
Book Reviews

Traveling Spirit Masters: Moroccan Gnawa Trance Music in the Global Marketplace. By Deborah Kapchan. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007. Pp. xi + 325, introduction, notes, bibliography, glossary notes, index, illustrations.

Deborah Kapchan traces the evolving tradition of Gnawa trance music from its Sub-Saharan African origins to its increasingly commercialized form worldwide in *Traveling Spirit Masters: Moroccan Gnawa Trance Music in the Global Marketplace*. She frames her work geographically in Morocco and France, and theoretically at the crossroads of performance, poetics, and aesthetics. The dancing and drumming trance tradition traveled first along the slave route, and today travels a different sort of trade route—the airwaves of live or digitized world music. Many past studies of the Maghreb have taken largely intellectual approaches, among them explaining trance’s functional aspects, its legibility as cultural text, or its existence as an embodied history of colonialism. Kapchan points out that it is possible to read the history of social theory and its tropes through these studies. What sets her beautifully written ethnography apart is that she also takes the spirit world seriously. The Gnawa ontology is one of difference and its reality can be grasped only in performance. It is not enough to analyze it only intellectually. For Kapchan, Gnawa trance presents more than an object of analysis; it is also a vehicle of knowledge that often possesses her. It is from her unique position as both ethnographer and performer that the reader receives such a rich description of Gnawan practices, history, and possibilities for the future.

A Gnawa *lila* (ceremony) with the *jnun* (spirits) occurs at night. The drummers rhythmically bring the dancer into a trance and the spirits into attendance. The work of a Gnawa ceremony is to give the participants—called “trancers”—knowledge of how the soul travels through life, death, and back to life again, enabling catharsis. The catharsis, however, does not occur through a purging of the spirits from the possessed person; rather, it occurs through the acceptance of living in a possessed state. Catharsis, then, admits and empowers spirit/human cohabitation. The tropes of the colonial legacy of slavery and occupation resonate in Kapchan’s analysis. However, she writes with openness to imagining and living with a multi-personality, which problematizes the notion of personhood in provocative ways. “Spirits inhabit the bodies of their hosts, but cultural worlds also inhabit us, and as people and their sounds, images, and words travel, we are inhabited by more and by different worlds” (6). The reader might ask what it means to be inhabited, to think and speak from a body that is at once yours and not yours. How does culture both embody and express people? Are those possessed not masters in their own houses? Or does the possession offer a sort of freedom? And what does it matter if people are not *really* possessed? How would we know, anyway?

Kapchan writes that there “is a finely nuanced notion of subjectivity among women who are multiply possessed. While all experience is authentic and real for the experiencer, judgments about who is truly possessed (‘the poor thing’) and who is working out stress in an emotional catharsis (‘to her health’ they say afterwards) are common in the discursive world of trancers” (52). Rather than delve into or develop a procedure for

evaluating whether these experiences or the spirits have scientific validity, Kapchan attempts to understand how metaphors of possession inhabit the body, expressing themselves in gesture, and further, how these ritualized gestures—the jerking movements, jumps, and falls—might effect changes of temporal perception and subjectivity. How the trancers interpret their shifted subjectivities both to others and to themselves relates to how they “see” themselves. The out-of-body, otherworldly experience of trance provides an oneiric mirror for an alternative view of one’s self, subject formation, and reinterpreting identity.

Despite the nod to men as trancers, for the most part women’s dance features most prominently in Kapchan’s ethnography. The male Gnawa play the trancing music and, while they also believe themselves possessed, they do not dance. A woman who trances “becomes an object to herself, an actor in a script. The script belongs to the *jnun*. They are the authors, yet their script—which contains the reflexivity that mediation fosters—allows her to see herself as if from the outside, from the perspective of ‘they’—in effect, cinematographically. Like an actor, she is possessed by her role, but is also aware that she is in it” (98-99). This kind of “being-outside-of-oneself” allows for a coming to terms with possession, providing an oneiric mirror for the trancer to see her “self,” to be both in and out of her body. It also allows for the trancer to share her inner space with the spirits and her outer space with the trance community, giving validation through a communal sense of a distinctive aesthetic. Multiplicity no longer seems so exotic.

The metonymic relationship of spirit possession to slavery and colonial violence relate to trancing via re-enactments of op-

pression, re-opening old wounds and past pain. “The spirit possession ceremonies of the Gnawa are metonymic performances in which somatic memories of slavery are invoked and symbolically mastered” (20). This opening, often metaphorically enacted by physical slicing of the skin with knives or burning of the flesh with fire, mimes the wounds inflicted by slavery. The memory of slavery causes pain but also an opportunity for healing. Only by recollecting the wound to discover what emotion, what traumatic event, or what shameful desire became displaced in transference can one heal. Recollection represents a process of self-recognition of the subject within his or her own biography which, in the Islamic Sufi tradition, can be (re)enacted by Gnawa *lilas* and dancing with the *jnun* by reopening or revisiting an old wound or loss.

The temporal wound (re)opened and (re)visited in trance, creates space for other temporalities and beings to enter and circulate, like the *jnun*. The wound or rift, in time, is not simply a void. Revisiting the wound or loss in *lilas* or dreams can be the way to arrive at a kind of resolution, but the memory never truly fades nor does the wound ever truly close. The wound is an opening for change as death is an opportunity for rebirth. Gnawa *lilas* engender a ritualized death and dreaming. In the Islamic Sufi tradition as described Kapchan, the sleeping body mimes death. During sleep, the soul exits the body and travels, meeting other souls and mixing with them. A dream and a trance is a *rih-la*—a moving away from oneself, but it also allows for a rediscovery or remaking of the self. *Traveling Spirit Masters* illustrates this with particularity to Kapchan’s own experience of losing herself and regaining a new identity, and creates a journey for the reader

as well, following the narrative temporal and spatial trajectory of Gnawa trance.

What happens when Moroccan Gnawa trance masters travel to other countries like France to perform their music for an audience uninitiated to the knowledge and practice of spirit possession? Money has long been associated with the Gnawa tradition and is acknowledged as necessary, but is not necessarily condoned. Kapchan attends commercialized performances in France which contain all the spectacular aspects of Gnawa trance without any of the healing catharsis or ritual understanding. How far the spirits can travel, and in what form, are questions Kapchan weaves throughout the text.

The future of Gnawa trance appears nebulous. Its status as a tradition in danger of losing its essence as fewer and fewer practitioners perform coexists alongside its status as an exotic world music genre. The identity of Gnawa traditions, not simply its practitioners, is at stake. Perhaps a highly commercialized public form will safeguard its existence, or perhaps the public form will kill the essence of the traditional form. Death, however, as Kapchan reiterates through the book, is not just an ending, but an event that opens up the possibility for other beginnings.

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Risk and Technological Culture: Towards a Sociology of Virulence. By Joost Van Loon. London, New York: Routledge, 2002. Pp ix + 234, introduction, notes, bibliography, index.

The Classical Italians warned that *knowledge too hastily acquired is not on guard*. This sage monition applies as much today as ever and finds within the field of technoscience a particularly snug and foreboding fit. A growing body of literature is investigating just how our mode of technoscientific “progress,” rather than embodying control, is instead ushering in an ever-expanding domain of uncertainty and instability. We are coming to discover that each attempt to avert or contain risks through technoscience is responsible for producing further, and even less containable, contingencies. Today, the elephant in the room is at once the bull in the china shop. As nuclear material, non-renewable resources, and virulent pathogens now line the shelves of this proverbial shop, it is becoming apparent just how little difference it makes if the bullwhip is cracked by ill- or well-meaning state agents, non-state agents, or nature herself.

In *Risk and Technological Culture*, Joost Van Loon performs a meticulous anatomy of both deep-rooted and emerging processes by which “risk,” “threat,” “disaster,” and “danger” (all technical terms carrying meanings quite different from their everyday uses) come heavily to bear upon us. For Van Loon, an analysis of risk must focus on perceptions of risk rather than any actual risk, as such. “Risks are always threatening to take

place, they never take place (as disasters do)" (29). In spite of this ontological "absence" of risk, Van Loon's analysis must navigate the complexities and paradoxes involved in treating risk as a special kind of "presence" (insofar as risks do in fact produce actual consequences). In approaching the paradoxical materiality/non-materiality of "risk," Van Loon engages Actor Network Theory (à la Bruno Latour) and the systems theory of Niklas Luhmann, to develop a particular understanding of risk as "virtual" object. In Part II, Van Loon applies his theoretical insights to four case studies of "risk" discourses. Discussing waste management, emergent pathogen virulence, cyberthreats, and riots in their specific historical contexts, Van Loon treats each sub-section as explication of "risk" qua "virtual object" as well as application of theory qua expansion on the conceptual apparatus used to engage "risk."

Ulrich Beck's notion of "risk society," (a very influential idea in Europe that is sadly given rather short shrift in American social sciences) serves as Van Loon's analytic anchor. Risk society, in Beck's formulation, is a concept of the social that recognizes an increasing relevance of "risk" that has slowly replaced traditional concerns with material "scarcity." Our technologies, if they had ever been unproblematic, argues Beck, are finally out of our hands. Beck's risk society notes that benefits and losses are no longer tied to expectations and intent. In his words, we are now dealing with "flows of goods and 'bads,' rather than goods alone" (21). For Van Loon, closely following Beck, this shift con-

stitutes a fundamental transformation in society away from modernity into a yet uncharted kind of present. "A risk society is a society where we increasingly live on a high technological frontier which absolutely no one completely understands and which generates a diversity of possible futures" (14). Viewed sociologically, Van Loon argues that an increased importance of risk relations (i.e. their avoidance and control) vis-à-vis class relations demands a new set of questions for reconciling and understanding the "emergent social (dis)order" (185). This organizational elusiveness accounts for what Beck calls a "risk habitus" on the level of the individual. This can be characterized as a paradox: the arrival of some impending danger is at once a product of expert systems' futility and a justification for their persistence. The upshot of the "risk habitus" is a schizophrenic trust/distrust of expert systems (32) and a general culture of ambivalence.

Moving beyond the ontological insecurity inhering in the individual, Van Loon turns his attention to cultural dynamics. He culls many of his insights from Niklas Luhmann's systems theory (1982, 1990). Systems theory, an offshoot of cybernetics, demotes the privileged conceptions of institutions as such, seeing them solely in terms of networks of communications in a "more or less deliberate set of processing flows, which interact with their environment in order to modify it" (35). Key to the logic of systems is their capacity to become internalized and self-referential (or "autopoietic"). Taking law as a model example of an institutional system, we rec-

ognize that it functions more or less independently insofar as its justifications are entirely internal to the system of law itself: "It affirms itself by assertion" (112). Law reduces all transactions to the logic of law. Economics (as an example of another quasi-independent system) cannot be expressed in legal terms and so finds no truck within this system. Looking at these productions of "internal environments," (at least so goes the argument), we can better understand a certain assumed logic at work in society. It is precisely this self-referential character investigated in systems theory that accounts for a susceptibility to outside, unmarked contingences, i.e. risks.

How, then, do different systems, after they achieve some degree of self-referentiality (autopoiesis), communicate? In Van Loon's estimation, communication between systems is done through a type of "translation." This, he presents in the language of Actor Network Theory (ANT). Citing Latour, Van Loon explores how "risk" itself achieves the status of agent in technoscience and how risks become exacerbated by what he, after Latour, calls "immutable mobiles" (51). This term refers to the maps, models, statistics, figures, or tables arising in one system and imported (a process Latour calls "enrolment") into a distinct system as a "matter of fact." "Technological culture frames risks in particular ways, but cannot contain the contingencies their social and symbolic organization sets into work, as a result of which it destabilizes" (45). As systems become more complex, they include more taken-for-granted elements. Resultantly, the system produces ever-larger un-

marked regions that reveal themselves only through system-breakdown. Such a model as Van Loon's might, for example, help to better understand the particulars of how gaping holes in the United States' security apparatus only came into view after four jumbo jets had simultaneously flown through them, or how billions of dollars of security-patching (including the invasion of two countries) has served to open still other apertures.

It should be clear by this point that Van Loon is interested in highly complex abstractions. Some prove more helpful than others. Perhaps Van Loon's most useful distinction is that which he makes between logocentric state apparatuses and the nomadological character of risks (86). For him, state apparatuses are logocentric, which is to say, concerned with order and classification, reduction, and discipline. They represent systems that gesture toward autopoiesis and self-preservation. Anything that fails to fall within the system is to be considered a risk to it. For the logocentric system, risks are understood as boundary transgressions from the outside (82). It is this logocentrism, Van Loon might argue, that allows for gaps, such as those that facilitated 9/11, to form without attracting attention. In short, logocentrism as a political model performs very poorly in "the risk society." "Supplementing this logos" Van Loon suggests, "is the possible availability of nomos — the practice of distributing intensities across a field of forces and intensities that is not its own" (159). Nomos is liquid, flexible, self-reflexive, and emergent. It engages difference as difference, dispels the thought

of “integrity” and forces us to not take the taken-for-granted for granted (193). “For nomos, risk relates to a lack of mobility and movement, to incommunicability of information flows, to codes that cannot be decrypted” (82).

Somewhat surprisingly, even to himself, Van Loon singles out “commerce” as a model nomadic institution. This is due to the way in which commerce “travels through the cracks in the virtual walls of institutionalized modernity” (83). He finds HIV to be similarly nomadic inasmuch as its surrounding discourses infiltrate countless social, political, family, financial, symbolic, and cultural institutions without becoming reified or bracketed by any one of them. HIV, he proclaims, “is a powerful, yet ambiguous code” (83). The work done by Van Loon’s nomos is appealing, to be sure, but there is an (albeit, arguably necessary) irony in his presentation of terms. His critique of logos, conducted in logocentric terms, makes ample sense whereas his characterization of nomos in nomo-centric terms leaves the reader utterly at sea as to how one might operationalize nomological practices – if such is even possible – in “the risk society.”

The aim of this is to argue that from within, from without, and against technological culture, new and old apocalyptic sensibilities have (re-)emerged that have appropriated risks to undermine this autopoietic movement of technical systems and reveal new opening for radical change. (89)

Again, how those openings might be exploited remains largely unclear. The four case studies that make up the second section of the book have little

to do with explaining the difficult first section and trace a tendency toward the commodification of “risk,” i.e. attempts by logocentric technical apparatuses to always transform “risk” into market opportunity. This, however, is not to say that Part II of the book does nothing to assist the reader in unfurling the convolutions of nomos. To note one such example, Van Loon argues that, in light of recycling, “Waste inhabits the ambiguous borders of ‘presence’” (108). He continues, “Hovering between presence and absence, [waste’s] ubiquitous ephemerality poses serious problems even for a culture based on strong boundaries of inclusion and exclusion” (108). The nomadological slipperiness presented by such semiotic obstacles as “recycling waste,” further complicates historical and synchronic treatments of waste, and hence problematizes traditional logocentric distinctions (here, between waste and resource).

If, as Van Loon claims, this work constitutes “an opening up of the state apparatus” (193) in the face of a broad-based tightening up of security regimes (think airport security and the Patriot Act), how well do its insights equip us to survive the apocalypse that awaits “the risk society”? How can we put these insights about technology, science studies, complex systems, logos/nomos, into operation and make necessary adjustments away from a logocentric security apparatus to one of a more nomadological nature? The author’s jejune attempt at answering these questions merits only brief mention here. Borrowing from the likes of Habermas, Van Loon suggests that we work toward a societal substitution of how we conceptualize trust: a re-

placement of the instrumental fidelity with quasi-transcendental, intersubjective *fides*. “There has always been another and more transcendental sense of trust, that manifests itself in a divinely inspired sense of fidelity (*fides*)” (201). It is in these normative claims that a reader feels most poignantly that this work, written largely before, and published directly on the heels of the incidents of 9/11, is already quite dated.

The most unfortunate irony of Van Loon’s difficult style, and the style of the authors whose work he draws from, is that each of his arabesque theoretical distinctions further ensures that the politics of urgency, which he so expertly outlines in the post-9/11 introduction, will play negatively upon any hopes for policy relevance in administrative risk discourses. This is to say that few, and still fewer in any position of influence, will feel compelled to labor through the technical abstractions of this book for the rare moments of clarity. What is most aggravating about this kind of spurning of a wider public is that Van Loon’s ideas merit much attention. Many issues that have come increasingly to the fore since its publication would benefit from Van Loon’s self-reflexive treatment of cross-institutional communication in light of risk and security concerns. Logos and nomos do promise further insight into how certain risks are able to breach security apparatuses, insofar as these terms focus on the nature of the institutions themselves rather than relying on reductionist models and objectified notions of “risks.”

It is less prophetic than pragmatic to state that in the ensuing years, the world will develop an increasingly

acute sense of risk (i.e. “risk habitus”). Events of enormous scale are sure to meet us in the form of deliberate (bio) terrorist attacks on the one hand and/or chance pathogens of tremendous virulence on the other (avian flu seems the likely candidate for the latter, Al Qaeda for the former). Understanding risk in its knowable, and for its unknowable, dimensions is a sensible ambition not only for the purpose of creating better avoidance or containment strategies (i.e. disciplinary regimes which inevitably break down at some point) but also in better contextualizing and problematizing dominant conceptions of technology in light of this emerging “risk habitus” for purposes of preparedness. This book serves as an object lesson in understanding technology not as a means to an end, but as an emergent structuring—a culture of sorts—whose cultivation in the name of progress might signal some quite unprogressive and unanticipated consequences which will structure and be structured by risk. One might call it a low-risk wager to assert that there will be many more books in the coming years that attempt to parse the ever-emergent dynamic relationship between risk and technology. Van Loon’s treatment, in spite of its problems, offers productive insights into how this discourse might proceed in the first half of the 21st century.

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National Dreams: The Remaking of Fairy Tales in Nineteenth-Century England. By Jennifer Schacker. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003. Pp. 198 + notes, bibliography, notes, index, illustrations.

In *National Dreams*, Jennifer Schacker boldly claims that the England of the nineteenth century had no real fairy tales of its own and so had to depend on the collections of folk and fairy tales passed on to them from other nations. Recognizing the political and economic potential of fairy tales in other European countries, English publishing houses sought to translate and print these foreign tales for their English audiences. Schacker argues that in the process, fairy tales became powerful vehicles for conveying cultural knowledge in England. In addition to serving as moral or etiological stories for children, the way they were translated and fine-tuned allowed the English to position themselves as intellectually superior to their foreign neighbors. This, in Schacker's view, helped build an English national identity that ushered them into the twentieth century.

The object of Schacker's study is the folklore book or collection of traditional tales. All of these volumes were chosen by English publishing houses, she argues, because they had already achieved huge popularity in their native lands. Schacker specifically analyzes the contributions of four major works to the creation of a national identity in nineteenth-century England. These collections include, *German Popular Sto-*

ries translated by Edward Taylor from Grimms' original *Kinder und Hausmärchen*, *Fairy Legends and Traditions of Southern Ireland* by T. Croffton Croker, *Arabian Nights* translated (and rewritten) by Edward Lane; and Webbe Dasent's *Popular Tales from the Norse*. Schacker contends that rather than asserting their own patriotic identity through fairy tales, the English came to understand themselves, as well as foreign nations, through the literature of their European neighbors. By placing emphasis on compilers as situated between two cultures, Schacker examines their influence on the text in framing audience perception of the Other. Adeptly darting between folklore, Victorian studies, children's literature and publishing history, *National Dreams* emerges as a cohesive and focused work on the role of folklore collections in nineteenth-century England.

Schacker's examination of these folklore collections leads her to conclude that they owe their popularity in England to elitist attitudes valuing literacy over orality. The tale collections of foreign nations were compiled by collectors of oral folklore, who then rewrote the tales in a literary style for their English audiences. These collectors often changed parts of the story, sanitized the language to make them appropriate for children, or incorporated what they considered "literary elements" that were lacking in the originals. This process allowed the English to distinguish themselves from other nations on the basis of their literacy, relegating the oral tales of foreign cultures to the genre of "folklore."

Schacker is attentive to the textual frameworks, context, aims, publish-

ing details, and cultural history of each tale collection. In her analysis of *German Popular Stories*, she emphasizes translation issues, collector/compiler troubles, history of publication, and notes that the English version did better than the original Grimms' at press. She examines Croker's famous methodology and less studied colonialist stance when she writes about *Fairy Legends and Traditions from Southern Ireland*. For *Arabian Nights*, Schacker explores the implications of Lane's Arabian scholarship and an Egyptian national context for the English. Taking a cue from Propp, she closely analyzes the structure and conventions of *Popular Tales From the Norse*, as well as national particularities within an Indo-European heritage of language and literature.

Schacker also includes illustration histories that suggest how the traditional accompanying artwork can be seen both as part of the text and as essential to helping formulate the image of the Other. "In the analysis of fantasy," she says, "ethnocentrism often shapes the underlying conception of the real." Her critique of Richard Dorson is noteworthy; she criticizes the way he tried to downplay the degree to which proto-folklorists had catered to popular reading tastes. She offers instead the notion that their very popularity can be seen as a driving force in textual histories of these tale collections. Schacker's provocative conclusion brings the study of nineteenth-century fairy tales to the present day. She asks her readers to consider contemporary uses of "multicultural folklore" in the classroom, which are often intended to educate children

about foreign cultures. In doing so, she forces us to question the assumption that folktales from other countries give us unmediated insight into the Other.

Schacker has smoothly developed her rigorous research into a volume of value to folklore scholars and others interested in literary history in the making of national identities. In a work that successfully incorporates theory from such diverse fields as literature, folklore, history, sociology, political science, and humanities, Schacker demonstrates how these folklore collections, when considered through the multifaceted lenses of these disciplines, represent an intellectual movement in nineteenth-century England.

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Tex[t]-Mex: Seductive Hallucinations of the "Mexican" in America. By William Nericcio. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007. Pp 1 + 248, figures, illustrations, notes, bibliography, image credits, index.

William Anthony Nericcio has published a timely and powerful study on the images of the "Mexican" in American culture. *Tex[t]-Mex: Seductive Hallucinations of the "Mexican" in America* is timely, even though the author admits to a sixteen year long gestation period, because of the United States' intensified focus on securing borders for national security and the recent border wall proposal. *Tex[t]-Mex* powerfully blends ethnic, cultural, and film studies with a strong theoretical foundation that uses humor to expose the agenda lurking beneath the Mexican stereotypes that invade American academia, film, and even cartoons.

Nericcio constructs his close reading of the Mexican stereotype using a Backstory, two Image Gallery sections, and five chapters. The chapters include topics such as Hollywood films, actors, cartoon characters, and a hopeful look at contemporary Chicano/a artists. Visual supplements throughout the book bolster *Tex[t]-Mex's* central theme of the importance of images on stereotypes. The images range from hand-drawn sketches to elaborate collages of board game box tops, surgical procedures on Speedy Gonzales, advertisements of Aunt Jemima, and boxes of Tide. To reinforce why these images are so vital

to his argument, Nericcio cleverly juxtaposes these infectious, defamatory Mexican portrayals with Hitler's order to "his media industry to create a mass of *common visionaries*" (17).

The Backstory explains the whys and the hows of this sophisticated take on handling Hispanic "types." Nericcio explains how growing up in the border-town of Laredo shaped his early thinking (and his own name changes). This book grew out of a vendetta for *Speedy Gonzales*, but the mission of the text is strictly archival. Nericcio seeks to chronicle how the entertainment industry has created a particular type of character embedded with Mexican traits and how that type has evolved to affect both individual Americans and American popular culture as a whole. The Backstory also offers readers historical accounts of the Mexican revolutions and border battles that coincided with the burgeoning of Hollywood industry.

The first two chapters give the reader a Hollywood history lesson. Chapter One, "Hallucinations of Miscegenation and Murder: Dancing along the Mestiza/o Borders of Proto-Chicana/o Cinema with Orson Welles's *Touches of Evil*," explains why *Touch of Evil* is the quintessential *Tex[t]-Mex* film. Welles produced a film about a border town that reinforces cultural stereotypes with the majority of the cast; however, one Mexican completely disrupts the type-cast by not being dirty, drunk, or sexualized. While looking critically at *Touch of Evil*, Nericcio engages both film theory and Chicano critical theory.

From that critical advantage, Nericcio dissects Margarita Carmen Cansino's

(Rita Hayworth's) Hollywood career in Chapter Two. His poignant remarks reveal Ms. Hayworth as a studio simulacrum, an actor whose subtle Mexican traces were deliberately erased for profit and exploitation.

The third chapter, "Autopsy of a Rat," asks the reader to focus on, and simultaneously imagine, a reconciliation of various critical and cultural images including certain entertainment characters like Freddy Lopez in *A Very Retail Christmas*, *Speedy Gonzales* and *Ren and Stimpy*. To ensure that readers can understand the author's deconstructed *Speedy Gonzales*, Nericcio catalogues definitions of loaded terms and confesses his obviously psychoanalytic theoretical bent. Nericcio contends that violence can be discovered in a stereotype's etymology and that the reproducibility of stereotypes does the most damage—distribution equals recognition. *Speedy Gonzales* is a violent stereotype; he looks, speaks, and dresses the way that a Mexican supposedly does, but he is not Mexican; he is a "Mexican" as imagined by the Americans who were once at war with Mexico. Additionally, another major concern about *Speedy* is his intended audience. This popular animated star has come to function in children's memories as a reinforcement of a politically charged type of "Mexican" on "American" soil. The image of *Speedy* lingers well into adulthood.

The last two chapters of *Tex[t]-Mex* focus on images of the Mexican that should linger, but do not. The fourth chapter, on the tragic tale of film star Lupe Velez, reminds readers that Velez's big-screen sexuality paved the way for

more recent Hispanic sex-icons/actors such as Jennifer Lopez and Selma Hayek. Nericcio employs four accounts of vomiting (from disparate authors) to construct his argument for Velez—Luce Irigaray, Frantz Fanon, Rosario Castellanos, and William Faulkner. Nericcio wants readers to help "clean up the mess" and shut the door "on one of the more bizarre chapters" of Mexicans in American culture (172).

After Velez's tragic suicide, Nericcio ends *Tex[t]-Mex* on a hopeful note in Chapter Five. In "XicanOsmosis," Nericcio claims the only response to the negative image overload is a "broadcast of other and othering images" (191). Citing Tino Villanueva's poetry, Manuel Alaverz Bravo's and Adam Sergio Rodriguez's photography, and Gilbert Hernandez's illustrations, Nericcio proves that positive images are available and ready for mass distribution.

The borders *Tex[t]-Mex* defines are similar to the borders that separate high culture and popular culture. Thus, Nericcio concludes that by analyzing negative images of the "Mexican" in popular culture, underlying stereotypes can be deconstructed. Nericcio admits that he let go of his anger for *Speedy Gonzales*; he instead doggedly catalogues and exposes the empty shells of other negative stereotypes. *Tex[t]-Mex*'s strengths resonate because of the author's honesty, his deliberate use of humor, and his ability to confront an age of visual ideology with many images. *Tex[t]-Mex*'s weaknesses are declared by the author in the Backstory. The chapters are not logically or chronologically ordered because they are ordered according to the

author's personal encounters. Nericcio tries to complete amazing feats of cohesion with the introduction paragraphs but gaps remain. Other distractions are apparent. Almost every page offers a different image, an additional anecdote, or a sidebar; the reader can get lost in the myriad of visual options. The varied visual options, constantly shifting tone, and authorial confessions also make this work's audience appeal ambiguous. Serious critical theorists might be confused by the rambling prose; graphic design students might miss the crux of the argument.

Quite possibly, reaching a wide-ranging audience is the author's intent. Anyone (academic or not) can pick up *Tex[t]-Mex* and find a worthwhile passage because Nericcio connects Derrida to cartoons and *Speedy Gonzales* to simulacra storytelling. *Tex[t]-Mex* provides a timely and powerful archive of the Mexican stereotype in American popular culture that bloggers and theorists can equally appreciate.

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Check It While I Wreck It: Black Womanhood, Hip-Hop Culture, and the Public Sphere. By Gwendolyn D. Pough. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004. Pp. 265, introduction, notes, bibliography, index, illustrations.

In *Check It While I Wreck It: Black Womanhood, Hip-Hop Culture, and the Public Sphere*, Women's Studies professor Gwendolyn Pough makes significant contributions to both black feminist thought and hip-hop scholarship. A third-wave feminist of the hip-hop generation, Pough critiques rap music's masculinist dynamics but stops short of dismissing hip-hop culture as inherently misogynistic or thoroughly corrupted by commercialism, as is the tendency for second-wave feminists and other scholars who came of age before rap. Rather, Pough convincingly argues that hip-hop offers rhetorical tools to invigorate black feminist discourse and increase its relevance to new generations of female intellectuals and activists of color.

Central to Pough's argument is the conceptualization of hip-hop as not simply an aggregation of artistic texts and performers – as is the case with most research on hip-hop, which takes the form of cultural history – but as a sphere of discourse, an expressive space within which young people, including young black women, communicate their experiences and articulate their political concerns. Yet it is a contested, male-dominated space in which women struggle for room to maneuver; hence, Pough's central metaphor of “bringing wreck,” the hip-hop slang term that “connotes fighting, recreation, skill, boasting, or

violence" (17). More specifically, she asserts, bringing wreck with regard to black women in hip-hop means to "fight hard and bring attention to their skill and right to be in the public sphere" (17).

Another key term Pough continually invokes is the aforementioned "public sphere," a concept she productively mines to develop her spatio-political theorization of hip-hop as a locus of political and personal expression. Her primary theoretical orientation derives from the Black Public Sphere Collective, a group of African-American scholars who in the mid-nineties reworked critical theorist Jürgen Habermas' influential notion of the "public sphere" of civic participation to include the activities of black civil society. In Chapter One, Pough offers a succinct synopsis of Habermas' central claim: that the public sphere is an egalitarian zone of democratic debate in which individuals put aside personal differences and private interests to talk about a common good.

Pough's first chapter serves as a useful introduction to the basics of public-culture theory for those unfamiliar with the literature. Here Pough also provides an astute overview of the Black Public Sphere Collective's key criticism of Habermas: that those bourgeois spaces he idealized – the cafes, meetinghouses, and salons of the eighteenth century – were always hostile to minorities as well as women, who could not as easily bracket off their differences as a private matter. Pough asserts that "as a result of Black history in the United States...these concepts have to be rethought when applied to Black participation in the larger

U.S. public sphere" (17). *Check It While I Wreck* is part of a growing body of scholarly efforts to rethink the traditions and practices of African-Americans in relation to Habermasian ideals, framing black culture in the U.S. as a "counter-public" formed in response to bourgeois exclusions and thriving today in places of African-American congregation, from barbershops to Baptist churches to street corner block parties, as is the case with hip-hop.

Although Pough directly links hip-hop to the enduring legacy of black public culture in the U.S., she argues hip-hop exists today as a counterpublic in its own right in which African-American youth "claim control of the public's gaze and a public voice for themselves" (17) despite oppressive ideologies and structural conditions that continually marginalize them. She acknowledges, however, that the public voice of hip-hop culture has largely been male. Part of her project is to criticize the gender inequities within what she calls the "uniquely testosterone-filled space" (9) of hip-hop. More optimistically, however, she locates moments in hip-hop's thirty-plus year history in which women's voices broke through the bass-and-baritone bluster of rap music, issuing street-level feminist critiques. She defines these ruptures continually in terms of "bring[ing] wreck – that is, moments when Black women's discourses disrupt dominant masculine discourses, break into the public sphere, and in some way impact or influence the U.S. imaginary, even if that influence is fleeting" (76). Pough argues that, because hip-hop culture fosters the kind of fierceness necessary to "bring wreck" to

one's opponent and, by extension, one's oppressor, it can serve as an important platform for future feminist expression; that hip-hop's powerful rhetorical tools can be wielded as political weapons by women as well as men.

To those who view hip-hop as mired in male chauvinism, this may seem an odd assertion, and one that is difficult for Pough to back it up since her claim is largely prospective. Her argument about hip-hop's political utility for women of color is less a thesis than a forward-looking call-to-arms for black feminists to "take up the cause and utilize the space that Hip-Hop culture provides in order to intervene in the lives of young girls" (11). *Check It While I Wreck It* contains rousing, manifesto-like passages about hip-hop's potential value to black feminism, which Pough argues needs to be more "accountable to young Black women" and to "come down from its ivory tower" (192). She contends that "if conversations and critiques of rap music and Hip-Hop culture move past merely dismissing it, we will start thinking about this particular public sphere in different ways - ways that can start to tap the potential for a more productive struggle against sexism and point the way toward meaningful disruptions of patriarchy" (13). What she lacks in evidence from the current state of hip-hop she somewhat makes up for with her engaged, impassioned tone.

Although the history of empowered female participation in hip-hop is somewhat spotty, Pough does manage to highlight a number of moments in which black women "brought wreck," or made powerful contributions to hip-

hop. Among the most famous instances Pough invokes is Queen Latifah's Grammy-winning rallying cry "U.N.I.T.Y.," in which the rapper calls for an end to sexual harassment, domestic abuse, and the denigration of black women in the African-American community and beyond. Pough characterizes the song as a "pedagogical moment" (88) for young black women, men, and listeners at large, a lesson in feminism delivered in the contemporary language of the streets.

Pough's overview of women in hip-hop includes not only artists working in popular music but also film and literary genres. One of Pough's most impressive qualities as a researcher is her breadth of knowledge about hip-hop culture, which encompasses numerous modes of expression, but also about black women's history, which she often invokes to contextualize the artistic output of contemporary black female hip-hoppers, suggesting they are part of a proud but often overlooked lineage of "womanist" African-American expressive traditions. She stresses cultural continuity throughout the book, devoting her entire second chapter to the literary practices of hip-hop's "foremothers" who, according to Pough, include nineteenth-century clubwomen and pamphleteers, early twentieth-century blues singers, 1960's civil-rights activists, 1970's Black Arts poets, as well as everyday black women keeping African-American storytelling and folk traditions alive.

In Chapter Three, the author persuasively links the activities of women in hip-hop to the vernacular practices of these foremothers - speech acts historically associated with black women such

as “sass,” “talking back,” “going off,” “turning it out,” and “being a diva” (78). She is at her best when finding these historical continuities, connecting both the artistry and the negative portrayals of women in hip-hop to modes of behavior and representation that preceded them. Throughout the rest of the book, Pough demonstrates a keen ability to deconstruct stereotypes as well as the cultural sensitivity to parse inherited codes of behavior assumed under racist and patriarchal conditions. By linking contemporary hip-hop performance to the kinds of everyday outspokenness black women have employed as a survival skill throughout U.S. history, Pough is able to substantiate one of her greatest insights – that female rappers, like their foremothers, use frankness, audacity, and spectacle to combat their own invisibility in the U.S. public sphere. Given that “one has to be seen before one can be heard” (21), the raunchy costuming of Lil’ Kim, the roughneck posturing of Eve, and fantastical music videos of Missy Elliott can be seen in an interesting new political light, regardless of whether one feels these images are “positive,” or that they tow the correct line for feminism.

Though largely convincing, Pough’s broad historical claims sometimes come at the expense of close textual reading, to which the author devotes little time or space. Her interpretation of musical, cinematic, and literary representations of black b-girls in Chapters Four, Five, , and Six are provocative yet too brief. More could be said, for instance, in Chapter Four about the homophobia Pough detects in the autobiographies of

Queen Latifah and Sister Souljah, who, the author argues, fall victim to the “myth of the strong Black woman” (122) as the backbone of the heteronormative black family. This important observation speaks to the way in which even empowered women of the hip-hop generation can be influenced by patriarchal norms.

Also significant and worthy of further development is Pough’s discussion in Chapter Five about the castration threat “ghetto girl” characters pose to male leads in gangsploitation films. By Pough’s account, the genre is rife with these female figures – represented by the “hoochie mama,” the “hood rat,” the “gold digger,” and the “baby mama,” – who represent traps to young inner-city black men. Whether money grubbing, sexually voracious, or overly opinionated, these characters are always portrayed, Pough argues, as posing a danger to the precarious masculinity of the films’ main characters. Those familiar with the genre would likely agree with Pough, yet she provides only the briefest mention of the roles played by actresses such as Jada Pinkett Smith, Regina King, and Nia Long, and even briefer descriptions of the sequences in which they are featured.

The conclusions Pough draws from these and other texts are compelling, though somewhat flattened by the fact that she does not provide a great deal of original source material – in the form of direct quotes, song lyrics, or scene-by-scene sketches – from which to build her interpretations. The reader of *Check It While I Wreck It* simply has to trust Pough’s readings of these works with-

out having access to the kind of textual evidence one would expect in a more literary-style analysis. Ultimately, though, Pough establishes the authority necessary to render her claims believable. Her credibility is premised largely on the personal passion she brings to this project as well as her expansive knowledge of hip-hop culture, black feminist thought, African-American history, and public-sphere theory. She skillfully puts these elements in conversation with each other, offering a youthful and dynamic remix of already established areas of scholarship that is potentially useful to both academics and activists.

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American Science Fiction TV: Star Trek, Stargate, and Beyond. By Jan Johnson-Smith. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2005. Pp. 308, acknowledgments, introduction, notes, bibliography, index, illustrations.

Jan Johnson-Smith, a senior lecturer in film and television theory at Bournemouth University's media school in the United Kingdom, has provided a much-needed analysis of science fiction television through an examination of the narrative and visual patterns that the genre has produced. Science fiction television has spawned legions of fans and clearly occupies an important niche in American culture, and Johnson-Smith takes on the ambitious task of sorting through the multitudes of applicable media content in *American Science Fiction TV: Star Trek, Stargate, and Beyond*.

Johnson-Smith opens the book by introducing the science fiction genre to the reader and simultaneously acknowledging that defining the genre has been a contentious matter amongst "sf" fans. In fact, this very debate will likely determine many readers' sentiments about the book. Johnson-Smith is cautious to group shows such as *The X-Files*, *The Twilight Zone*, and *The Outer Limits* with mainstream science fiction television. Instead, she places much greater focus on shows like *Star Trek*, *Stargate SG-1*, *Babylon 5*, *Space: Above and Beyond*, and *Farscape*, a choice which may alienate fans (no pun intended) and scholars looking for a broad overview of the genre.

The opening chapter does a fine job of exploring the historical context of sci-

ence fiction, paying homage to speculative literature and science fiction's role in the history of developing ideas about the future. In her discussion of metalinguistics and neologisms, Johnson-Smith notes that different approaches to science fiction such as satire and parody, as evidenced in films like *Brazil* (1985) and *Galaxy Quest* (1999), respectively, "offer comment upon our own world through metaphor and extrapolation, with utopian or dystopian visions of alternative realities" (30).

The book caters to the interests of both fans and scholars alike, which is problematic at times. In Chapter Two, "Histories: The American West, Television, and Televisuality," Johnson-Smith provides a lengthy discussion of how science fiction television redeveloped themes from Westerns to create "a new frontier." This is not a new development for scholars, but Johnson-Smith's cumulative approach will appeal to lay readers. Indeed, Johnson-Smith continually revisits this theme throughout the book, arguing that the Western mythos stems from an innate desire for exploration, thereby contributing to the allure of science fiction television. The book often reads like a dissertation, which it was in a previous incarnation, and those familiar with the correlations between the Western and other genres may feel quite distracted by Johnson-Smith's overzealous "name-dropping" of films and television shows to contextualize her arguments.

Clearly, the highlight of *American Science Fiction TV* is Johnson-Smith's coverage of *Star Trek*, perhaps the most important and influential American science fic-

tion program of all time. Johnson-Smith discusses the representations of gender and race in the series, which again is not exactly groundbreaking, but is nevertheless enjoyable to read and yields some interesting observations. For example, Johnson-Smith points out that *Star Trek* has been considered by some critics to be "naïve" and even racist for envisioning a white, American-led future. Intriguingly, she also notes that the infamous interracial kiss between William Shatner and Nichelle Nichols on the original *Star Trek* series, while brave, occurred while both characters were forcibly under the control of an alien power, "so it can be viewed alternatively as a clever plot device with positive intentions, or as a less constructive expression of inter-racial [*sic*] relations, and a myriad of positions in between" (82). Johnson-Smith also offers compelling analysis of *Star Trek's* utopian idealism and the narrative and visual styles that the series propagated.

In Chapter Four, Johnson-Smith turns her attention to militarism in science fiction television. Another strong point of the book, Johnson-Smith's analysis of invasion and warfare in science fiction is riveting and complete, with a colorful sampling of numerous films and programs that have broadcasted the theme of Earth under threat. Johnson-Smith also surveys the impact of Vietnam on science fiction, arguing that "American mythology was fundamentally trapped" by the war (133) and brings attention to the popular theme of colonizing space, and military history. Chapter Five, *Wormhole X-Treme!*, explores concepts of space travel and its limitations, parallel worlds and dimensions, and time trav-

el. Johnson-Smith's discussion of time travel depictions and paradoxes is particularly fun and insightful. Chapter Six examines *Babylon 5* and contemplates the narrative patterns, types of verbal and visual imagery, music, and plot devices employed throughout the series.

Despite the insightful analysis and range of topics presented by Johnson-Smith, there are also some disappointing absences in the book. Given that the author is a native of the United Kingdom, there is surprisingly inadequate consideration given to the influence of British science fiction television on American programs and fan-bases. There is no mention of technologically groundbreaking British programs such as *Space: 1999* (led by American actors Martin Landau and Barbara Bain) or the long-lived sci-fi comedy series *Red Dwarf*; there are only vague references to the longest running science fiction program in history, *Doctor Who*, a program that clearly has influential ties to American science fiction programs like *Quantum Leap*. Furthermore, science fiction television cannot be adequately reviewed without some discussion of its influence and creation of fan culture, and this topic is ignored throughout the book.

Still, *American Science Fiction TV* is, for the most part, a successful effort. It is an excellent introduction to the literature on science fiction, which will greatly aid the efforts of other scholars hoping to expand on the genre's impact on American culture, but lacks the depth that most scholars would likely hope to see in a book purporting to fully cover American science fiction television. For

a book that claims to be "the first full-length study" of the television genre, it is too narrow in scope. The material that Johnson-Smith scrupulously analyzes is well-written and interesting, but may be off-setting for those looking for a broader work on science fiction television and its impact on culture.

The relationship between science fiction television and fan culture deserves further study. Conventions, costume and apparel patronage, festival attendance, and gaming are revered staples of the most ardent sci-fi fanatics and demand scholarly attention. After all, these material manifestations of sci-fi culture are among the most tangible measures of their impact on popular culture. I expect that this book will be regarded favorably by fans, especially enthusiasts of *Stargate SG-1*, *Babylon 5*, *Farscape*, and the *Star Trek* franchise, but will greatly underwhelm scholars looking for a definitive publication on science fiction television and its impact on popular culture.

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