zionist national narrative. The challenge was confronted by what can be called imaginative inaccuracy, namely including Jewish heroism during the Shoah in the Holocaust remembrance day. At the same time, the dignity of the victims was not fully acknowledged. Survivors who came from "there," as the Holocaust was called in a mixture of awe and removal, symbolized the Diaspora Jews who went like lamb to the slaughter, a diametrically opposed image to the new Jewish man and woman of the Zionist revolution, who worked the land and defended the homeland. But the silence over the victim's experience in the heroic national narrative was commingled with many noises of Holocaust memories and traumas in Israeli society. In contrast to common wisdom that has emphasized repression between 1945 and the Eichmann trial, new research has shown the presence of the Shoah in Israeli culture in this period in novels, political rhetoric, and legal cases (Yablonka 2001; Shtaubert 2000; Segev 1993; Shapira 1997; Kimmerling 2001, 7, 36–7).

One reason the murder of the Jews was more explicable after the war is that the totality of the Final Solution had not yet been known and disseminated in popular culture. The enormity of the Holocaust was not yet known and certainly not yet understood. The murder of the Jews was perceived as fitting within patterns of murderous utopias: collectivization, ethnic cleansing, forced migration, and, as Walter Benjamin put it, the Enlightenment's belief in the inexorable course of the "infinite perfectibility of mankind" (Benjamin 1986, 260). Paradoxically, then, the last sixty years reverse a cherished Enlightenment ideal, namely, that knowledge provides better understanding. The more we know about the Holocaust, it appears, the less we understand it.

III

Let us tie the arguments of this essay together. We begin with the notion of memory as interpretative attraction and problem. Some scholars think that memory studies are a fashion and a fad. As one historian recently put it, "Everyone is doing memory work these days. Titles with the word 'memory' in them fill sagging library shelves. Memory, it would seem, is a major industry Why this should be the case is still an open question. The concern with memory in recent years reflects an egocentric obsession with the past-in-the-present in the guise of preparing for a 'better' future" (Chamberlin 2001, 74). While not all historians are writing on memory, many do. It is now a leading term, perhaps *the* leading term, in current historical analysis, replacing the previously dominant terms

of class, race, and gender. By focusing on memory, historians reflect, more than they shape, contemporary engagement with the past that is evident at all levels of society, in popular culture, government initiatives, heritage and tourist industry, family and genealogical history, reparation claims and repentance declarations. It follows that to dismiss memory ironically as fashionable will not do. The reason to take it seriously is precisely because so many *are* doing memory work these days: national truth commissions, governments, the Pope, financial and industrial companies—the list can go on and on (Mommsen 1996; Feldman 2001; Cullen 1999; Jeismann 1999).¹⁵ The focus on memory is a fad, but it has also developed into a fundamental term with which individuals and collectivities define their identity. It deserves serious, though critical, consideration. With respect to studying the Second World War, it calls for an awareness that—precisely because memory is a leading cultural term and the Holocaust is the moral signifier of our age—the danger of interpretative anachronism is always present.

Based on this idea, the essay argues that the focus of postwar European nations on victimhood was associated with modern ideas of individual and collective rights. But when it came to remembering the extermination of the Jews, this memory was silenced, viewed as a model of historical injustice, and placed unexceptionally within the general inhumanity of the period. These were coexisting representations, not so much contradictory as commingling and complementary, which belonged to a moral uni-

verse that was different from ours.

A reshuffling of the meaning of victimhood, rights, and genocide remembrances has been at the heart of a remarkable turnabout in which the memory of the Second World War has become in the last sixty years not simply more inclusive of the victims of the war, but indeed dominated by them. The full story of this shift is still to be told. What Lagrou observed about French memory is true for other countries as well: *Déportation* has become more illustrative than *Résistance* as a leading metaphor for the war (Lagrou 2000, 296). In France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, as in other European countries, the memory of the war is now heavily centered on the Jewish genocide. In Italy in 1999, the readers of the leading newspaper *Corriere della sera* chose the Holocaust as the most significant event of the century. A proposal to display at every school in Italy the photograph of the Jewish boy raising his hands in the Warsaw ghetto received wide support.¹⁶ In Germany, a distinct move has taken place in public culture to remember the victims of the Nazi regime. When Germans now speak of the victims of the Second World War they most often mean the victims of German aggression, and not their own victimhood. The theme of Germany as a victim appears occasionally in literature and cinema, but it ought not to be interpreted as dominant (for a different view, see Bartov 2000a, 2000b). In contrast, in the 1950s the policy debates over reparations for victims of Nazi persecution, on the one hand, and laws to help expellees and POWs, on the other, showed the narrowness of the West German defini-

tion of "victim" and the basic unwillingness of Germans of all walks of life to acknowledge the crimes committed in the name of Germany. Fifty years later, a different memory culture has come to exist. Thus, in December 1999, an anonymous Berliner, age 72, sent 10,000 Marks to the newly-instituted slave labor compensation fund. During the war, he wrote the German committee, his father employed a Ukrainian woman in the family restaurant in Münster. He never forgot this. "Her name was Anna and she worked for us for three years—certainly not of her own free will. My contribution pays a moral debt."¹⁷

We end, then, where we began: with memory and repentance as signifiers of our era. In our age of apology, one hears of scholars as well as laypersons who admonish European societies between 1945 and 1965 for failing to come to terms with the Second World War and the Holocaust. But reversing this logic seems more appropriate. Perhaps we should be amazed that societies are now so open about their wrong deeds, and ready to apologize with such frequency. It is, after all, easier to understand why individuals as well as societies would prefer to repress their crimes rather than to understand why they atone with such insistence, indeed with a religious sense of purification. When we take human fallibility and weaknesses into serious consideration, then the right question may be not only: why did postwar societies remember the war so selectively?, but also: why is it that at the end of the twentieth century memory and repentance have become fundamental creeds for topics of morality, of legal proceed-

ings, of international relations, and of group and individual identity?

This is the question I hope to raise by writing this essay. Thinking critically about memory, about victimhood and rights, and about Holocaust memory are some possible beginnings to answering this question. A conclusive answer was not an aim of this essay, but a series of further suggestions can be provided as to where other answers might be sought. The interpretative framework of the Second World War and the Holocaust in the three decades after 1945 was influenced by several factors that were not conducive to explore individual and human rights. Historiographically, the dominance of Marxism de-emphasized the racial aspect of the war and the victimhood of ordinary citizens and Jews (other than workers and communists). An influential non-Marxist historiographic approach wrote history from the point of view of the state and of political, military, and economic organizations, not of the subjective memory and experience of individuals. Politically, the Cold War determined a polar ideological view of the war and its aftermath; under these conditions, discussion of memory and human rights were often reduced to an instrumentalization of history.

In the last generation we have witnessed the dismantling of Marxism as a leading interpretation of history, the collapse of communism and the end of the Cold War, the rise of new historical approaches (such as gender, culture, and everyday-life history) that put at the center the subjective experience of individuals and the imaginative reconstruction of

cultures, and last but not least a generational change that opened up new historical topics that had hitherto been taboo. As a result, interpretations have set their gaze to the massive, unprecedented violation of individual and human rights that took place in the name of ideologies and social engineering during the war. The notion of human rights became individualized, whether in scholarship where the experience of victims of persecution is explored, or in politics and the legal profession where victims claim compensation from states and other organizations for, for example, lost property and slave labor. But the notion of human rights did not become only individualized, it also became a property of humanity as a whole. The creation of the United Nations' International Criminal Tribunal, based on previous documents such as the 1949 Geneva Convention, makes genocide a punishable offence for rulers and their helpers; such supra-national bodies are the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) established on May 1993 and for Rwanda (ICTR) established on November 1994. The state as the crux of political inviolability and historical research has thus been challenged, and to some extent replaced, by a focus on the specific experience of individuals and on the abstract notion of humanity's rights.

There are certainly additional elements to this history, but as I write this short narrative I realize that whatever happened in the world since 1945, there is a reason to think that at least some people drew so far a correct, valuable lesson from the past of the Second World War. And this is no small feat.

Notes

I am grateful to Allan Megill for his reading of an earlier draft of this paper. With my students Monica Black, David Bridges, Thomas Fallace, Jeanne Haffner, Desiree Hopkins, Chris Loss, and Mary Ann McGrail, I discussed these and related topics; I am indebted to their critical and enthusiastic spirit. I wish to thank also the essay's two anonymous readers.

¹ All these memories are, of course, selective. The controversial politics surrounding the Holocaust Museum in Washington is a case in point. The Museum was seen by some as confirming American moral superiority by vanquishing evil, but to others it raises the question of why the Holocaust is chosen as a commemorated genocide on the Mall and whether Armenians or Indians should not receive a similar museum. Moreover, the function of the Museum as a symbol of a perceived US historical mission does not contradict the fact that the museum is also appropriately critical of specific US policies.

² Israel's Holocaust Remembrance Day had multiple meanings. For a complex analysis, see Segev 1993.

³ The difference between France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, on the one hand, and Britain and the United States, on the other, is significant. The last two did not experience fascist movements, occupation, collaboration, forced labor, resistance, and defeat. Their memories of the war are less burdened by moral dilemmas and painful evasions, and are organized more around heroism and moral fortitude. This is exemplified by the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, which commemorates not only the genocide, but also America's historical destiny as a fighter against evil. Interestingly, the legacy of anti-fascism as mainstream ideal and political discourse was fundamental in most postwar continental countries.

But it was not important in postwar Britain and the United States beyond limited Communist and Trotskyist circles. In Britain "democratic populism" served the functions of antifascism in political discourse. See Eley 1996, 73–100, esp. 73–75, 96–97. On the Holocaust museum, see Handler 1994; Linenthal 1995; Stone 1999.

In Britain to this day, as one scholar has argued, "public remembering of the war [presents] the idea of a national unity, a shared aim of defeating fascism and liberating occupied Europe, [an idea] which cut across distinctions of wealth, rank, and politics." (Noakes 1998, 2; see also Evans and Lunn 1997). Alternative memories that do not fit easily with the heroic narrative have been produced in the US and Britain, but the heroic narrative remained powerful in contrast to, say, Italy and France, where forceful and controversial questionings of the Vichy regime and of the *resistenza* (resistance) have taken place in recent years. See Rousso 1991; Tranfaglia 1996; Pavone 1991.

⁴ The representation of German suffering during the war has recently been a controversial topic in German society following, among others, the publication of Friedrich 2002 and Grass 2002. On Friedrich's book and the debate over the Allied bombing, see Kettenacker 2003 and the Forum on H-German Net: http://www.h-net.org/~german/discuss/WWII_bombing/WWII-bombing_index.html. See also Moeller 2003. The film *Das Wunder von Bern* (2003) used the story of West Germany's 1954 World Cup victory as a backdrop to Germany's postwar suffering, grief, and miraculous resurrection. Focused on the relationship of 11-year-old Matthias with his father who returned home after 11 years in Soviet captivity, it raised concerns among some commentators about the image of Germany as a postwar nation of victims. See *New York Times*, November 10, 2003, A4.

⁵ The Austrians also saw themselves as a "community of suffering" in the immediate postwar years as a result of the de-Nazification policies of the American occupation forces. See Burkey 2000.

⁶ Russia may be one important exception to this pattern of constructing memories of victimhood in European nations. Victimhood, according to Catherine Merridale, was not part of personal or political language, and the psychological tradition, based on such terms as trauma and denial, is largely unhelpful in explaining Russians' attitudes toward death. This is an intriguing argument that demands more study and evidence. See Merridale 2000.

⁷ For a gender dimension of German victimhood, see Heineman 1996.

⁸ For using "community of suffering" to describe French self-perception, see Bartov 2000a, 18, and Lagrou 2000, 297. Elizabeth Domansky 1997, 256, uses it to describe German self-perception after 1945.

⁹ See von Borries 2003 on the persistent representation in East German textbooks of bourgeois West Germany as a continuation of Nazism.

¹⁰ The essayist Jane Kramer, who argued that Germans "buried the past . . . without a reckoning, without committing the past to history," popularized this view on the pages of *The New Yorker*; see Kramer 1996. For a discussion and critique of the repression approach, see Moeller 2001. It should be noted that before 1989 most of the research on how Germans came to terms with the past had concentrated on West Germany. For a study of both Germanies, see Herf 1997.

¹¹ The anti-Jewish graffiti in Courbevoie continued a wartime French practice. Under Nazi occupation, anti-Jewish graffiti appeared in Lyon such as "TUER un Juif c'est venger un soldat" (TO KILL a Jew is to avenge a soldier). See Bebenrieth 2001.

¹² I use the term "murder of the Jews" in this context because the term "Holocaust" entered into use only later, and in itself demonstrates awareness of the totality and perceived uniqueness of the extermination of the Jews.

¹³ There were important qualitative differences between the two projections, however. Chief among them was that West German victimhood discourse was expressed under conditions of political democracy and open civil society.

¹⁴ I use "event" here much as we refer to the Industrial Revolution, which was a process, as an event. Just as the Industrial Revolution happened differently in each country but can still be historically analyzed in terms of general cause and effect, implications, and consequences, so too can the Holocaust.

¹⁵ Volkswagen and Allianz Versicherungs AG are among the companies that have opened their Third Reich archives; see Mommsen 1996 and Feldman 2001. On the Berlin Holocaust memorial, see Cullen 1999 and Jeismann 1999. The Swiss government formed an international committee of scholars to look at Switzerland's role in the Second World War. The committee's final report is available at: www.uek.ch

¹⁶ *Corriere della sera*, December 27, 1999, 17; December 30, 1999, 21; December 31, 1999, 12.

¹⁷ *Der Tagesspiegel*, December 14, 1999, 5. He wrote to Otto Graf Lambsdorff, the chair of the committee who represented the German government in the negotiations. In contrast to the man in this story, the conduct of German financial and industrial companies in establishing the fund was often despicable.

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Responses

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Alon Confino asks: "Why did victimhood become a ubiquitous metaphor to understand the [Second World] war?" He contrasts rhetorics of victimization—used by Germans and others to describe their experiences—with the ways in which Germans and others have remembered and commemorated the Holocaust. I'm flattered that he's found my work useful in his approach to these problems. Our conversations about these topics that have taken place in cyberspace via email can now continue here in a more public context, and I welcome the invitation to respond to this insightful, thought-provoking piece. Confino's analysis extends to all of Europe, but he has the most to say about Germany, and it's on that case that I'll focus most of my attention as well.

Confino notes the dismantling of Marxism as a leading interpretation of history, but perhaps the past master's prologue to *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* can still help us think through how memories take shape. Marx writes: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past" (Marx 1852). Substitute memory for history, and Marx's observation still holds true. Confino gives us a good sense of "those already existing circumstances" in which post-World War II memories take shape, but I'd add to

his list. Foremost among those circumstances postwar Germans did not choose was the larger geopolitical context of the Cold War, and to understand the narratives of both heroism and victimization that Confino discusses, it would be important to remember that framework. The Cold War does make a cameo appearance late in Confino's essay, but I'd argue that it might be allowed more than a walk-on role. The western Allies—particularly the United States—and the Soviets did little to encourage postwar Germans—in East and West—to dwell on German crimes against Jews and other civilians, as they rushed to draw a clear distinction between a handful of evil Nazis and the overwhelming majority of good Germans who could be rapidly integrated into postwar military alliances. East Germans could be enlisted to remain vigilant against capitalist imperialism, lest it unleash destruction a second time. And in the West, rehabilitated enemies became allies in a battle against the foe they'd fought from 1941–1945.

Marx continues: "The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living," and this time we might replace tradition with memory. In passing, Confino refers to past German experiences of victimhood—the Versailles Treaty and German territorial losses after World War I—but heeding Marx's advice, we might think through more systematically the different ways in which victim discourses played themselves out after 1918 and again after 1945. For the Nazis and others on the political right, the only way to redeem the victimization of Germany by the Allies and the

"November criminals" and the sacrifice of those who had died struggling against the Weimar state was through the glorification of force, the promise that Germany would once again assume its rightful place as a world power, and the pursuit of the real perpetrator of crimes against Germans, the Jew. Once the Second World War commenced and particularly after the number of German military and civilian deaths began to soar, justifying sacrifice became more and more difficult for the regime. Beginning in 1943, the Nazi state attempted to transform once triumphant Germans into victims whose sacrifice demanded fighting to the finish. The rhetoric of victimization only intensified as the war continued to sour for Germans in the winter of 1944 and the spring of 1945. Some modes of understanding defeat and destruction, which would reappear with variations in the late 1940s and early 1950s, could be traced back into the war and even the interwar period. This longer term perspective, however, can also remind us that however incomplete and selective were German memories of the Second World War, a second time around rhetorics of victimization did not trigger demands for revenge and retribution. To be sure, unconditional surrender, the presence of sizable occupation forces, the prosecution of German military and political leaders at Nuremberg, and the Cold War all distinguished 1945 from 1918. But in neither East nor West was there evidence that post-World War II rhetorics of victimization translated into the politics of resentment that had contributed to the triumph of the Nazis.

There was no "Stalingrad syndrome," no lost war for which Germans must seek revenge. The public commemoration of mass death, loss, and suffering was accompanied by the exhortation to avoid all future wars, not to redeem loss at the end of a gun. The German word *Opfer* can denote both passive victimization and sacrifice or suffering in service of a higher cause. The pre-1945 emphasis on the latter meaning of the term gave way in the late 1940s and 1950s to the former. And looking back from the viewpoint of the present, it might be possible to trace out how, particularly in the West, public memories of German suffering in the war translated into widespread opposition to rearmament and placement of nuclear weapons on German soil. German political resistance to the use of armed force could be justified by claims that Germans knew altogether too well what destruction wars could unleash.

I find particularly intriguing Confino's idea that we understand claims to victim status in terms of a "modern rhetoric of individual and group identity," and the discourse of rights and entitlement runs throughout postwar West German discussions of restitution and reparations – to the victims of bombs, expellees from eastern Europe, and POWs who lost the "best years of their lives" in Soviet captivity. But Confino might also want to look more carefully at conceptions of sacrifice and victimization that were deeply rooted in a Christian discourse that was shared by both Protestants and Catholics and described sacrifice as the first step toward atonement and moral restitution

that was not determined in a court of law or the halls of parliament. For example, Frank Biess demonstrates how POWs returning to the West were described as "survivors of totalitarianism," victims first of fanatical Nazis, then the Red Army, who emerged as representatives of a specifically Christian German *Kultur*. They had lived to tell the tales of Soviet captivity and could serve as the source of the "spiritual renewal" of postwar society. No other group had done more penance for National Socialism's defeat in war, and when the POW was depicted as a shaven head, framed by barbed wire, the association with a crown of thorns was not accidental. The POW's redemption for past crimes became the redemption of all Germans, and as Biess makes clear, in the West the churches played a crucial role in shaping the terms in which redemption was understood. In the East, redemption lay not in Christianity but in the ersatz religion of an anti-fascist education, available to many in Soviet prisoner-of-war camps, where German soldiers were transformed into "pioneers of a new Germany" whose labor rebuilding the Soviet Union had paid off some of the debt owed by Germans to their liberators. As Biess has demonstrated, the process of conversion also brought with it forgiveness of all past individual and collective sins (Biess 1999, 2001, 2002). In both East and West, claiming status as a victim was the first step toward establishing an identity as a survivor, and survivors became the shapers of their own destinies, able to return Germany to the proper path—whether that path pointed toward a

"Christian occident" and the "social market economy" or toward a light from the east and communism. Embracing victim status was the first step toward overcoming it.

How Germans described their victim status differed for women and men. In a doubtless intentionally polemical fashion, Confino argues that memory is "now a leading term, perhaps *the* leading term, in current historical analysis, replacing the previously dominant terms of class, race, and gender." Elsewhere, he has identified memory as a crucial object of study in any attempt to write a "history of sensibilities" and outline the "mental horizon of society," part of a cultural history that would explore "mental and emotional perceptions" (Confino 2004, also 2002). But surely in attempting to describe this horizon we will continue to employ those other categories of analysis, and to race, class, and gender, I'd add sexuality. Consider a few examples: In Elizabeth Heineman's study of postwar discussions of women as victims of rape by the Red Army, she describes how a specifically female discourse of victimization became central to the creation of West German collective memory and shaped national identity after 1945 (Heineman 1996). In her work on "Trauma, Memory, and Motherhood," Atina Grossman concludes that "many Germans conceived of their experience as that of *Opfer*, and they did so in gendered and sexualized terms, which focused on birth and abortion rates, infant and child mortality, on female victimization and rape" (Grossmann 2003). Men, returning from the war, defeated and often disabled, carried other images

of *armes Deutschland*, which registered clearly in public memory, and by the early 1950s, as Biess's work suggests, the hour of the man had struck in East and West, as the returning veteran and POW became symbols of a new, rehabilitated—and remasculinized—Germany. When Lutz Niethammer and his co-workers set out to compile the postwar memories of working class women and men in the Ruhr in the late 1970s (Niethammer 1983a, 1983b), interviewers quickly determined that men's and women's memories focused on very different things. The memories collected by Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman in their moving documentary, *Paragraph 175*, tell other victim stories, those of gay men, who in one case wore a Wehrmacht uniform and served the Third Reich (Epstein and Friedman 2002). And Claudia Schoppmann has much to say about the lived experience and memories of lesbians who were not subject to criminal prosecution in the Third Reich but whose sexuality left them far outside the *Volksgemeinschaft* (Schoppmann 1996).

Confino concludes this essay by fast-forwarding to a present in which Germans who speak of "the victims of the Second World War . . . most often mean the victims of German aggression, and not their own victimhood." Getting to that point is a story that exceeds what he undertakes in this essay, but the dates in his title—1945–1965—suggest that the change comes after the mid-1960s. I would encourage him to set the date a bit earlier. Although East German public memory with its emphasis on heroic anti-fascism remained largely uncon-

tested, in the West the story is more interesting. Consider a few indicators of the West German public's willingness to entertain a greater range of victim memories and pursue perpetrators with faces and names a decade or so after the end of the war: *The Diary of Anne Frank* appeared in a popular paperback edition in 1955 and was soon followed by a staged version in 1957. A year later, millions of West Germans went to see the movie based on the play. In the last third of the 1950s, a growing number of acts of antisemitic vandalism against synagogues and Jewish cemeteries also raised fears domestically and abroad that one troubling phoenix was arising from the ashes of National Socialism and led to more aggressive West German prosecution of at least some of the Nazis who had committed crimes. By the mid-1960s, West Germans had watched Eichmann on trial in Jerusalem and had also observed a trial of Auschwitz guards in a West German court in Frankfurt am Main that began in 1963 and went on for twenty months. And throughout the 1960s, when a majority of the legislators in the West German parliament voted to extend the statute of limitations for murder, they were particularly concerned with murders of a very specific sort—those committed by Nazis in the service of the Third Reich (Marcuse 2001). I agree with Confino's conclusion that Germany is among those societies that "are now so open about their wrong deeds, and ready to apologize with such frequency," but I would trace the beginning of this development to the last third of the 1950s when in many respects the postwar period—in which Germans imagined

themselves most often as a "nation of victims"—was over.

If Confino dates the beginnings of a major shift in Germany's "memory landscape" a bit late, he perhaps announces a bit too soon that when Germans speak of victims, they mean victims of the Nazi regime. Tucked in a footnote he makes reference to Günter Grass's recent novel, *Crabwalk*, which calls on Germans to remember the victims of the expulsion, and Jörg Friedrich's *Der Brand* (The Conflagration), slated for English translation, a massive compilation of history and memories of the bombing of German cities during the Second World War. The expulsion has also loomed large in public demands for a Center Against Expulsions, located in Berlin, that would place the fate of Germans, displaced from their eastern European homes, in the context of other victims of "ethnic cleansing" and forced population transfers in the twentieth century. A past of German victimization is also at the movies. Confino calls attention to *Das Wunder von Bern* (The Miracle in Bern), a movie in which a returning POW is redeemed by his embrace of fatherhood. And *Der Untergang* (The Downfall), a movie that opened in September 2004, directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel and produced by Bernd Eichinger, who also wrote the screenplay, presents a story of the last days of the Third Reich in which no one dies but Germans. Guido Knopp, an historian turned television producer, has also churned out a steady stream of memories, commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of defeat at Stalingrad, the bombing war, and the expulsion of Germans from eastern Europe. Against the back-

ground of the completion of a massive "monument to the murdered Jews of Europe" in the center of the capital of a unified Germany, it is difficult not to hear echoes of the juxtaposition of fates of German victims and victims of Germans that dominated the discourse of the 1950s. Finally, in fascinating analyses of interviews of three generations of German families to determine how memory is communicated across generations, Harald Welzer, Sabine Moeller, Karoline Tschuggnall, and Olaf Jensen determined that German young people are perfectly capable of dissociating the accounts of National Socialist crimes that they hear in school from their memories of their own grandparents who emerge as heroes or heroic survivors of victim fates. A small group of Nazis remain distinct from the vast majority of good Germans, many Germans are victims, and "Opa was no Nazi." Memory—now reproduced in the third generation—and history continue to collide (Welzer, Moller, and Tschuggnall 2002; Jensen 2004).

Confino concludes that one post-Second World War/Holocaust legacy is that the "notion of human rights"—so profoundly violated by the National Socialist regime—has become a "property of humanity as a whole." I wish I could share his optimism. He is certainly correct that this is a "correct, valuable lesson from the past of the Second World War" that "at least some people drew." However, Samantha Powers' riveting book *A Problem from Hell* (Powers 2002) offers powerful evidence of how little has been done since 1945 to prevent genocide and how remarkably able members

of the international community—in particular the United States—have been to put nationally-defined self-interest ahead of any commitment to an abstract conception of human rights. "Self-proclaimed civilized societies" have continued to justify "or tolerate terrible experiments in social engineering in the name of ideologies" well into the second half of the twentieth century in ways that confound, dismay, anger, and sadden. They make no less relevant the study of the history and memory of the mass murder of Jews and other civilians in the Second World War and they suggest the importance of seeing the Holocaust in a comparative trans-national framework which would also include careful attention to the kinds of narratives of victimhood and genocide that were constructed in the aftermath of other moments of state-organized mass death and destruction. As we continue to pursue these topics, there's no question that Alon Confino will have much to contribute, and we should all listen carefully to what he has to say.

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Memory and human rights

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The powerful and insightful remarks offered by Alon Confino on memory, victimhood, and identity since 1945 are important in two respects. First, they provide a framework to understand the human rights boom of the later twentieth century. Secondly, they adopt a conceptual rigor in the handling of the term "memory" conspicuously lacking in most accounts of the subject.

These comments are offered, therefore, in the hope that his interpretation can be pushed further. My reflections concern the way in which human rights discourse emerged in the later twentieth century. In 1948, René Cassin read out to the United Nations assembled in Paris the text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the same year Rafael Lemkin's project of securing a Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide was realized.

It has taken nearly half a century for both of these documents, and the ideas underlying them, to grow into pillars of the international polity and legal and moral thinking. Why did it take so long? And how does this slow growth in the public profile of human rights affect our understanding of notions of victimhood, identity, and memory?

It is evident that Cassin and Lemkin, both Jewish jurists, had the Holocaust in

mind when they set about transforming international law. Both had lost most of their families in the war, and had few illusions as to the disappearance of anti-Semitism in 1945. And yet they had the foresight to see that law is organic, and though in the short term it might not reach those who need it, in the longer term a commitment to rights could come to protect the victims of state power.

Both the Universal Declaration and the Convention on Genocide were challenges to the notions of state sovereignty. The Nazis were explicit in stating their complete freedom of action within their own borders. The Holocaust made such affirmations that the sovereign "est une châtelaine dans son château" no longer tenable. But claims or even conventions that human rights supersede national sovereignty are one thing; political practice is another. It took two decades for Cassin's own government to sign on to the Universal Declaration, that is, until the vicious civil war in Algeria was finally over.

What made possible both public acknowledgment of the significance of the Holocaust and the human rights epoch lay elsewhere. The interpretive framework in which war and Holocaust were set after 1945 was either statist or Marxist or both. The turn away from a pure belief in state sovereignty or from Marxism took time. The Second World War obviously was a war about state borders and boundaries, and the Soviet Union held understandably conservative views on this matter, having lost (according to different estimates) between 20 and 50 million lives in the defense of their territory.

Facing the Holocaust and reinterpreting the Second World War as a war in which individual or human rights were challenged in an unprecedented way took time. The state had (and to a degree still has) its claims to see the story differently. But in a period of globalization, of growing trans-national identities, of the emergence of European federalism, and after the collapse of communism, the whole intellectual and legal framework of state power has come under significant review. In Europe, the doctrine of supremacy of EU law over national law has inserted the commitment to human rights and international conventions within the legal frameworks of the constituent states of the European Union.

That is why in 1998, Gustavo Pinochet was arrested on a writ issued by a magistrate in Madrid and enforced by a magistrate in London to hold him accountable for the work of Chilean secret police assassins murdering Spaniards (among others) in Buenos Aires. It is not that the state has vanished as a legal force; it is that its reach and writ are now contested as never before.

Herein lies one of the key sources of the recent increment in the visibility and power of the human rights agenda. Only when Marxist ideas of the state and what may be termed Schmittian notions of emergency powers and absolute sovereignty began to fade, did the campaign for human rights finally come into its own. As against the notion of state identity, other identities—ethnic, multi-national, or gendered—can now make claims they could not make in what may be termed the *étatiste* age. That age lasted

well into the second half of the twentieth century and beyond, but its future is uncertain (for a full elaboration of this argument, see Winter 2006a).

Some of these claims now being made are corporate. Rigoberta Menchu Tum speaks for Indians suffering genocidal acts in Guatemala. But other claims about rights have become both entirely individualized and thereby become the property of humanity as a whole.

One way in which individual voices have become the voices of humanity is through the emergence of what Avishai Margalit (2000) terms the "moral witness." This individual directly faced the cruelties of what Kant termed "radical evil" and took risks to tell that story. Thus journalists, judges, historians are not moral witnesses, in Margalit's terms, since they did not go through the suffering. But most of those who suffer and survive do not tell the story. It is too difficult, too dangerous. Those who come forward anyway are moral witnesses.

It is in the context of contested state power that the moral witness has emerged as an iconic figure in the later twentieth century and after. And here the term "witness" takes on multiple connotations. Echoes abound. The first meaning is religious. The witness testifies to the faith and suffers the consequences. The second usage is legal. Much "memory work" is codified, validated, communicated, legitimated in court rooms and in commissions of inquiry about human rights abuses. The third—closer to Margalit's central point—is moral. The moral witness is someone who tells the tale of such inhumanity that one wonders if moral reasoning can sur-

vive it at all. By telling the tale, whatever the consequences, the moral witness reaffirms the very possibilities of moral thinking. Only the voice of an individual—a still small voice in the rhetoric of the prophets—can do that (see further Winter 2006b).

One extension of Confino's argument is, therefore, that "victimhood" has become central to memory work for two fundamental reasons. The first is that the state is no longer free to act without reference to human rights law. The second is that as and to the degree that the moral content of national or Marxist frameworks has waned, so the claims of human rights as individual rights has been extended to humanity as a whole. Moral witnesses are individuals who tell us what human rights are even by describing their violation. The act of telling is what counts. Here remembrance and victimhood come together in an inextricable embrace, one which affirms, despite all, the Enlightenment commitment to moral reasoning, without which the notion of human rights vanishes into thin air.

One set of images may help to further clarify the point I wish to make about the framework in which to set this phenomenon. In 1955, Edward Steichen constructed an idealized vision of humanity, "the family of man." The appeal of this exhibition, initially held at the Museum of Modern Art, and then turned into a traveling exhibition which toured 37 countries in eight years, was evident. What gave it power was sentiment, affect, the identification of viewer with faces and family relationships like their own. Now a half century later, I doubt if

such an exhibition would draw the same attention. Today what humanity has in common is less affect than rights. We all have families, but we do not all have rights. Steichen's faces are those of the common man; they are witnesses to a time, and to an ideology of liberal individualism, but they are not moral witnesses, since their suffering is not portrayed, and there is no risk in doing so. Today the faces and voices of victims describe humanity, and through their testimony their memories become iconic and thereby become our common cultural property. Memory, however defined, is what makes us feel that we can still use the term "humanity;" perhaps this is one reason why so much "memory work" has accompanied so much activity about human rights. It is in their intersection that we may find the key to an important facet of contemporary cultural life.

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Reviews

Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe. By Ruth Ellen Gruber. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. Pp. 304, introduction, notes, bibliography, index, illustrations.)

Ruth Gruber, in her ambitious book *Virtually Jewish*, takes as her subject the recent European phenomenon of non-Jewish interest and participation in Jewish culture. This topic is ripe for research, given the press attention to some of its various elements: new Jewish festivals, new Jewish museums, even new Jews. *Virtually Jewish* has four main sections, all of which address what Gruber calls the "Jewish phenomenon"—a constellation of Jewish cafés, foods, monuments, celebrations, music, clothing, and identity, constructed by those who "perform . . . Jewish culture from an outsider perspective" (11)—in short, the apparent existence of Jewish culture in the apparent absence of Jews.

Part I: "Afterlife" discusses the phenomenon in general, analyzing its existence, participants, and diverse motives. The other three parts of the book deal with what Gruber sees as its main manifestations, namely Jewish monuments, Jewish museums, and Klezmer music. Part II: "Jewish Archaeology" addresses the massive efforts dedicated to the restoration of Jewish sites, following not only Nazi destruction but, also, in eastern Europe, a half-century of often Communist-motivated neglect, ironic transformations of use, and local scavenging. Part III: "Museum Judaism" addresses the wide range of local European Judaica collections, displays, and presentations

and their diverse aims. Part IV: "Klezmer in the Wilderness" considers this traditional yet flexible musical form, which is perhaps the most widespread manifestation of Jewishness in Europe.

Virtually Jewish lucidly captures some of the quirky, ironic, and moving passions of non-Jews who have discovered a powerful and inexplicable pull towards Jewishness in their own lives. Gruber frames her discussion with observations of interesting and important tensions—those between sincerity and self-congratulation, appreciation and appropriation, guilt and stereotyping (and whether it is all "good for the Jews" anyway)—that echo those experienced by many Jewish visitors to formerly "Jewish spaces" in Europe.

Gruber, a freelance journalist living in Italy and Hungary and for many years a foreign correspondent for United Press International and the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, is well-positioned to write this book. Her two previous books, *Jewish Heritage Travel: A Guide to Eastern Central Europe* and *Upon the Doorposts of Thy House: Jewish Life in East-Central Europe Yesterday and Today*, as well as her involvement in the early Jewish community revival in Poland, reveal her own longstanding interest and intimate participation in the very reinvention of Jewish culture she portrays in her present work. Indeed, it is precisely Gruber's intensive engagements with Jewishness in Europe that suggest, to me, the value of a somewhat different perspective on "the Jewish phenomenon" than that offered by Gruber. In my view, the easy separation of "virtual" from "authentic" Jewishness can obscure as much as it

reveals, indicating Jewish nostalgia for Europe as much as European yearnings for Jews. While Gruber is clearly aware of the slipperiness of her chosen terms (see especially the section "Is It Jewish? Is It Culture?"), the structure of her argument, and most obviously, the book's title, reinforce the illusion that "virtual" and "authentic," "cultural products" and "living culture," as well as "cultural outsiders" and "insiders," are natural taxonomies.

The jacket of Gruber's book shows the flat cardboard cutouts of traditionally-garbed pre-war Polish Jews that inhabit the beautifully restored Izaak synagogue in Kazimierz, the historical Jewish quarter of Krakow, Poland. Chosen, no doubt, as icons of the phenomenon of "virtual" Jewishness, the photograph alludes to other questions—of the context, audience, and cultural dialogues involved in the Jewish phenomenon—that Gruber did not pursue. For one, the picture suggests a static solitude that is not the permanent, or even primary, atmosphere of such Jewish icons. Living in Kazimierz for some months, I saw these very same puppet Jews often, draped with the gangly arms of Israeli teenagers posing for their friends' cameras, or piously ignored by American Chasidim on pilgrimage, who stood praying, unruffled, next to their cardboard doppelgängers.

While Gruber notes the roles of local Jews as well as foreign Jews in "the Jewish phenomenon," and suggests that "virtual" Jewry "may be enriched by input from contemporary Jewish communal, intellectual, institutional, or religious sources" (21), she de-emphasizes these sources, both as a choice of focus in her

book and as a social reality. She sees Jewish and non-Jewish efforts and interests as "parallel processes," leaving "virtual Jewishness" as "a form of Jewish culture, or at least Judaica, minus the Jews" (8).

Yet her balanced and well-researched book is replete with examples of how these "virtual" and "authentic" Jewish processes are inextricably intertwined. If we explore how various individuals and groups of Jews relate to both more normative Jewish and "new Jewish" cultural forms and how these contemporaneous forms shape each other, in short order we must also ask whether the distinction between "virtual" and "authentic" Jewishness is useful, or even possible. While Gruber maintains the apparent distinction between "virtual" and "authentic, communal, traditional, etc." Jewishness throughout the book, the real distinction between them is shaky.

Who, in the living Izaak synagogue space unseen in the book-jacket photo, is being "authentically" Jewish? The Israelis? The Chasidim, who after prayer might watch the synagogue's educational video on Polish Jews, have a smoke, and then videotape graves in the nearby Remu cemetery with their camcorders? Or Dominick Dybbek, organizer of the synagogue restoration project, son-in-law of the head of Krakow's Jewish community, and Hebrew-speaking citizen of the State of Israel? Visitors animate the new Jewish spaces in Kazimierz, regardless of who created them. Here Polish and Jewish salvage projects meet and intertwine, and identities and memories are actively negotiated and redefined.

Gruber, by her choice of topic and the wide angle of her lens, gestures towards the "new Jewish Studies" that breaks with its traditional counterpart by exploring how history and identity inform each other, raising questions about difference and solidarity, and recognizing that Jewish culture exists in a field of interactions with other cultures. And in so doing she offers us something important and unique that puts her in the company of other new thinkers on Jewishness who have grappled with elements of the European Jewish phenomenon. Diana Pinto has written encouragingly regarding the potential of "the Jewish Space" in Europe; James Young discusses the politics surrounding Holocaust monuments and memorials; and of course there are well-worn paths through the particular problems of Jewish memory, history, and commemoration in Germany. Yet *Virtually Jewish* is the first book to look comprehensively at the question of post-Holocaust Jewishness in Europe in a conceptually expansive way (notwithstanding Jonathan Webber's important edited volume, *Jewish Identities in the New Europe*. London/Washington: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1994). In contrast, for example, to Bernard Wasserstein's pessimistic *Vanishing Diaspora*, Gruber's work opens the lens on "Jewishness" wide enough to consider new or unacknowledged forms of Jewish vitality in Europe.

But Gruber stops short of what might be the most significant contribution of ethnographic and cultural studies to Jewish topics; namely, questioning, rather than presuming, the content and boundaries of "Jewishness," and

acknowledging Jewishness as always a social construction that is performed and attributed rather than a stable essence. Indeed, it appears as if the trade-off for Gruber's willingness to consider Jewishness within a larger field is her adherence to a clear "virtual/authentic" dichotomy that suggests that *real* Jewishness is a clearly identifiable and discrete entity, and the realm of *real* Jews. Such categorization, in turn, structures how she interprets her own evidence, forcing her to treat the Jewish and non-Jewish projects as separate rather than jointly rooted and deeply intertwined. She thus neglects the interesting cross-fertilizations, dialogues, and blurrings among the more and less traditional Jewish projects, and how they are negotiated, understood, and supported by the variously-defined Jews and non-Jews who share this field of interest. Indeed, what is fascinating about the Jewish "revival," at least in Poland, is the *collaborative* nature of its development, and the shifting boundaries of "Jewishness" itself.

Looking at some of the specific paths along which Jewish identity in Europe has ebbed and flowed—and the sometimes unexpected engines that have driven its re-emergence as a vital, habitable category—helps to illuminate its fluid character. As noted above, much of Gruber's authority is based on her own participation as an "outside" catalyst of European Jewish revival. She discusses her involvement in the early 1980s in Warsaw's "Jewish Flying University," a "semiclandestine group of young Polish Jews and non-Jews who were trying to teach themselves about Judaism and

Jewish history, culture, and traditions" (21) which, like much new Jewish communal life in Poland, owes a debt both to dissident Catholic intellectuals and the foreign Jewish visitors who supported and encouraged it. Indeed, the Jewish Flying University is an excellent illustration of the ties between Polish interest in Jewishness and Poland's early democratic movement, as well as of its character as a joint endeavor between Polish Jews and non-Jews. Konstanty Gebert, one of the Polish-Jewish founders of the Jewish Flying University and now a leader of Poland's new Jewish community, lists the "Jewish Culture Weeks organized by dissident Catholic intellectuals as one of the major sources of energy and information that helped young 'Poles of Jewish origin' . . . to make sense of their heritage" (p. 162 in Gebert's article, *Jewish Identities in Poland: New, Old, Imaginary*, in Jonathan Webber's edited volume, *Jewish Identities in the New Europe*. London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1994). Iwona Irwin-Zarecka adds that "[i]t would often be from these Catholic friends that a Jew brought up in silence learned some basics of Judaism and Jewish history" (pp. 90-91 in her book, *Neutralizing Memory: The Jew in Contemporary Poland*. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1989). Thus, beyond mere support and company for Jews and their search, we see that non-Jewish Poles made an active contribution to thinking through what Jewishness might *mean* in today's Poland. Included in Gebert's description of the ethnically and religiously mixed Jewish Flying University is its character as "a hot-bed of debate on individual Jewish identities

in contemporary Poland" (p. 164 in Gebert's 1994 article, cited above).

Without detracting from Gruber's fine and significant work, it is necessary, I think, to ask what the implications might be of focusing precisely on what she downplays. Primary among these might be a profoundly different understanding of identity formation and maintenance, and the relationship of these to popular culture.

There is a complexity that remains to be captured in how people live their group identities, both within and between the categories that society proclaims to be authentic. "Virtual" identities, Gruber suggests, can be taken on as complements or alternatives to "real world" identities, allowing people to "act *as if* they are, whoever they want" (21). But is this different from any other kind of identity? Or, more broadly, how could any "virtual" culture or ethnicity be distinguished from any other more or less "chosen" ethnicity in the post-Enlightenment era?

Gruber notes that "Some [of those newly interested in Jewishness] go so far as to wear Stars of David around their necks, assume Jewish-sounding names, attend synagogue, send their children to Jewish schools, and follow kosher dietary laws, in addition to championing Jewish causes" (11). One is compelled to ask, then, what—short of a racial or orthodox religious definition of a Jew, neither of which Gruber claims to hold—makes these people not Jewish? Are young halakhic Jews whose identities may be based mostly on a vague sense of collective ancestral victimhood less "constructed" or "appropriating" of

identity than a European goy who feels similarly drawn to identify with Jewishness?

Clearly, there are more and less committed participants in "the Jewish phenomenon," just as there are more and less committed Jews. So when Gruber expresses suspicion of those who enjoy the pleasures of "virtual Jewishness" but display "little apparent interest in the local, living Jewish present" (10) she begs the question of *which* living Jewish present she has in mind. In places where orthodoxy (if anything) is the only "official" religious choice, Jewish cabarets, cafes, museums, and tourists offer alternatives, spaces in which one can experience oneself as communally Jewish regardless of one's specific ancestry.

New forms of Jewish culture are being created in Europe's long-empty "Jewish spaces." Pilgrimages to Poland are *becoming* Jewish culture for many foreign Jews (every 11th grade Israeli class makes such a trip), and visiting Kazimierz's Jewish cafes is *becoming* Jewish culture for long-closeted Polish Jews. And it is in such "virtual" venues that foreigners and locals often meet or reunite, mingle, tell stories, create new Jewish networks, and recollect shards of Jewishness they feel they have lost.

Everyone is *inauthentic* to someone else; one person's "virtual" is another's deepest sense of self. Marek Edelman, the last surviving leader of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, told Konstanty Gebert, a leader of Poland's hard won "new Jewish" community, "You guys are a fraud, a literary fiction. The Jewish people is dead, and you simply thought yourselves up, looking for originality and

exoticism. You are not for real" (p. 165 in Gebert's 1994 article, cited above). And the American Jewish Lauder Foundation's rabbi in Krakow, Sascha Pecaric, is not accepted by the old guard of pre-war, Yiddish-speaking Krakovian Jews ("Rabbi?" they ask, telling me, "We haven't had a rabbi here in years. . ."). Neither is he accepted by many of the new, young Jews—who crave an intensity of Jewish purity and distinction—because it is rumored that he was born a Muslim. Finally, how many assimilated Jews look to the long robes and fur hats of the Chasidim—a costume borrowed from the 18th century Catholic Polish nobility—as a mark of ur-Jewish authenticity and cultural continuity?

Each of us knows for ourselves what is authentic Jewishness, and many of us belong to groups that maintain these distinctions and reinforce their boundaries. But we must investigate local understandings of Jewishness, rather than impose our own, and attend to the influences of Jewishness and surrounding cultures on each other, if we are to understand and describe the "phenomenon" at hand as it is lived, and gain some insight as to how it got that way. Still, the idea that these cultural dialogues might lead to blurrings, to mixings, indeed to "corruptions" of what is "really Jewish" is a source of profound consternation for many. As Gruber expresses her own discomfort, "Visiting outsiders and probably even many Poles . . . often confound the vitality of the virtual Jewish world with the real thing, mistaking external Jewish style for internal, communal, Jewish substance" (69).

I do not suggest that ethnic particularism is, or should be, a thing of the past. Judaism—and these days, Jewishness—has never been a universalist tradition, and that fact may contain its own wisdom. But I suspect that some of the discomfort is based in many visitors' own waning sense of Jewishness. Indeed, Gruber addresses the longstanding Jewish nostalgia for the exterminated shtetl culture, and alludes, through mention of Alain Finkielkraut's *Imaginary Jew*, to the problem of disconnection from Jewishness among post-Holocaust generation Jews. I would suggest that this is part of the reason why many American Jews visit former Jewish spaces in Europe in the first place, and that our longings play into the Jewish phenomenon as well. If our own Jewishness feels troublingly virtual, perhaps the Jewish interests and competencies of others are just the catalyst we need for our own Jewish renewal, not to mention the ways that the Jewish phenomenon might represent synergy or creativity or reconciliation between estranged Jews and non-Jews and their respective yearnings.

Nor am I overly sanguine. Jewish-Christian dialogue isn't the norm, in any format or venue; nor, as Gruber points out, does any new European interest in Jewishness preclude overt anti-semitism or Holocaust denial, stemming in part from ignorance and miseducation, in the selfsame societies. But in Poland, at least, the purveyors of what Gruber calls "virtual Jewishness" include the individuals most active in, sympathetic to, and educated about Jewishness in Europe today.

As Bernard Harrison affably states, "The identity of any man or woman is,

after all, or often is, a palimpsest composed of fragmentary memories, imprints, of those he or she has loved" (p. 4 in his 1996 article, Talking like a Jew: reflections on identity and the Holocaust, in *Judaism* 45 (Winter):3–28). This may not be the whole story of identity, but if Europe's opening up *to* Jewishness means the opening up *of* Jewishness a bit, if "philo-semitism" is in some way a critical project that might resist more oppressive structures and silences and samenesses that leave no room for Jewishness at all, this might be seen—for now—as an authentically good thing.

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Legend and Belief. Dialectics of a Folklore Genre. By Linda Dégh. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001. Pp. 498, notes, bibliography, index, illustrations.)

Linda Dégh is one of the researchers whose works on legend and storytelling belong to the 'canonical' corpus of 20th century folkloristics. This monograph is an outcome of her life's work, the result of co-operation with her late husband, Andrew Vázsonyi, and of lively dialogues with many folklorists to whom Dégh gives credit in her acknowledgements (vii-viii). One of the distinctive traits of the book is its belief in the existence of scholarly truth, in valid theory that leads us to the correct understanding of the complex world of folklore and the genre of legend in particular. Although Dégh pursues a master theory, making her discourse authoritative and monological, she ponders other expert opinions, starting from the Grimm brothers. She relies upon "intensive field ethnography, archive and library research, and rigorous text and context analysis" (9). The book aims to present a coherent theoretical framework for interpreting legends that the author sees as "a traditional product of the Western world" (9). This sets some frames for her study, which deals with European and North American 20th century folklore, both oral and written. Dégh introduces the reader to contemporary "New Age" beliefs and occultism: ghosts, haunted places, Satanism, sensitives, UFOs, etc. However, she does not explore the occult

phenomena but instead "examines the world of legend that surrounds them" (4).

Dégh examines the extensive research on legend and sees a major "communication gap between armchair legend scholars, who deal with abstracts and fossils, and those who in their role as fellow travelers pursue the dynamics of narration as it unfolds, conscious of being a participant in the enterprise" (95). Being a fieldworker herself, Dégh clearly favors the latter. Although she acknowledges research done in the archives on past storytelling practices, she writes that such works "cannot compete with first-hand observations by the analysts themselves" (207). Thus she finds historical and philological research of limited value; she also criticizes folklorists who have truncated legend texts and published them without any data about storytelling context and without professional commentaries. As negative examples, Dégh refers to many European anthologies of urban legends (96).

A great deal of legend research has focused on its subgenres, leading to a rich terminology conceptualizing the varieties of belief expressions. It developed towards seeing complexity, pluralism, and contradictions in the realm of legends, its forms and functions. Dégh prefers simply to lump all these materials together and treat them all as legend, the genre that "entertains debate about belief" (97). Thus, legend becomes an overarching term for a variety of expressive forms whose common core is belief and discussion about it. Dégh sees legend as an extremely vital genre, which has maintained its importance in

everyday communication and acquired a prominent place in modern mass media. According to Dégh, belief in legend does not imply the concept of the supernatural (as in her discussion of the legends about the *House of Blue Lights* in Indianapolis of which only 5 percent contain supernatural elements [165]).

"Legend" thus becomes a flexible and immense category, an endless ocean of constantly emerging and transforming texts, all of which share questions about belief. This begs the question of what "belief" is. Throughout the book this issue gets less attention, which becomes evident even from the index, where we find only seven references to the notion of "belief." Sometimes the author gives almost cryptic comments (e.g., "It is not the belief of the narrator, nor any beliefs of the participants, but rather *the belief-itself*, making its presence felt, that is essential to any kind of legend" [140][italics in original]). Belief is "invisible and inaudible" (82); it thus seems to be an immanent, hidden quality of some texts that only a folklorist can recognize and label as legends. But then how shall we distinguish them from non-legends? Probably not all verbal statements that include belief and discussions about it should be considered legends. Dégh writes: "Building on experience in the ethnography of the legend, beyond the narrow-minded fuss of setting formal categories for an index as an end-product, I *believe* that the legend must be seen as a plot unit regardless of the lack of formal cohesiveness of its variants" (102, my italics). Even if this belief would be expressed in informal communication, this statement obviously could not be cat-

egorized as a legend, although it explicitly refers to personal belief and is open for debate. The missing plot does not seem to be a firm criterion for excluding this text as a legend because elsewhere in the book Dégh discusses non-narrative legends as well.

Obviously not all legend-like texts have always been suggested to be believable; their primary function may be amusement or something else, such as a satirical expression of ideology or political attitudes. One of Dégh's sources of legends in contemporary mass media is the tabloid *Weekly World News*. For example, its October 7, 2003 issue contains a commented photo album of the gay wedding of Saddam Hussein and Osama Bin Laden. Although it is presented as a well-documented event and purports to be true, referring to the authority of the CIA, its authors probably do not expect to find a single credulous reader.

Let's also consider the following issue of belief and believability. While writing about chain letters and supernatural belief held by educated, affluent Americans, Dégh refers to the stationery of a letter, including the names of "prominent intellectuals whose names are too well-known to be revealed" (192). I admit, I do not share the author's belief that the address list of the chain letter is true and not made up by somebody to amuse the next readers. The disbelief I verbalize in this review has taken us far from the original topic of the chain letter and its supposed quality of bringing good luck. Is there a difference between discussing belief in legend conversations and doing it at a meta-textual level? The

problem also remains how to distinguish legends from non-legends if the latter conversational forms also often include debates about belief.

More elaborate discussions about the notion of belief can be found in the second half of the book, mainly in the fifth chapter on "The Landscape and the Climate of the Legend." Legend-tellers are characterized as believers, which implies a general fascination with extranormal topics and readiness to participate in discussions of believability (221). Dégh writes about "diverse degrees of belief" (229) and its "fluctuation" (315). Belief at the heart of the legend can be understood through the "articulation of culture-specific, religion-specific truth by individuals" (318). Believing is conceptualized as a behavioral attitude (261), but generally the author seems to avoid fixed definitions in accordance with her understanding of legend and belief as fluid categories.

There are only a few errors in the book, such as the year of publication of *Malleus maleficarum* (263), which should be 1487. The title of Leea Virtanen's book *Varastettu isoäiti* (453) should be translated as "Stolen grandmother." Philologically oriented readers of the book would probably like to see more specific references to the pages of previous scholarship, instead of general references to whole publications.

The book is rich in topics not discussed in this brief review. It is animated by the spirit of lively discussions and simply invites its reader to think critically and argue with the author, who is both polemical and generous with brilliant ideas that will hopefully be developed

in future scholarship. Among such illuminating insights are seeing Western folk religion as "the informal doppelgänger of mainstream Christian philosophy" (262), "institutionalization of legends by the occult and borderline sciences" (262), "scientification of the legend" (266), and a multitude of others. Dégh's monograph is a major contribution to the scholarship on legend, a useful treatise in a long format, which offers guidelines to other folklorists who wish to pursue the study of legends. This book teaches how to problematize folklore material and question the validity of previous research; it is a proof that it is possible to express one's individual voice in the polyphonic folkloristic discourse about the legend, a truly big and immortal genre.

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The Practice of Cultural Analysis: Exposing Interdisciplinary Interpretation. Edited by Mieke Bal with the assistance of Bryan Gonzales. Cultural Memory in the Present. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999. Pp. xix + 392, introduction, notes, bibliography, index, illustrations.)

The Practice of Cultural Analysis is an introduction to the discipline of Cultural Analysis, whose focus is "not only on contemporary culture, but also on historical phenomena analyzed and interpreted from a contemporary theoretical viewpoint, in their relevance to the present" (Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA), www.hum.uva.nl/asca; accessed December 18, 2002). The book is a volume of essays demonstrating the necessity and the practical applications of a new, interdisciplinary school, in which self-reflection is central to the analysis of cultural objects, informing both academic process and interpretation as well as our understanding and experience of our own present.

Self-reflection and the effect of observation and intervention within studies of culture are not new to many of the contemporary humanities and social sciences, including Folklore and Anthropology. Therefore, for scholars within these disciplines, Cultural Analysis reinforces and creates a forum for current practice, in which interpretation of cultural processes, such as gender formation or heritage and identity building, is attentive not only to the data collected, but also to the historical moment in which scholars perform their analysis, the cultural and

academic experience they bring to their studies, their relationships to previous scholars and studies, the objects chosen, and the conclusions drawn. *The Practice of Cultural Analysis* is "designed to promote dialogue" (325), however, and seeks to demonstrate the relevance of this approach to a variety of disciplines throughout academia. Therefore the book includes essays that discuss, for example, literature, history, art, politics, aesthetics, popular culture, gender, and film. And in turn, the book also seeks to show how different disciplines and their study help to create and strengthen the need for the new interdisciplinary school.

The Practice of Cultural Analysis begins with an introduction by Mieke Bal, Professor of Theory of Literature and a Founding Director of the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis. Bal focuses on the cultural object and its significance as a "gesture of showing," a discursive act that is performative in its very nature (7). Bal and, subsequently, each of the authors seek to introduce readers to a new way of looking—one in which we are all active participants in the performance of culture and its material objects, and therefore active participants within analysis and interpretation. This concept is familiar to contemporary Folklorists and also practiced today within the context of the museum, "the kind of cultural object on which cultural analysis can set to work" (7), wherein an approach to both the cultural object and its analysis as performance places the academic or observer in the midst of a dialogue. Bal suggests in the introduction, and more in depth in her own *Double Exposures: The*

Subject of Cultural Analysis (London: Routledge, 1996), that this may be seen in terms of first, second, and third person, wherein an expositor (or curator) communicates with a visitor about an object, respectively (8).

Following Bal's introduction and a short prelude in which Janneke Lam discusses the visualization of the process of looking through a dialogue in images between herself and Edwin Janssen, *The Practice of Cultural Analysis* is divided into four parts that lead the reader from Cultural Analysis practice to self-reflexivity and include essays from nineteen authors. Part I, titled "Don't Look Now: Visual Memory in the Present," discusses the presence of the past in the present and the "theoretical theme of visuality, of looking" (24). Evelyn Fox Keller considers the role of intervention within Biology, focusing on the microscope and use of x-rays. Nanette Solomon, Griselda Pollock, and Carol Zemel analyze gender and cultural identity in Art History. Solomon looks at images of women as culturally produced signs and studies a paradigm shift in representation within the works of Vermeer. Pollock also examines woman as sign, but her study explores gender roles and relationships within the world of art. Focusing primarily on Lee Krasner, Pollock seeks to broaden the feminist discussion of "the necessary relations between a woman who is an artist, her cultural moment, and the discursive terms available for historical analysis and interpretation" (78). Carol Zemel considers photographic images of Jewish life in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s and the ways in which these representations both reflect

and create national character and consciousness. Thomas Elsaesser examines the place of film and cinema and contemporary Film Studies in the history and academics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Finally Stephen Bann proposes a paradigm for the study of History, stating that ". . . the cultural critic is not simply someone who analyzes and reorders textual material, even to the point of undermining it and exposing its hidden ideologies . . . the cultural critique works on discourses which have already been fragmented, already destroyed, if we set them within the broader historical perspective" (127).

Part II, titled "Close-Ups and Mirrors: The Return of Close Reading, with a Difference," contains essays that demonstrate close reading as a critical practice. Although the previous section suggests that Cultural Analysis applies to the study of many cultural forms, the authors in this group of essays focus primarily on written texts. Helga Geyer-Ryan examines the cultural construction of Venice as both place and rhetorical figure within literature. Ernst van Alphen discusses loss of self both within the text of *Nightwood* and within himself as its reader. Frank R. Ankersmit considers History and historical truth. J. Cheryl Exum analyzes various visual interpretations of the *Book of Ruth*, such as Philip Hermogenes Calderon's painting *Ruth and Naomi* and the films *The Story of Ruth* by Henry Koster and *Naomi and Her Two Daughters-in-Law* by William Blake. Isabel Hoving looks at space and identity as they relate to both Cultural Analysis and postcolonial theory, stating that "the focus on the complexity of text or

image itself, and the focus on lived experience in cultural analysis, can form an antidote to the universalizing tendencies in postcolonial theory" (204). Hoving imagines that "one characteristic of such a theoretical practice will certainly be that it will welcome the voices and discourses of writers, poets, and narrators from outside the academy with the same eagerness with which dominant theories of movement are usually met" (218). Finally, Siegfried Zielinski considers standardizing praxes of expression and multiplicity within contemporary art and creativity.

Part III, titled "Method Matters: Reflections on the Identity of Cultural Analysis," presents "different perspectives that indicate the diversity of views that are compatible with, and helpful for, the kind of practice which [*The Practice of Cultural Analysis*] demonstrates in the first two parts" (229). Johannes Fabian discusses his ethnographic research in the Shaba region of Zaire, 1972-1974, and the relationship between politics and popular paintings produced during that time. Both Luis Dupré and Theo de Boer set forth philosophical reflections on culture itself. Dupré investigates both the plurality of symbolic systems and metaphysical unity that are found within culture. De Boer looks at culture in order to further investigate "the function, nature, and meaning of cultural analysis in three areas that we may see as three levels of reality: unconscious reality, daily reality, and fictional reality" (272). John Neubauer considers the definition of analysis, and Jon Cook contemplates knowledge, its relationship to the institution of the university, and the effect that

institutional change has on our understanding of what knowledge is and the identity of cultural studies and cultural analysis.

Finally, in the last section, titled "Double Afterwords," William P. Germano, Vice President and Publishing Director at Routledge Publishers, discusses the benefits and difficulties of publishing works that deal with interdisciplinary studies and cultural studies. Germano suggests that the label "interdisciplinary" can be problematic for many publishers, where cultural studies offers unity of theme and can be more successfully marketed. In closing, *The Practice of Cultural Analysis* features an essay by Jonathan Culler, editor of the journal *Diacritics*, in which he reflects on the field of cultural studies in both the United States and Britain and its relationship to the discipline of Cultural Analysis. Cultural Analysis does not face the same difficulties of proving legitimacy as cultural studies, he states, as its own "theoretical engagement: its reflection on the way in which its own disciplinary and methodological standpoint shape the objects that it analyzes," (345-346) ground it within academia.

The Practice of Cultural Analysis is an ambitious book. Mieke Bal and her colleagues set about to define, legitimate, and demonstrate an entire discipline. On the whole, the publication is successful. The reader is certain to understand what Cultural Analysis is, its practical applications, and its relevance to a wide variety of research topics. The book is heavily weighted toward written texts, however, and many of the authors come to Cultural Analysis with backgrounds

in Literature, History, Philosophy, and Art History. *The Practice of Cultural Analysis* would have benefited from inclusion of more ethnographic- and museum-based studies. In her introduction, Bal discusses Cultural Analysis' direct relevance to the interpretation of the museum as a performative and dialogic cultural object, yet none of the essays really articulate this connection fully.

The essays featured in *The Practice of Cultural Analysis* not only provide the reader a solid foundation and understanding of the discipline of Cultural Analysis, but they also offer scholars throughout the humanities and social sciences a fresh perspective on the nature of analysis and the interpretation of culture and its material objects. *The Practice of Cultural Analysis* is a significant contribution in the changing landscape of contemporary academics.

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Harry Potter's World: Multidisciplinary Critical Perspectives. Edited by Elizabeth E. Heilman. Pedagogy and Popular Culture. (New York and London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2003. Pp. ix + 308, introduction, appendix, index.)

Five books into the commercial and social phenomenon of *Harry Potter*, the scholarly world is taking more notice of its various implications and opportunities for research. *Harry Potter's World: Multidisciplinary Critical Perspectives* is a notable attempt to contextualize the series of books by J.K. Rowling in the overlapping academic spheres of cultural studies, reader response theory, literary theory, education, sociology, and related fields. The volume, edited by Elizabeth E. Heilman as part of a series titled "Pedagogy and Popular Culture," is composed of an introduction, fourteen essays, and an appendix.

From Heilman's introduction alone, the complexity of the collection is evident. She begins by relating how she bought her first *Harry Potter* book to read with her son and expands her viewpoint to describe how the social impact of the books can be both experienced and studied in numerous ways. More than many other studies of children's literature, this collection contains personal anecdotes of interactions with the *Harry Potter* books and related subcultures interwoven with densely layered theory; works cited in the essays include everything from Roland Barthes and Judith Butler to Umberto Eco and Edward Said. The book's complexity must speak for itself, as Heilman's overly general summary of

the book demonstrates: "This book examines *Harry Potter* from some of the major theoretical and critical vantage points for the study of literature and culture" (2).

The essays are divided into four major categories. The first, Cultural Studies Perspectives, contains three essays, which approach the issue of cultural reactions to the *Harry Potter* books from different angles. In the first, "Pottermania: Good, Clean Fun or Cultural Hegemony?" Tammy Turner-Vorbeck uses Neo-Marxist theories to articulate some of the perceived difficulties with the *Harry Potter* books and merchandise: the fetishization of commodities, the transmission of socially normative messages, and the battles to foster resistance through literary criticism and media literacy. The second essay, "Harry Potter's World: Magic, Technoculture, and Becoming Human" by Peter Appelbaum, links magic, science, and identity in the *Harry Potter* books and the culture that has sprung up around the books. The glamor of magic in *Harry Potter* gives the books a wide appeal, and the commodification of knowledge and the existence of consumerism among young wizards "makes the children in the books more 'realistic'" (36). Realism is a key concern in the third essay, "Controversial Content in Children's Literature: Is *Harry Potter* Harmful to Children?" by Deborah J. Taub and Heather L. Servaty. The authors catalogue objections to the *Harry Potter* books, review relevant scholarship on how children read and learn about issues such as death and the occult, and conclude with guide-

lines for parents and teachers who wish to protect as well as respect children's learning abilities.

The second grouping, Reader Response and Interpretive Perspectives, also contains three essays, which explore in varying degrees of objectivity issues of intertextuality and how *Harry Potter* is read, interpreted, and reinterpreted. In "Ways of Reading *Harry Potter*: Multiple Stories for Multiple Reader Identities," Kathleen F. Malu layers reader response theories and personal data collected from herself, her son, and her son's classmates to navigate how and why certain readers respond differently to narrative elements in the *Harry Potter* books. The next essay, "Reading *Harry Potter* with Navajo Eyes" by Hollie Anderson, relies entirely on personal response to convey how a certain cultural background will cause particular narrative elements to resonate more than others. For instance, the book characters known as animagi, wizards who can turn into animals, correspond to Navajo beliefs about shapeshifters, whereas the author was made "uncomfortable" by certain elements in the book, such as a death party, because discussing death is taboo in Navajo culture (105). The following essay, "Writing Harry's World: Children Coauthoring Hogwarts" by Ernie Bond and Nancy Michelson, is more scholarly and rigorously researched. Utilizing theories of narrative and identity, the authors examine Internet culture, including fan fiction, which exhibits numerous interesting traits—it is written by Internet-savvy young people and contains many strong reinvented female characters.

The third section of the book, *Literary Perspectives: The Hero, Myth, and Genre*, contains three essays with disparate topics and methods. The first, "*Harry Potter: A Return to the Romantic Hero*" by Maria Nikolajeva, classifies Harry Potter as a romantic hero based on Northrop Frye's five stages of mythic literary characters. She makes the point that the romantic hero is typically masculine, and, following from psychoanalytic insights, usually faces a same-sex villain. However, the character of Harry can also be seen as a reaction to postmodern generic conventions, as he is a refreshingly "straightforward hero" (138). The next essay, "Generic Fusion and the Mosaic of *Harry Potter*" by Anne Hiebert Alton, surveys how the *Harry Potter* books fit to varying degrees within traditional—and sometimes despised—children's literature genres, noting how generic elements influence marketing strategies along with plot content. The *Harry Potter* books combine elements from pulp fiction, series books, school stories, sports stories, fairy tales, and quest romances, resulting in "a generic mosaic made up of numerous individual pieces combined in a way that allows them to keep their individual shape while constantly changing their significance" (159). Deborah de Rosa, author of the final essay in this group, "Wizardly Challenges to and Affirmations of the Initiation Paradigm in *Harry Potter*," brings Joseph Campbell's work on myths to the discussion of Harry Potter as a hero. Though some of Campbell's universalistic claims might appear overly simplistic, the author makes a few inter-

esting points, such as how Rowling inverts the traumatic periods in Harry's life such that he experienced abuse at home and was nurtured at school, whereas the latter is conventionally more of an initiatory experience.

In *Critical and Sociological Perspectives*, the final category of the collection, the four essays are mostly concerned with normative representations of social groups within the books. In "Comedy, Conflict, and Community: Home and Family in *Harry Potter*," authors John Kornfeld and Laurie Prothro discuss the comedic (albeit conventional) dynamics of the two main nuclear families in the *Harry Potter* books, the Dursleys and the Weasleys. The home and family dynamics at Hogwarts, in contrast, are more complex, and provide Harry with the "strength to stray and separate as he undertakes his ultimate quest: to find his parents and thereby find his place in the world" (201). The next essay, "The Seeker of Secrets: Images of Learning, Knowing, and Schooling" by Charles Elster, collapses the dichotomy of "school learning" and "book learning" in favor of a more active paradigm of "inquiry based learning," which benefits not only Harry in the books but also provides alternate models for children who read the books. Elizabeth E. Heilman takes a feminist approach to *Harry Potter* characters in her essay, "Blue Wizards and Pink Witches: Representations of Gender Identity and Power." She examines the (often derogatory) representations of female characters as well as the constraining ways of performing masculinity available to male characters, ending with a call for

feminist critical pedagogy in education. The next essay in this section is "Images of the Privileged Insider and Outcast Outsider," coauthored by Elizabeth E. Heilman and Anne E. Gregory. The authors examine the Hogwarts house groupings; racial, cultural, and ethnic stereotypes in the books; and how these representations are discourses calling for classroom deconstruction. The final essay, "The Civic Leadership of *Harry Potter*: Agency, Ritual, and Schooling" by Rebecca Skulnick and Jesse Goodman, locates Harry's position as a hero in the agency he exercises in certain rituals, such as the Sorting Hat Ceremony, Quidditch games, and his decision, along with Dumbledore, to pronounce Voldemort's dreaded name without fear. This essay, though thought-provoking and well-written, might lose credibility with anyone who studies folklore, as the authors refer to "the actual narrative, the folktale" (273), meaning the text of the *Harry Potter* books; a "folktale" (275), which is actually an anecdote about a teacher encountering difficulties using the books in the classroom; "the folklore of *Harry Potter*" (273), meaning the phenomenon of the books; and "*Harry Potter*, the folktale and folklore" (275), which seems bereft of any real meaning.

The Appendix contains lists of inconsistencies between the *Harry Potter* books and movies and internal inconsistencies within the books. Written by a high school student, this section is disappointing not only because it is a mere list that follows highly theoretical and provocative essays, but also because some of the questions raised seemed banal, such as asking "If Harry Potter was raised with such severe child abuse, why isn't he weird?" and "Why don't the students ever take regular classes such as Math or English?" (282).

On the whole, these essays are stimulating responses to a widely popular phenomenon. Many of the essays complement and enter into a dialogue with each other about issues such as developmental psychology and concerns about teaching and ideologies. For instance, Elster's essay addresses the "dialectic about whether accomplishment in learning is a matter of nature or nurture" (211), using Harry's inherited magical abilities as an example, while Skulnick and Goodman note how "The Sorting Hat not only validates the power of Hogwarts but also demonstrates the dissonance between self-determination and predetermination: are civic identities composed of choices or are they a birth-right?" (266). On the issue of ideologies, many of the authors seem concerned that children might passively absorb the simplistic messages and stereotypes of the *Harry Potter* books or fall prey to vicious consumer impulses. In order to counteract these possibilities, many of the authors make suggestions for how to not only study but critically engage the *Harry Potter* books in classrooms; as Heilman writes in her introduction, "in addition to the significance of this collection for literary and cultural studies, this book is important because it can help parents and teachers to make school curriculum and conversations about books more meaningful" (9). This collection is indeed significant for both reasons, and as such it is a valuable addition to the body of work about popular culture, children's literature, and the magical, enticing world of *Harry Potter*.

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The Black Gentleman. By Ülo Valk. FF Communications No. 276. (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 2001. Pp. 217, introduction, bibliography.)

A revision of his 1994 dissertation, first published in Estonian in 1998, Ülo Valk's *The Black Gentleman* presents readers with an impressively thorough and comprehensive study of the role of the Devil in Estonian folklore. Valk explores diabolical manifestations in various forms throughout legend, superstition, and folktale, as well as situating his data in a larger context by providing comparisons both across Christian Europe and locally in Estonian folk religion. On the former account, he draws parallels between the Estonian material and information from theological writings on the Devil in medieval and early modern Western Europe, as well as in the folklore of Estonia's neighbors, like Germany, which lay closer to what is commonly thought of as the center of Christendom. On the latter, he tells us from the beginning of the monograph that his purpose is to redress a relative scholarly neglect of the Devil in Estonian folklore, which he attributes to a misunderstanding of the material as not adequately pre-Christian. Prior scholars fail to understand, he writes, that the Devil has at least as much longevity as any other figure in Estonian tradition; he is similar to any one of a whole menagerie of native daemons and spirits, simply with a name-change and a facelift to reflect a new Christian priority. "The ideas of different eras have merged in the figure of the Devil," Valk writes. "The pre-Christian traits are intertwined with Orthodox and Roman Catholic ideas as well as Lutheran

influences which finally became predominant" (11).

To support his argument and redress this perceived scholarly dearth, Valk presents his readers with a seven-part examination of the Devil, devoting the first four to his manifestations, and the final three—more briefly—to different narrative contexts in which he appears. Thus, he begins with extended discussions of the anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, fantastic, and inanimate incarnations of the devil, and continues with discussions of the devil's appearances as a coachman and in delusions. In each section, he furnishes ample exemplary evidence for the prominence of the devil in Estonian folklore, as well as significant statistical evidence toward that same end.

In the section on anthropomorphic manifestations, for instance, Valk provides examples of the Evil One—a term that he often uses—in the form of a man, a woman, a landlord, and a German nobleman. Of the cases he has examined, he reports that 58.9 percent presents a Devil in human guise. Most of these describe a "typical situation where the Devil is first encountered in human form and then exposed" (27). He demonstrates the breadth of different versions of this scenario, exemplifying the typical, the exceptional, and even a number of cases that do not follow this pattern at all. In addition, he explains what one might term the folk mechanics of the Estonian Devil. We find, for example, that the Devil is often identifiable because he is unusually short or tall (40-41), because he is unusually thin, old, or young (43-45), or because of another anomalous physical feature like peculiar clothing or a single zoomorphic attribute like horse's hooves. Further, as in other European daemonic traditions, we find

that the Devil cannot, in fact, take on a human form, and is thus also identifiable by features peculiar to a facsimile built of base materials like water and earth (26).

In the final part of this section, Valk abandons his emphasis on data in part, providing a particularly illuminating discussion of what he terms "the demonisation of the Germans as well as the 'Germanisation' of the Devil" (87). Through various examples, mostly found in legend, he establishes that the physical appearance of German landlords in Estonia from the seventeenth century forward fits with the general Estonian perception of the look of the Devil. Further, he tells us that as "the landlord merged with the demonic sphere, the place where he lived was transformed into hell" (92). The cause of this, he says, lies in Estonian popular theology—especially that of self-described prophet Tallima Paap—where visions of hell are common, and its occupants are often German nobles (88-89). The peasants' association of their landlords with Germans, as well as a perception of those landlords as both cruel and overtly wealthy (taboo in Estonian folk Christianity) led to this conflation and established both Germans and Germany as a model for the demonic in Estonian folklore.

The remainder of the monograph reads much more like the first, data-rich, portion of the anthropomorphic section than the critical second portion. In the zoomorphic section, Valk contextualizes his Estonian data briefly in terms of various world religions and scholarly explanations, then launches into

example after example of what he terms "the second-frequent manifestation after the anthropomorphic one" (103). He provides a table of statistical data concerning the frequency with which the Estonian Devil appears in various animal forms, following that with examples of manifestations as both domestic and wild animals. His section on fantastic manifestations provides readers with more of the same, as he describes for us satyric Devils (146-149), fiery-eyed Devils (151), and Devils with the teeth of a rake or iron teeth, who spit standard fire, blue fire, or tar (152). Finally, he explores inanimate manifestations of the Devil, concentrating primarily on the Devil as a haystack (163-165), a whirlwind (166), a ball of fire (167), and a trough (168).

Thorough as it is, *The Black Gentleman* is not without its problems. From the outset, Valk tells his readers that were he given a second chance, he would "write a very different study"—that he would add more theoretical and analytical reflection to his already ample empirical data, pay "more attention to the cultural and social context of the time when these pieces of folklore were noted down," and further develop his discussions of "generic variations of folk religion" (9). He emphasizes, however, that this is not a rewrite of his dissertation, merely a revision, and that despite the problems apparent in this study, he is not willing to retread old ground—"to warm up jelly", to use an Estonian expression" (9). By his own admission, then, there is a great deal of untapped potential in the study of the Devil in Estonian folklore, and the framework that he lays out here

could be better developed in one or many future studies. On the other hand, the obvious possibilities for future research based on the data that he provides is a testament to the importance of this book. What Ülo Valk does here, in essence, is open a new discussion of a largely untapped body of folklore, and invite others, both through the strengths and the weaknesses of this study, to participate.

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