

# **CULTURAL ANALYSIS**

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY FORUM ON FOLKLORE AND POPULAR CULTURE

## Volume 9: Virtually Global

**Terry Gunnell**

In Memorium: Ezekiel Alembi

### Articles

**JoAnn Conrad**

Mapping America: Re-creating in the Cartographic Imagination

Responses by **Casey R. Schmitt** and **Jill Terry Rudy**

**Pamela Conners**

Putting Words to Work: The Politics of Labor's Vernacular

Responses by **Eugene Cooper**, **Barry Brummett**, and **Christina M. Smith**

**Kerstin McGaughey**

Food in Binary: Identity and Interaction in Two German Food Blogs

Response by **Lucy Long**

**Kimberly Ball**

UFO-Abduction Narratives and the Technology of Tradition

### Events and Debates

**Jack Zipes**

Sensationalist Scholarship: A Putative "New" History of Fairy Tales

**Rebecca Elliott**

Contesting the Spectacle: Global Lives as Counterpublic in the Context of  
Celebrity Activism

**Stina Marie Hasse Jørgensen**

The Global Lives Project: Making New Media Matter in a Global World

Book Reviews by **Jessica Erberich**, **Benjamin Gatling**, and **Michelle Robinson**



Cultural Analysis:  
An Interdisciplinary Forum on Folklore and Popular Culture  
Volume 9: Virtually Global

<b>In Memorium: Ezekiel Alembi</b> .....	1
Terry Gunnell	
Articles and Responses	
<b>Mapping America: Re-creating in the Cartographic Imagination</b> .....	3
JoAnn Conrad	
Responses: Casey R. Schmitt, Jill Terry Rudy	
<b>Putting Words to Work: The Politics of Labor's Vernacular</b> .....	39
Pamela Conners	
Responses: Eugene Cooper, Barry Brummett, Christina M. Smith	
<b>Food in Binary: Identity and Interaction in Two German Food Blogs</b> ....	69
Kerstin McGaughey	
Response: Lucy Long	
<b>UFO-Abduction Narratives and the Technology of Tradition</b> .....	99
Kimberly Ball	
Events and Debates	
<b>Sensationalist Scholarship:</b>	
<b>A Putative "New" History of Fairy Tales</b> .....	129
Jack Zipes	
<b>Contesting the Spectacle: Global Lives as</b>	
<b>Counterpublic in the Context of Celebrity Activism</b> .....	150
Rebecca Elliott	
<b>The Global Lives Project:</b>	
<b>Making New Media Matter in a Global World</b> .....	146
Stina Marie Hasse Jørgensen	
Book Reviews	
<i>Cinderella in America: A Book of Folk and Fairy Tales</i> (McCarthy).....	R1
Jessica Erberich	
<i>Everyday Life in Central Asia: Past and Present</i> (Sahadeo & Zanca).....	R2
Benjamin Gatling	
<i>Imperial Masochism: British Fiction, Fantasy, and Social Class</i> (Kucich).....	R5
Michelle Robinson	

## Editorial Board

Fekade Azeze, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia  
Pertti J. Anttonen, University of Helsinki, Finland  
Hande Birkalan, Yeditepe University, Istanbul, Turkey  
Regina Bendix, Universität Göttingen, Germany  
Charles Briggs, University of California, Berkeley, U.S.A.  
Véronique Champion-Vincent, Maison des Sciences de l'Homme,  
France  
Linda Dégh, Indiana University, U.S.A.  
Valdimar Tr. Hafstein, University of Iceland, Reykjavik  
Jawaharlal Handoo, Central Institute of Indian Languages, India  
Galit Hasan-Rokem, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem  
Jason Baird Jackson, Indiana University, U.S.A.  
Kimberly Lau, University of California, Santa Cruz, U.S.A.  
John Lindow, University of California, Berkeley, U.S.A.  
Sabina Magliocco, California State University, Northridge, U.S.A.  
Jay Mechling, University of California, Davis, U.S.A.  
Fabio Mugnaini, University of Siena, Italy  
Sadhana Naithani, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India  
Peter Shand, University of Auckland, New Zealand  
Francisco Vaz da Silva, University of Lisbon, Portugal  
Maiken Umbach, University of Manchester, England, Universitat  
Pompeu Fabra, Spain  
Ülo Valk, University of Tartu, Estonia  
Fionnuala Carson Williams, Linen Hall Library, Belfast, Northern  
Ireland  
Ulrika Wolf-Knuts, Åbo Academy, Finland

## Staff

### Editorial Collective:

Ted Biggs, Anthony Bak Buccitelli, Karen Miller, &  
Tok Thompson

Review Editor: Elaine Yau

Website Developer: Brooke Dykman

### Copy Editors:

Fionnuala Carson Williams, Maggi Michel, Melissa Royer,  
Heather Blackmore, Jason Canniff, Christian Palmer, &  
Christian Tambascia

**IN MEMORIAM**  
**EZEKIEL ALEMBI**  
(12.12.1960 – 17.01.2010)

On 17<sup>th</sup> January 2010, I received the news that my good friend and Kenyan “brother” Ezekiel Alembi had died of a stroke at his home in Nairobi at the tender age of 49. The news came as a great shock to all of us who had come to know him over the years as a friend and fellow folklorist, not only because of the sudden loss to African folklore studies (and folklore and ethnology in general), but more particularly for Ezekiel’s extended family in Nairobi and Bunyore, Kenya, and the countless students of all ages (at home and abroad) who had benefited from his teaching and positive encouragement over the years.

The story of Ezekiel’s education is an example in itself, and no small achievement. Starting out in 1971 in the local Ziواني primary school in the Vihiga region, in the countryside of Bunyore, in western Kenya, Ezekiel went on to graduate from Ebwirany school in Kakamega, before taking his secondary education in the Kakamega and Kangaru Embu high schools in the same area. His university education in literature and English language then took place in Kenyatta University, Nairobi, where, in 1991, he wrote his MA thesis on local children’s songs. Soon after this, Ezekiel began teaching at the same university (in the fields of literature, drama and folklore), and in 1995 became a member of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research, taking a regular and active part in the society’s congresses (he

became a representative on the ISFNR board in 2008, later going on to serve for more than ten years as the ISFNR Vice-President representing Africa). Participation in these conferences brought him into contact with fellow academics in Europe and America, and especially those from Estonia and Finland where he first took part in one of the Folklore Fellows Summer Schools in Lammi in 1997. This brought him into close contact with Prof. Lauri Harvilahti at the University of Helsinki. Lauri became a close friend and mentor, supervising Ezekiel’s Ph.D thesis at the same university, “The Construction of the Abanyole Perceptions on Death through Oral Funeral Poetry” (2002), which dealt with Abanyole death culture in Ezekiel’s home area of Bunyore (see <http://ethesis.helsinki.fi/julkaisut/hum/kultt/vk/alembi/>).

Typically, Ezekiel felt it necessary not only to add a summary to the thesis in the local language of the people he was writing about, but also to defend the thesis for a second time orally in front of the local people of Bunyore, an outdoor affair that lasted all day and included not only deep discussions amongst the local people but also music and dance. This, he felt, was the *real* defence (and the most difficult, even though his listeners proved to be very positive in the end).

Ezekiel Alembi’s approach to his thesis was reflected in his other articles on folklore, such as “Telling Tales: The Use of Oral Narratives in Religious Sermons in Kenya” (*Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, 13 [2000] 103-110) and “Dawn of a New Era: Song and Dance in Kenya’s Multi-Party Elections 2002” (*Journal of Indian Folklore*, 5,1 [2003]).<sup>1</sup> All

of these works, dealing with his local Luhya people in his old home district of Bunyore (where he is now buried), show a deep love and respect for his Kenyan culture, along with a firm belief that it deserved equal attention to European and American folklore, and a sense that the new generations of Kenyans should grow up feeling a sense of pride in their local culture and history, rather than a feeling of hopelessness or inferiority in comparison to the European culture they meet daily in the media. This same feeling of pride was reflected in Ezekiel's demands of guests: those of us who visited him should experience Kenya as the Kenyans understood it, rather than from the balcony of a large hotel or a university apartment. It was important that Kenyan culture should be understood from an African viewpoint if it was to be understood more fully.

Ezekiel Alembe's respect and hopes for the potential of the young people of his country (who he saw as representing a concrete dream for a better future) were similarly reflected in the over forty five novels and biographies that he wrote for young Kenyan readers, something that earned him not only a literary prize in 2003 but also the respect of his peers in various spheres of life. Most of these books have a deliberately strong moral and educational message showing young people fighting their way past immense difficulties to find safety and achieve new self respect in a changing world, principally if they manage to build on the older values of their culture.

Ezekiel was not merely a writer, though: he was also a great storyteller and performer, and many of our conversations at conferences, and during

a memorable visit to Kenya in 2007, dealt with the essentially performative nature of storytelling—and the idea that if Africans had drawn up the borders between folklore genres and types of art rather than Europeans, these borders would have been very different (and more multidisciplinary). As anyone could see when watching Ezekiel tell stories, appearance, gesture, expression, tone, rhythm, music and context were as important as the words involved. I have a clear memory of the back half of a conference bus slipping into amazed silence in order to overhear the stories of Kenya he was privately—but loudly—telling me.

The same interest in performance and drama could be seen in Ezekiel's tireless work on the annual Kenya Schools and Colleges Drama Festival, for which he served as the National Chairman. These unique festivals, in which hundreds of students of all ages and tribes come together to compete in plays and dance dramas they have put together themselves about subjects that matter to their lives (ranging from AIDS to children's armies, government corruption and genital mutilation), are an experience in themselves. They are also a clear statement of belief in the free speech and increasing mutual respect that recent generations of Kenyan children had achieved after years of dictatorship. For Ezekiel, these children and their art represented a symbol of peaceful hope, as well as a firm belief in the future and potential of his country. It is noteworthy that one of his final achievements was the building and opening of a library designed for local children, set in the garden of the house where he grew up in Bunyore.





Ezekiel Alembi telling stories to Icelandic high school students.  
Photos by Terry Gunnell



In spite of his firm local roots, Ezekiel was nonetheless also a man who proved to be infinitely adaptable to changing environments (from the noisy Bunyore market, to the formal Nairobi campus, the snow and ice of Finland and Iceland, and the rooftop heat of central Athens below the Parthenon where I saw him last). In addition to his work in Kenya (Senior Lecturer in the Literature Department of Kenyatta University from 2003, Chairman of the department between 2007 and 2008, and then Director of Kenyatta University Radio Services until his death), and his memorable appearances at ISFNR conferences, Ezekiel also served on the editorial boards of several American folklore journals (including *Cultural Analysis*) in addition to being a long-time member of the editorial board of the Estonian journal *Folklore: Electric Journal of Folklore*.

As noted at the start, Ezekiel Alembi will be sorely missed by many. The sound of his deep, rolling laughter at life's small absurdities will nonetheless continue to resound in our memories for years to come: sadly gone, but far from forgotten. Without doubt, his influence will live on in the work of his many students and colleagues.

**Terry Gunnell**  
*University of Iceland*

#### **Notes**

1 Other articles include "Singing and Dancing the Rhythm of Life: Oral Poetry in the Abanyole Community of Kenya" (2003 *Elore: A Scholarly Online Journal in Folklore Studies* 10: 1); "The Calling and Work of Wellington Masatia Tambwa: A Traditional Healer from Bunyore, Kenya" (2004 *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* 24 : 78-89); "Issues in the Socio-Cultural Perception of Death as Reflected in the Abanyole Dirges" (2007 *Indian Folklife* 27: 15-20); and "The Abanyole Dirge: 'Escorting' the Dead with Song and Dance (2008 *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* 38: 7-22).



## Mapping America: Re-creating in the Cartographic Imagination<sup>1,2</sup>

JoAnn Conrad

*University of California, Berkeley*

### The Shaping of a National Citizenry

Maps have long been part of the American cultural landscape. Plotting military advances and territorial expansion; regulating and demarcating land through surveys, thereby inextricably merging land and property, maps have shaped our sensibility of the landscape at the same time as they have guided our movement through it. The mapped identity of the U.S. as the visualized outline of the forty-eight contiguous states is, by now, a naturalized phenomenon both in the sense that it is taken for granted, and in the sense that the natural boundaries have been set by nature—originating at the Atlantic and terminating at the Pacific Ocean.<sup>3</sup> The shape of the continental United States, established cartographically, unproblematically represented in road maps, railroad maps, atlases, school texts, advertisements, and news, has become iconographic. Inscribed onto the popular imagination, it has “entered the national collective image bank . . . [T]he shape of the United States is so ingrained in the minds of those who live here . . . that it stands for the nation as a symbol” (Holmes 1991, 7), which is then conflated with the continent—“America”. In this nation/continent homology, however, nature operates metonymically with

culture, and the cartographic presentation belies an ideological and historical shaping of the country that is anything but natural. In fact, the sleight of hand by which the “irrefutable” materiality of the ground that is presented and the scientific cartographic processes by which the in-itself-material map is produced transform the ideological possession of that land into its own reality and into claims that “we Americans” are here, coast-to-coast. This obscures alternative, often highly contested, mappings, and effaces the processes of coercion and consensus building which involve the interwoven strands of politics, economics, ideology, social change, power, and domination that have resulted in a singular narrative of national identity, visualized in the map of nation.

This notion of continental integrity fused with national identity is thus one of an imagined and contested space, in which neither the nation nor the space it occupies can be postulated *a priori* as preexisting or fixed, but is the outcome of specific historical, narrative processes. “America,” thus, ontologically, is not an immutable, taken for granted “ground,” but a potentiality to be filled with meaning and thus recognized as meaningful. Maps play a critical and yet largely unchallenged role in the ideological work of fixing such meaning. The apparent capacity of the map to hold together the nation from the internal and external forces of disintegration, the semiotic and rhetorical potency of the map, based, in part, on the deceptive fixity of the mapped terrain and the naturalness of the continental nation, can be seen as the imposition of a hegemonic view

masquerading as “common knowledge.” In other words, “it is the map that precedes the territory” (Baudrillard 1983, 2); “mappings do not represent geographies or ideas; rather they effect their actualization” (Corner 1999, 225).

In a sense, then, the maps of the continental United States show the development of an American [creation] myth which “. . . functions to control history, to shape it in text or image as an ordained sequence of events. The world is rendered pure in the process; complexity and contradiction give way to order, clarity, and direction. Myth, then, can be understood here as an abstract shelter restricting debate. But myth can also function as ideology—as an abstraction broadly defining the belief system of a particular group . . .” (Truettner 1991, 40). But these ideologies which undergird the overdetermined sense of order in any map are only possible through the continued discarding, forgetting, and evacuation of those strands that run counter to the main narrative; those counter mappings which threaten the integrity of the national space.

The narrative of “America,” with hindsight as its perspective, presents a seamless and naturalized series of such myths—presumptions which subsume the Americas into a metageography which obfuscates its ideological underpinnings: the myth of continents; the myth of the nation state; and the myth of the East to West progression of civilization (Lewis and Wigen 1997, xiii), all of which have been mapped onto the terrain and the national consciousness. In this narrative, continents become fundamental building blocks of geography which are reified, acquiring the status of

a “naturalized geographical taxonomy” (Lewis and Wigen 1997, 8-9). The idea of this continental America thus justified continental conquest in the name of national integrity, while the concept of a continental nation supported notions of American exceptionalism and privilege.

Although this dominant narrative seeks to organize the unified nation ideologically through the cartographic image of an imaginary America which is naturalized by the representation of a contiguous land mass, a reinvestigation of these maps reveals the sub-texts which constantly threaten to destabilize and challenge the singular narrative strand of American continental/national unity, as well as the historical changes that belie this mythic unity—the recuperative adjustments which seek to contain and subdue alternatives.

### **The Ties Bind the Nation**

Although in the territorial uncertainties of the colonial period the map of America was shifting and contested, the general impulse of continental expansion was nonetheless dominated by an East-West logic (i.e., a N-S Frontier) until the Civil War. Here, again, the cartographic process inscribed the shatter belt of the astronomically surveyed Mason-Dixon Line, rupturing the East-West logic, threatening to expose the disorder in the apparent order of the map. As the United States reinvented itself as a unified, whole nation in the wake of the Civil War the West became even more central to the national mythos, and westward expansion and continental unification along the East-West axis resumed, marked, significantly, by the completion of the transcontinental railway in May of

1869, joining the Union and Central Pacific Lines.

The physical incorporation and linkage of the mythic landscape of the West to the rest of the nation provided the focus for American regeneration, reunification and self-affirmation. The marriage of mapping and the railroads served further to solidify the image of the unified, continental nation, sutured and reinforced by the iron rail grid. The story of these maps is one of masculine domination and conquest over Nature in the form of presidential acts rather than the story of those whose physical labor produced the railways, or who were displaced or dislocated as a result of them.

The railroads, as major landholders in the late nineteenth century, were to dominate the changing ways in which the nation was apprehended, not only through their linking of the continent, but through the hastening of the immigration of settlers into more of the West, reconfiguring settlement patterns along the narrow corridors of railroad development. The American landscape was reduced to strips that criss-crossed the mapped surface, with vast, unknown, and emptied territories beyond, many of which had been stripped of their former significance.

The growing strength of the railroads and the increased demand for rail travel also ushered in a significant new presence into the landscape—tourism. Railroad tourism offered growing numbers of the elite a comfortable way to view and travel through the country. Tourism became typified as the act of viewing—sightseeing preselected natural wonders from the comfort of the Pullman car windows, or, at the very most, from the vista

points provided by the luxury hotels that grew up at such destinations along the rail lines. Situated alongside or nearby the spectacular sights of Nature — the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone,<sup>4</sup> and Yosemite — tourists were guided in an act of national communion and reaffirmation. As such, tourism initiated a new form of collective citizenship; the embodied retracing of a shared destiny, and a shared experience in the space of America.

One of the earliest to reconfigure and repack the landscape around the logic of the rail lines and the new viewing tourist was Fred Harvey, who famously repackaged the West as a series of motorcar “detours” that took city “dudes” to various vista points in luxury cars that conveniently detoured from the rail line into landscapes in which imaginary “natives” were colorful, silent, and static.<sup>5</sup> [Fig. 1].

After the antagonistic and hostile natural and human forces in the West had been subdued, the tourist was able to romanticize and “experience” these forces in a repackaged state.<sup>6</sup> These decontextualized and recontextualized tourist destinations, then, became imagined places, the precursors to contemporary theme parks, where reminders of suffering and social conflict are removed from the touristic purview. These touristic itineraries restaged narratives of conquest of the native peoples who were evacuated from the newly constituted national parks, put on reservations, and presented as ethnographic remnants of “authentic” Indian cultures in a decontextualized setting for the consumption of tourists seeking a palliative to the rigors of modern, urban life.



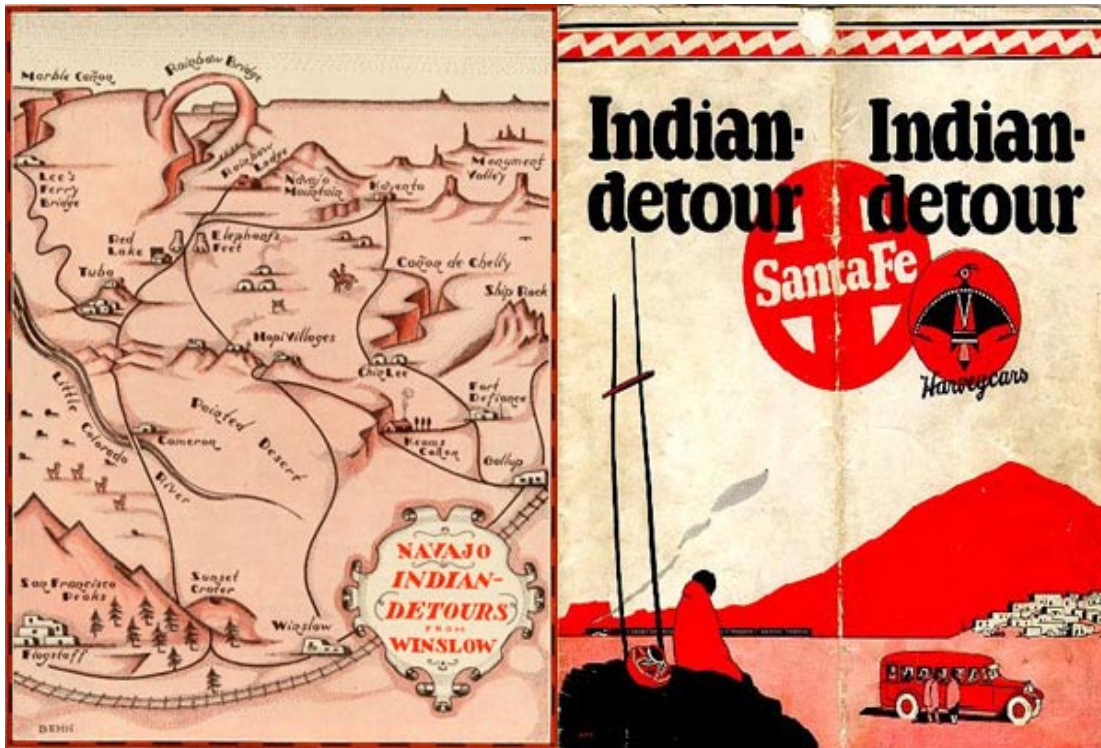


Fig. 1. Harvey marketed itineraries as destination points on a map linked by the traces of roads and rail lines.

With the emergence of the vacation as an individual right, and the configuration of touristic sights as encapsulating the essence of the nation, tourism addressed and shaped a particular America and collective American identity. Tourism and nation building were conjoined—structuring the meanings of experience, desire, visibility, mobility, and consumerism; defining the “good life” as a social and moral imperative. Thus tourism, during this early period of railroad travel, allowed for an affirmation of the tourist’s rightful place at the head of the social hierarchy and the American system. “In the spectacular vistas of the West, in a growing obsession with native peoples and their arts, Americans used a geographic place as mythical space

. . . [t]ourism had become intrinsically linked to the formulation of the industrial age, to the combination of Manifest Destiny, empirical knowledge, and romantic thinking that typified the fin de siècle” (Rothman 1998, 49).

#### Promotional Maps and Tour Itineraries

Nation, conquest, private enterprise, industrial expansion, a new consuming tourist class, and a radically different conceptualization and organization of time and space focusing on an imaginary national landscape were merged and distilled in the emergent new phenomenon of promotional cartography. Technological innovations such as the wax engraving process and the use of pulp paper, along with mechanized, industrialized produc-

tion, resulted in the increased availability of cheap road maps for an increasingly mobile public.<sup>7</sup> The cartographically defined vision of the nation was thus tied to the commercial interests of the railroads and tourism, and as such was abstracted and delimited according to financial imperatives. Despite the claims to cartographic accuracy and comprehensiveness, these maps reveal the competitive motivation of advertising campaigns.

Railroad maps, like the form of travel they purport to represent, also emphasize destination. Thus the type of information contained in the maps, the emphasis on sites along the routes at the expense of

map, tracing and anticipating the tourist's itinerary, both facilitated and limited the individual's movement. [Fig. 2] Space became known through a process of miniaturization at the same time that the individual was positioned in a common social space. The map, then, like the book, could become a "talisman to the body, and an emblem of the self" (Stewart, Susan 1993, 41) through which the re-inscription of personal itineraries onto routes proffered by the printed map effected the reinvention of the map which could then be displayed, revisited and re-presented.

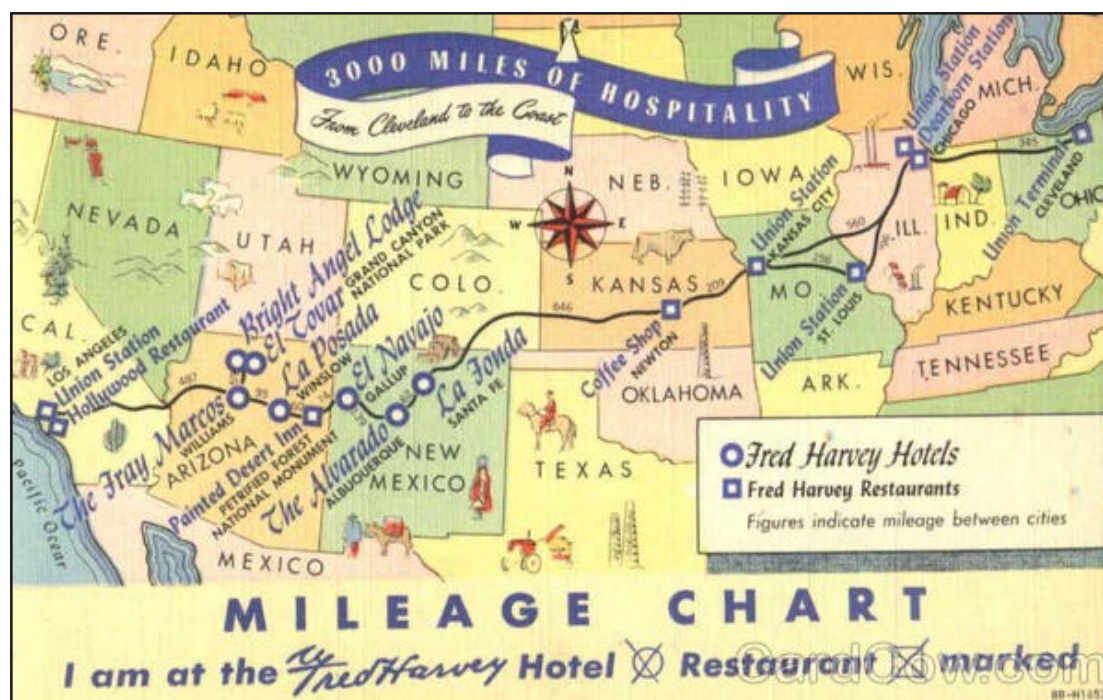


Fig. 2. Mapping Destination. The U.S. visualized as a series of stops<sup>8</sup>

a broader, detailed relationship with the landscape, guided the consuming public in ways of seeing that would in turn affect the vision of the nation. The railroad

### Blazing Trails

The railroads dominated American transportation and travel in the second half of the nineteenth century and the begin-



ning of the twentieth century, and during this period railroad maps continued to inform the American continental imaginary. Gradually, however, road maps began to have a presence. Initially, these maps and the associated “Good Roads Movement,” were local and discrete in nature, catering to cyclists. In 1908, as the first production-line Model T Ford appeared, systems of travel, touring and mapping in the U.S. began to change. Henry Ford’s revolution transformed the ways in which Americans lived forever, and did so rapidly: in 1900 there were eight thousand cars registered; in 1910, one million; by 1915, at the onset of WWI, two million (Yagoda 1998, 35); by 1920, eight million; and by 1930, twenty-three million (Rothman 1988, 146). But Fordism’s effects went deeper: in his assembly-line worker, in the homogeneity and standardization of his product, and in the assurance of a decent wage, Ford initiated a consumerist regime of demand-driven economics, and created a middle-income class with money to spend and leisure time in which to recreate. This Fordist revolution initiated a change in individuals’ attitudes toward the land—at once more distanced (in terms of labor and production) and more intimate (in terms of car travel and the individualized travel through space). Early car travel upset the “hegemony of the intellectual message encoded in railroad travel” (Rothman 1988, 144) by putting the car owner in the “driver’s seat” to deal with the many unexpected contingencies of road travel. This was the “democratization” and appeal to the sense of individualism and adventure that early car travel offered middle-class Americans.

As car travel eclipsed train travel so was the nature of travel transformed; an elite, highly-structured cultural tourism was replaced by a more personal type of experience-based recreational tourism. In the transformation, tourism focused less on destination and more on the experience of the road, and yet destination and experience still existed within the same nationalistic symbolic rhetoric: the grand national parks of the West still stood for America’s might; the historical parks of the East reframed the war of independence and celebrated the birth and glory of the new nation; while the ethnographic displays of Indians in museums and at arts and crafts shops all reinscribed a particular social order and the privilege of the tourist class. All of these assumptions operated on the by-now invisible background of the continental United States, and all were narratives that naturalized conquest—the tourism of hegemony.

As more cars and more drivers with vacation time and the desire to exercise their freedom and independence began to hit the road, they were met by the newly established Highway Associations of local businesses and commercial enterprises ready to capitalize on this new market. These early associations established the “Blazed Trails Program”—the first system of marked and mapped regional routes. Routes with evocative, rugged names benefitted travelers’ own images and expectations—The Black Horse Trail; Dixie Highway; Erie Trail; Yellowstone Trail. Probably the most famous of these was the Lincoln Highway, which traced a line from New York to San Francisco.<sup>9</sup> In 1916 it was estimated that five to ten thousand motorists made the entire transcontinental journey across the

Lincoln Highway (Joy 1917), which was mapped by Rand McNally in 1913 using previous continental railroad maps as a template. Thus, although car travel effected a democratization of tourism in contrast to the more exclusive earlier rail tourism, the accompanying road maps which interpellated an even larger portion of the citizenry into the discipline of the nation did so according to a pre-existing grid.

The map referred as much to an imaginary terrain as to any “real ground,” and the mapping of the continental road systems, like those of the railroads earlier, was often prior to the actual presence of the roads. In Emily Post’s diary of her transcontinental road trip across the Lincoln Highway, her companion’s comments bear witness to this: “It’s an imaginary line like the equator . . . [o]nce you get beyond the Mississippi the roads are trails of mud and sand . . . [t]hese are not towns; they are only names on a map” (Post 1925, 7; cited in Akerman 1993, 79). That people planned their itineraries based on these lines on a map is a testament to the power of the map to effect its own reality, naturalizing an imaginary landscape.

### Constructing National Unity

Increased demands for long-distance travel and transportation required new types of road construction, and in 1916 the Federal Aid Road Act appropriated \$75 million to the standardization not only of road construction, but of road designation (Weingroff 1996a). Hampered by the demands of WWI, highway construction stalled until the passage of the Federal Highway Act of 1921, ushering in the heyday construction period of the 1920s

(Weingroff 1996b). After WWI, highway construction, mapping and signing continued, and the standardized federal highway numbering system, initiated in 1926, signaled the demise of the older, more regional Blazed Trail system. It was during this period that the road map and road travel began to truly shape a unified national consciousness:

The creation of the national highway system in the United States was guided by the hope that it would eliminate the last natural barriers to national integration. And thus early auto road maps were relied upon to conquer the vast American space, to invite transcontinental travel by car. American auto touring ever since has had less to do with travelling in the country than through it. The bold-line, sparsely detailed aesthetic of American road maps reflects this detachment from the countryside. (Akerman 1993, 79)

These road maps, stripped down to the essentials of the road trip’s demand for movement, showed only what was appropriate for road travel, and this minimalist presentation and limited topographical relief effected a distanciation from the landscape, opening up the map space which could then be “filled in” with sights, tourist destinations, and imaginary places projected onto the surface of the map. As these sights became the destination, they also portrayed the road trip as an “experience,” and thus the reproduction of these sights—the post cards, photos, souvenirs—not only made the sight “real,” but also validated, materialized, and commemorated the experience into the future.

During the Depression and the subsequent New Deal Era, the federal gov-

ernment became even more involved in the work of cultural production, shaping the American citizenry in accordance with the unifying goals of Progressivism. As part of the WPA, in 1935 the Federal Writers' Project was allotted \$6,288,000 and employed sixty-five hundred writers to produce the American Guide Series, a collection of over 400 volumes of "regional guide books" (Bold 1999, xiv).<sup>10</sup> These writers, although guided by certain preconceptions about what constituted points of regional and local interests, were also managed and incorporated into the overall agenda of the national agency. The central office in Washington ultimately arbitrated local variation in order to map out a uniform and unified America onto a retraceable grid. The guidebooks' promise, beyond a make-work project, was pedagogical: teaching the American public how to not only read the newly remapped and re-presented landscape, but how to be in it. Road travel became insistently work, national duty, as well as play. In this, the guidebooks were informed by not only the dictates of the WPA, but also a cluster of agencies that included the National Park Service, the Department of the Interior, and also state, and local agencies, which, through "preservation, education, and display. . . were closely tied, by production and rhetoric, to the New Deal's vision of the United States as a nation of communities" (Kammen 1991, 299-527; quoted in Bold 1999, 4). Guidebooks also had widespread distribution; standardizing and normalizing the vision of American unity:

Volumes in the American Guide Series were distributed to public schools, to refugee centers, and to the libraries of

military bases, as well as being prominently exhibited in bookshops, department stores, hotels, transportation depots, and advertisements throughout the subway system. By mid-1936, 431 radio stations were using Works Progress Administration radio material. (Bold 1999, 12)

The widespread dissemination of the message of the guides,<sup>11</sup> as well as the "documentary style" they assumed, served to naturalize not only a particular text of American-ness and the natural order of existing social relations,<sup>12</sup> but also served to naturalize the ritualistic act of traveling along a prescribed route through this American landscape. In contrast to the dislocation and displacement of the Depression, the New Deal and the guidebooks in particular stressed "purposeful movement" that was destination oriented—to see the sights, to relive history, and to know one's country.<sup>13</sup> The guides, issued at a particular moment in American cultural history just before the onset of mass tourism, served as the texts of the rhetorics of nationalism, and their structure and presentation of the landscape of America, the sights and points of touristic consumption, were to set the template for tourist guides to come<sup>14</sup> which would replicate the form as well as the power relations that inhered in the assumptions implicit in the guides' presentations.

Not until the challenges to the narrative of national unity and harmony in the 1960s did the model set by the guides suffer. But, as with all cultural production, once the genie is out of the bottle, the control of meaning and dissemination is imperfect. Those images and descriptions of the guides of the 1930s, un-

moored from their original context and social signifiers, float freely in a complex set of cultural scenarios and imaginary landscapes, becoming the sites of nostalgic reappropriation and reconfiguration, as well as objects which, through consumption, possession, and ownership, reinsert the tourist into an entirely new imaginary landscape.

### The Road Trip

Geography became political destiny and personal fantasy in the post-WWII family vacation—the road trip. The road trip fully emerged in the post-WWII era in a perfect convergence of social, economic, and political factors, becoming the iconic encapsulation of the “good life” and the “American Dream.” Americans were ready, after the austerity of the war effort, for movement and consumerism, and the post-war economic boom provided the capital incentive. Car ownership was climbing: in 1948, fifty-four percent of families owned cars; by 1960 this was seventy-seven percent (Rugh 2008, 18). There were nine car manufacturing companies, unable to keep up with orders, and generally, the demand for all petroleum products, after war time rationing, rose eighty percent between 1945 and 1957 (Jakle and Schulle 1994, 67). And cars got bigger. This was the era of the station wagon, big enough to accommodate the growing Baby Boom generation. Car manufacturers, and the expanding ad industry that accompanied them, not only spoke to this growing market, but, through the advertising images displayed in magazines and on television (itself a rapidly expanding post-war socializing experience), tended to normalize the very family it was appealing to: a 1954

magazine ad for the Ford Ranch Wagon proclaims, “There’s always room for one more, in a FORD Ranch Wagon!” (Rugh 2008, 22).

Cars were one part of the equation; freeways were another. In 1956 the Federal-Aid Highway Act was signed, allocating federal funds for the construction of an interstate freeway system, argued, by then-President Eisenhower to be necessary for national security. The consequences of the introduction of the freeways, however, are much more profound and long-lasting. Freeways effected a completely different way of being in space: they facilitated the rise of the suburbs by making commutes fast and without stops, and thus inevitably longer; they standardized road travel, incorporating freeway design into the national model; they distanced the driver and passengers from the surrounding countryside, thus defining any car trip by the points of departure and destination; and they institutionalized the association of being American and being “on the road,” since freeways by definition were not local, and tended to decentralize and segregate zones of activity, and did so, primarily, to the exclusion of other modes of transportation. Clustering around the infrequent turnoffs were new subsidiary industries: gas stations, fast food chains, strip malls, and motels, all positioned to facilitate travel along the freeway, but also to be within the view of the motorists from the road, and all of these industries became increasingly standardized across the entire system. These tended to change the ways in which Americans in the post-war era configured their work and leisure times to be in conformance with the logic of the freeway – minimiz-





The new 1954 Chevrolet Delray Coupe. With three great series Chevrolet offers the most beautiful choice of models in its field.

## Four good reasons why new Chevrolet families are "having a wonderful time". . .

Fig. 3. Family values, consumerism, and the Road Trip Family Vacation, circa 1954

ing deviation, eroding the possibility of a different, "uncharted" excursion. The speed of travel that the new freeways enabled opened up the potential for the cross-country family road trip, enhanced by the comfort and familiarity of standardized fast food, uniformed gas station attendants, and motels that, like Howard Johnson's, offered rooms in which "kids stay free," and whose motel pool offered "roadside entertainment" included in the night's price.

The 1950s thematized nuclear family was the embodiment, enactment and justification for the "Cold War

consensus" (Stephens 1999; Conrad 1999a, 324-328), linking political policy and "family values" as it merged domestic and national containment. "The Cold War era generation, in the wake of the disruption of World War II and the uncertainty of the new, nuclear age, looked "homeward" to the isolated, stable, sexually charged safe haven of the home and family" (Conrad 1999b, 145). Families were "re-domesticating" and suburbanizing "in the intersecting currents of Cold War ideology; the domestic, family romance; consumerism; and the rapid technologizing of mass





Fig. 4. Documenting and Commemorating the Family Road Trip <sup>16</sup>

media" (*Ibid.*). The "family vacation," in this context, became the model of family togetherness: "Taking a family vacation was justified by adherence to the ideal of family togetherness, out of a belief that a vacation would strengthen family bonds" (Rugh 2008, 12) and thus, by extension, the strength of the nation. The newly emerging concept of the "family vacation" was an aspect of the processes that this age of high industrialism and wealth intensified—processes which included massive social reorganization, lifestyle changes and expectations, increased scheduled leisure time, the rise of consumerism, and the valorization of the nuclear, domestic sphere. [Fig. 3] Thus

the nuclear family, recreating in the vacation landscape, linked family life to the car-centered, freeway-accessed lifestyle, and also to larger political discourses of nationhood.<sup>15</sup>

The family vacation on the road became a moral and national (security) imperative, and the nuclear family, inwardly focused, was ideally suited to perform one of the most important national duties—consumption. Through the insistent and redundant mediated images of the 1950s American families were instructed how to be and how to have fun. Television sitcoms, ads for theme parks, for Kodak film and Cameras, ads for cars and gas all interwove their primary message with that of the normalizing message of the family that is strengthened by togetherness—and that togetherness was most effectively and emphatically enacted on the family vacation. [Fig. 4]

The model of the nuclear family was bifurcated along spatial, temporal, and gender lines into the feminized home sphere and the masculinized work arena away from the home. During the two-week vacation, these spatial, temporal, and gender relations were temporarily reorganized around a masculinist imperative, when the father reinserted himself into the day-to-day sphere, albeit "on the road." The vacation was determined by the father's work schedule, and leisure time was scheduled, regularized, and rationalized in a process made manifest in the road trip itinerary and road map. That the road trip was under the stewardship of the father is explicitly illustrated in road maps and other gas station promotional material in which station attendants seemed to be speaking directly to a male driver/consumer—the

head of the household who maintains control “at the wheel.” At the same time, the domestic sphere was maintained on the road, particularly with the rise of the motel, complete with kitchenette. Vacations thus served to reaffirm the familial, and by analogy national, order and hierarchies. Additionally, through the road trip, retraced across the regulating and unifying grid of the national highway system, each individual and family was interpellated into the physical and symbolic national landscape which was interpreted and presented for consumption in the standardized road map and the tour guide. And while the family vacation was directed out into the touristic landscape of the nation, the family, traveling in its “home away from home” was increasingly insular, with leisure and recreating linked to asocial consumerism.

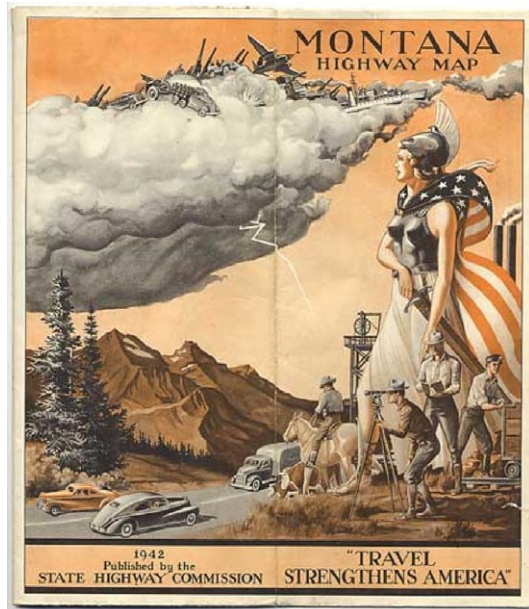
In the geography of the imagination the road trip epitomized the unfettered freedom of the open road, with the driver as the master of his own destiny, and thus fulfilled the escapist fantasies of rugged individualism and personal autonomy.<sup>17</sup> The road trip was a compact and elegant metaphor for the “American Dream” of democratic opportunity and individualism (Patton 1986, 9). The escapist realm of the road trip, enabled by mechanized labor and mechanical reproduction, was apprehended as a “break” from the routine of the work-day world,<sup>18</sup> a move from creation to recreation. The road trip exemplified and shaped a particularly American collective identity, mapping a system of meaning onto the landscape and its citizenry, and structuring the meanings of experience, desire, visibility, mobility, and consumerism by which the “good life” was defined as a social and moral imperative.<sup>19</sup>

The intertextual representations of/on the Road enabled the enactment of fantasies of power, individuality, autonomy, and freedom onto pre-imagined landscapes as part of the mapping of an American identity. The road trip, as cultural practice, ritualized personal engagement with a reconfigured and managed landscape as it shaped identity. The mapped, organized, and pre-scripted landscape naturalized its own construction as it naturalized our passage through it. We were invited to “Discover America!”<sup>20</sup> — the act of “discovery” masking the artificiality of reconfigured landscapes, presenting them as inevitable. Furthermore, in the touristic consumption of and (re)enactment through these imaginary landscapes, individual family stories are woven back into the national: scripted landscapes of desire which are reinscribed, and memorialized in the snapshot memory. Landscape thus, as W.J.T. Mitchell reminds us, “...circulates as a medium of exchange, a site of visual appropriation, a focus for the formation of identity” (Mitchell 1994, 2).

As highways became more ubiquitous and standardized, car travel faster, maps more abstract, and the tourist itinerary more insistent, the contingency/adventure of the open road and the appeal to individualism remained only in the imagination. In fact, the roads and the prepackaged destinations and sights that the road map/tour guide promised came to homogenize the experience into an increasingly predictable series of themed environments, in which fast food chains, gas stations, chain stores, and motels often merged into one giant roadside site. This disjuncture between the lived and the represented — this text of nostalgia

and longing — allowed for the collective re-membling of a non-existent place, the fertile ground of identity formation and maintenance. These sites of longing were necessarily experienced as sites of compensatory consumption, increasingly experienced through the road-side attractions in what Mark Gottdiener has called the “theming of America” and Umberto Eco has referred to as “hyper-reality”—locality as simulacrum (Conrad 2004, 181), realized fully in theme parks, which achieved their quintessential expression in Disneyland and Disneyworld.

**Know Your Country! Wider Horizons  
Makes Better Citizens**



**Fig. 5.** “Travel Strengthens America”

The narrativization and the representation of the national landscape, directed specifically towards this new type of car touring in which tourism and nationalism combined to dictate ways of see-

ing and ways of being in the land, were embedded in the road map. Knowing one’s country, touring those sites accessible from the road and highlighted on the map and in the tour guide, became a personal reenactment of the narratives of America’s destiny and thus a patriotic duty. This duty was fulfilled by the ritualistic, embodied interiorization and personalization of the nation through its surrogate, the map of the nation. Maps provided the totalizing national space into which diversity was subsumed. Through the retracing of the specified routes, the road trip was the enactment of this unifying principle, showcasing the local/regional/ethnic as commodity, standardizing the roadside experience (never far from the interstate), enjoining all in the same endeavor: “Know your Country!” But this knowledge (and movement) was doubly prescribed; onto the road that cuts through the land and onto the trace of the road on the map. Using the map thus became a disciplinary, rationalizing exercise, in which we were directed to consume the landscape and the products of tourism (evidence of our journey), and were incorporated into the larger national premise—consumerism, masquerading as re-creation. The road trip was not only a way to facilitate and affirm one’s personal and family autonomy, it was a way to do so within the context of a larger national destiny. Promotional road maps thus replicated preexisting master narratives of progress, mobility, independence, and destiny. [Fig. 5]<sup>21</sup> In following the trails inscribed and illustrated in these maps, tourists could retrace and reenact the nation’s history: [Fig. 6], ritually and corporeally experiencing the national narrative.





**Fig. 6.** Retracing a Generalized History — U.S. 40 National Old Trails Road, Registered Service International, 1924. Osher Map Collection. Note how the “historical” trace conflates and rewrites the generalized narrative of Westward Movement.

Touring American was an act of consumption that partook in the markers of America’s might—industry, monuments to government and democracy, as well as natural wonders which were metonymically and metaphorically linked to political and military might. Road maps also frequently retraced the steps of pioneers,<sup>22</sup> encouraged the development of a national mythology surrounding the “Fathers” of the nation,<sup>23</sup> and established battle sites as pilgrimage destinations in a sacralizing of the secular.<sup>24</sup> These imaginaries of freedom, independence, and the lure of the open road, however, were overlain onto imaginaries of conquest,<sup>25</sup> dominance, and violence.<sup>26</sup> Thus the homogenizing experience of the pre-charted road trip existed within a much larger system of signification and spoke to a particular vision of America and a limited version of its history, one in which many actors were erased, making the touristic participation in “American” history essentially a foreign experience

for many who were nonetheless exposed to the commercial images.

As the narrative of nation excluded a multiplicity of versions and voices, so too the presumed consumers of the road trip, the audience to whom the road trip imaging was most obviously directed, was that middle-class, white, heteronormative, suburban family with the father at the helm; that social realm which most perfectly reflected the imagined nation, and to which all were encouraged, especially through the commercial media, to aspire.<sup>27</sup>

Diversity was subsumed under unity in this narrative and rendered peripheral to the experience of the road trip itself, in the form of silent and invisible workers whose labor made the touristic experience possible [Fig. 7], and also in the imagery of postcards, souvenirs, and maps in which racialized others have become part of the roadside attractions associated with touristic consumption [Fig. 8].<sup>28</sup>



**Fig. 7.** Scrap-book post card of a road-trip Motel. <http://www.thepostcard.com/cs-scan/6700/6706.jpg>. Available for purchase for \$4.50; decontextualized nostalgic “Americana.”

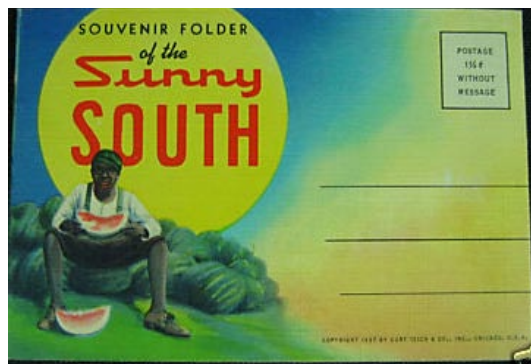


Fig. 8. Vintage SUNNY SOUTH Souvenir from 1937, on sale on Ebay 1/09.

### Touring Race: Recreating in the Playground of the Imagination

The systems of signification that constitute and represent the bourgeois American subject continue to reinforce entrenched ideologies of race, naturalizing racial hierarchies and oppression in their ubiquity and “ordinariness.” But the racialized “other” is not only the subject of this oppression, it is fundamental to and constitutive of a naturalized, normalizing American-ness. Writing specifically about representations of African Americans in literature, Toni Morrison has described notions of “American-ness” as responses to a “dark, abiding, signing Africanist presence” (Morrison 1993, 5), which has enabled the constitution of the new white male as the site of American privilege and power. This racialized presence also played a role in the mapping of American-ness, through the production, consumption, and reproduction of pictorial road maps and other tourist ephemera related to road travel, as well as through the systems of racialized imagery to which these are intertextually related and from which they derive meaning. Road maps in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, in their ubiquity and in the fact that they

were given away free were certainly “ordinary”<sup>29</sup> and unremarkable. The mundane aspect of the road map, however, obscures the political labor of collective memory which necessitates the forgetting, evacuation, and reconfiguration of the past, reinforcing and reinscribing a highly racialized presentation of “America.” These images, inserted into these ordinary maps, themselves become less remarkable and more firmly interwoven into the fabric of dominant American culture, and serve to circulate ideologies of race in and through such commonplaces.

Pictorial maps are a particular genre, the superposition of images onto the road map, a conflation of the “scientific” and the “playful” that produces an integrated text of Americanness with deep ideological foundations which are reproduced without drawing attention to themselves, hidden in the “ordinariness” of the roadmap. The genre of the promotional pictorial road map reached its peak during the 1930s and 1940s, continued in popularity and distribution during the “golden age” of the road trip—the post WWII era — and gradually fell out of use along with the free road map as the road trip was supplanted by other forms of travel and tourism. Pictorial maps were usually on the back side of more conventional road maps, and signified a modulation from the public to the private, from macrocosm to microcosm, and represented both commodity and knowledge, fact and fiction (Stewart, Susan 1993, 41). The exaggerated, fictive and playful nature of the pictorial road map with its childlike and infantilizing illustrations, lack of detail, and inattention to scale contrasts sharply with the claims of



objectivity and accuracy implicit in the stark, surveyed road map on the reverse side. The standard road map's emphasis on the lines inscribed by the traces of the roads themselves, in contrast to pictorial maps in which roads merely locate the place of images, serves to resolve the tension between the linear teleology of "passage," with the stasis and idiosyncrasy of "place".

Although there are hundreds of pictorial maps in existence, generated primarily by oil companies as free promotional gimmicks until the 1960s,<sup>30</sup> most used and reused extant imagery that constituted a "common sense" set of attitudes towards race relations. This makes a specific historical reading of these images more difficult, as they are reproduced over a period of several decades, decoupling them from any claims to context, and pointing to a metaphysics of racism as well as the semiotic potency of all such racialized imagery.

Replicating the western progress of civilization – settlement, railroads, and finally interstate highways — American national maps are to be read East to West. Pictorial maps of New England and the Eastern Seaboard read as centers of civilization, and history is represented by markers of progress — buildings, bridges, sites of historic battles—and emptied of human figures. The reader's eye is then directed West and South, reenacting the narrative of Manifest Destiny. The South is the province of raw material and raw labor, epitomized by the Black field worker.<sup>31</sup> The Southwest is an ethnographic encounter of another sort with a dehistoricized relic from a nonexistent past—the "native" in full regalia.<sup>32</sup> The Far West is the land of spectacular nature, awesome

greatness and power that could be used in analogy to that of the nation itself.

A close reading of one such pictorial map [Fig 9]—"A good-natured map of the United States setting forth the services of The Greyhound lines and a few principal connecting bus lines,"<sup>33</sup> serves to illustrate: The offhand manner in which the imagery is presented as just "good-natured" distracts attention from the intertwined discourses of the nation, tourism, and commerce, which ultimately give meaning to the map's surface. An investigation into the specific images on the map [Fig 10] reveals a highly complex system of racialized social hierarchies encoded in the presented or absented bodies, and reveals a process by which the racialized other is available and exposed to the presumed subject's view, while the subject remains invisible.

In the South, illustrations carrying racial significance operate within an intertextual semiotic sphere in which these maps, tour guides, postcards, as well as non-tourism-related images all relate to a general semiotics of "blackness"—infantilized, backwards, bestial, consumed by sexual and gustatory urges, criminal, and marked by speech that is "inferior"—a marker of backwardness, but also an exclusion, a devoicing. These images of the South were ubiquitous, and as most of the production of printed images in the form of maps and postcards originated in the North, specifically Chicago, coincident with the migration of Blacks into that city, it can perhaps be suggested that the emphasis on rural Blacks in the South not only points to a desire for the "good old days of the happy plantation darkie" rather than the urban racial tensions in daily life (note the absence of any human



Fig. 9. A Good-natured Map of the U.S.—Greyhound Lines, 1938



Fig. 10. "Good-Natured" Images of the "South" include:

An Alligator chasing a black man up a palm tree—South Florida

Black mother and pickaninnie in cotton fields picking cotton—Georgia

Boy in a watermelon Patch—South Carolina

Black Boy holding up a possum, "Jes dinna, das all"—Alabama

Black cotton pickers, man and wife, "Honey, we sho is pickin lots of cotton"—Texas

Texan Law man, with a 10-gallon hat and handle-bar moustache, "Thar's room in Texas for all of Yurup and half of Africa, yes suh,"

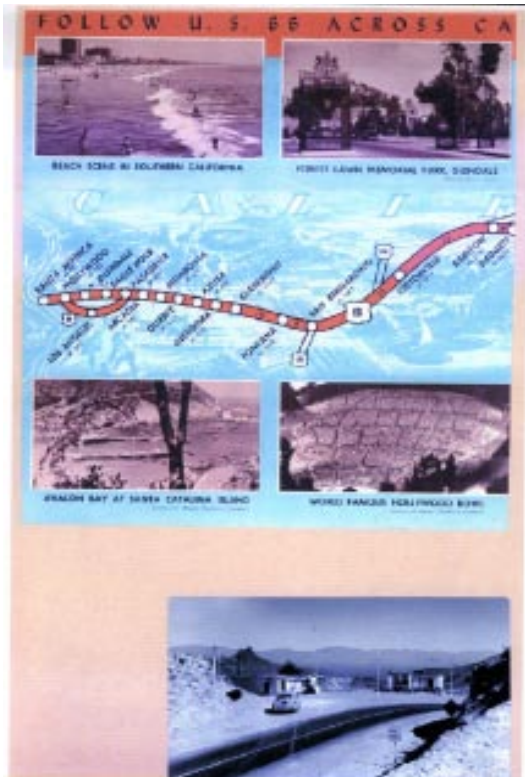
Police man and other man with gun near Memphis—"Crossroads of the South"

presence in Chicago on the map), but also a distancing, a quarantining and segregation of Blacks in their "proper place."

The infantilized, brightly-colored, stereotypic, cartoon-like figures of Native Americans, African-Americans, and Mexican-Americans masquerades as a cultural diversity of sorts, effacing the violence behind these images. The "casual innocence" of the Greyhound map can't fully mask the terror implicit in the image of the Black boy eating watermelon in a patch near Augusta, the barefoot Black woman and her diapered baby picking cotton near Macon, or the Plains Indians in full regalia alongside their teepees in Montana, ironically placed close to a cartoon depiction of the Battle of Little Big Horn. These pictorial maps attest to and distract the viewer from the "evacuated presence" of racist subjugation, dismemberment, annihilation and premature death that constitutes the larger non-White experience, and, it could be argued, the reproduction and repeated consumption of these images metaphorically continues this process. To continue to reproduce such images "innocently," to protest that they are "just tourism" suggests the possibility of "memory without consequences" (Lippard 1999, 119). In fact, it represents an erasure of memory, a collective amnesia, which obscures a "life-and-death struggle between memory, denial and repression" (*Ibid*) in which the invisible operations of power maintain an entrenched network of privilege and domination.

### Consuming Citizenship

Road maps, with their standardized and authorized routes, are regulatory; travel is delimited, prescribed by the route.



**Fig. 11.** Post card of Route 66 and points of interest in California. From a Scrapbook in the Newberry Library collection.

Pictorial road maps, the superposition of images onto this grid, contextualize those routes; informing, shaping, instructing and pre-interpreting our movement across the mapped landscape. Along with the use of road maps to plan, trace, and plot travel itineraries however, tourists of this age of road travel also engaged in a series of memorializing projects [Fig. 11] — souvenir and memento collection, photography, and scrapbook production. In these individualizing acts, American subject-hood was constituted in the incorporation of images and “personal” experiences into commemorative, narrativized scrapbook projects that use the road itinerary as a template. Generic post cards become personal proof of passage when collected in a trip’s scrap-



**Fig. 12.** Page from Scrapbook with menu memorabilia, themselves located on a map.

book, while the national is transformed into the personal through the process of miniaturization.

Scrapbooks speak to the labor of leisure—the labor of cultural (re)production. Leisure is thus in the process of becoming commoditized, becoming work in its own right. The act of scrapbook making, the cultural production of family, nation, and middle America, was the “work” of the feminized sphere; women and children who were thus interpellated into the larger consumerist regime, and into the ideological regimes at work in the representations that were recontextualized in their own “personal” scrapbooks. Ironically, the memorialization of this vacation time was also an act of mechanical reproduction along regularized, scripted lines. The use of photographs and postcards, and the organization of these into a linear, chronological progression often mirrored the route inscribed by the highways and interstates,



and in fact, maps were often included in trip/vacation scrapbooks of this era [Fig 11].<sup>34</sup>

Personal photographs do not usually find their way into travel scrapbooks. Instead, they are filled with postcards, purchased photographs, pictures from road maps, brochures, promotional material from various sights, and mementos, such as napkins, place mats, menus, etc. [Fig 12]. The rejection of personal photographs and the inclusion of textual material directly from the postcards and brochures is an attempt to authenticate the experience: "I was there..." while simultaneously claiming the authority of the "experts"—converting the scrapbook into a testimony of the "more real than real."

Travel scrapbooks, linked to pictorial maps and tour guides by their shared images, can provide insight into the reception, incorporation, recapitulation, and sometimes recontextualization of ideologies at the individual level, suggesting, again, the diffuse operations of power. The scrapbook is a prosthesis, the function of which is to generate an external interiorized space—an exteriorized subjectivity. The bourgeois subject can create and revisit his/her own creation of self, consuming a recontextualized and repackaged narrative of both travel and longing, and in this way, the images become reinserted into narratives of longing and desire as well as of order and authority.

In comparing the images on maps and other mass produced items with those used in scrapbooks made by individuals, some emerged more frequently and emphatically than others, and these suggest the intertextual field of mean-

ings that accrue to these images, enhancing their potency, and also points to the rhetorical moves that insistently effect the persistence of ideologies as "commonplaces." The imagery of everyday life—that found on promotional road maps, postcards, matchbooks, food, restaurants — in its ubiquity, attests to and distracts the viewer from the evacuated presence of racist subjugation which constitutes the larger non-white experience, and, in fact, the reproduction of these images is part of this, reinscribing the possessive investment in Whiteness (Lipsitz 1995). The fact that many of these images — often described as "adorable" and "wonderful"— circulate today on eBay and among post card and map dealers seriously undermines any denial that a major subtext to the American narrative is that of racism.<sup>36</sup> These images now circulate freely, untethered to their original context. Now the signifiers of race have been decoupled from the signified, from any context other than that of racism itself, and operate metaphorically, disinvested of consequence. This resonates with the larger argument of this article that ordinary "commonplaces" are replicated in physical throw-away commodities that reinscribe disposable images of caricatured people inhabiting an abstracted place, while these maps of abstracted space facilitate our journeys into our vacation selves where we "dream of escape" while, at the same time enact the "simple life" of relaxation.

### America Mapped

We live in a cartographically realized and informed world. This is not to say that maps were not discursive battlegrounds in pre-modern times,<sup>37</sup> but they are now

ubiquitous, everyday, their rectilinear logic enacted with each venture into the street. We use Mapquest and GPS guidance systems, deferring to and depending on the imposed logic of the grid. But maps tenaciously assert an empirical logic whose demonstration is founded on a fragile deceit:

Maps are highly symbolic and abstract systems of signification which operate at least two conceptual layers of remove from the "ground" they claim to represent. The precise scale and linear demarcations of contemporary maps are a desperate claim to accuracy, resisting the inherent inadequacies of a two-dimensional representation of three-dimensional space. Spatial meaning is enacted through the symbolic medium of cartography which is increasingly permeated by additional, invisible meaning the more it is used and incorporated into everyday life, allowing for a vernacular interpretation and penetration of "official" space (Conrad 2004, 178).

We draw maps on napkins and "give directions" in a manner that offhandedly disregards the disciplinary imperatives of scale. We also internalize road layouts (those lines on the map) and improvise our own itineraries based on a more complex, but highly localized, knowledge of conditions and shortcuts. Similar to the ways in which the regulatory tour-guide itinerary becomes miniaturized and personalized in the scrapbook, these personalized directions/maps/routes of daily use have become part of the cultural landscape, itself an ongoing recursive engagement between the official and the personal. Maps and itineraries shape our place in space and how we move

through it, and our incorporation of this cartographic knowledge is one way in which American identity is organized by continuity and reciprocity between political/institutional/commercial and personal levels of interaction. Ideology, cultural productions, personal enactments, and belief systems engage in recursive loops, entangling personal and collective memories, individual and institutional landscapes of fantasy and power, interweaving us into their microphysics of power as our personal reenactments are at once authorizing and infantilizing. Ordinary, even disposable everyday items carry signification beyond their immediate functions, and serve to continuously and invisibly<sup>38</sup> reinforce hierarchies of power. These items, existing at the nexus of folklore, popular culture, commercial interests, pedagogy, consumerism and ideological rhetoric are critical to the construction of contemporary subjecthood, and an interrogation of these can begin to shed light on those processes by which we are all interpellated into the project of nation-hood.

### Notes

1 Much of the initial archival work on this article is the result of participation in the NEH supported summer institute: "Popular Cartography and Society" at the Hermon Dunlap Smith Center for Cartography at the Newberry Library in Chicago, during the summer of 2001. Special thanks go to the director James Akerman, for all his help, and to seminar co-participant Dr. Michael Crutcher of the Univ. of Kentucky, for many insights on the relays between postcards/souvenirs and social discourse.



2 This article is dependent on visual imagery. Most of the maps and map-related images referenced, however, are available online in various exhibits. Wherever possible, then, to maximize the use of these images, links to these high quality images are provided in lieu of their reproduction here.

3 It was John Quincy Adams who, in the 1820s identified the Pacific Coast as the “natural” boundary of the Continental U.S., but this claim was anticipated by, among others, Lewis and Clark’s expedition to the headwaters of the Missouri River and eventually to the Pacific Coast. This declaration of unity was more of an expression of intent, however, since at the time Great Britain shared rights to Oregon and Washington with the U.S., Spain claimed rights to the Pacific coast up to northern California, and the Russians also had territorial and military ambitions in California.

4 See [http://www.fruitfromwashington.com/History/railroad\\_images/npr4.jpg](http://www.fruitfromwashington.com/History/railroad_images/npr4.jpg) “Northern Pacific — mainstreet of the Northwest” and sightseeing tours in the West by rail at [http://www.fruitfromwashington.com/History/railroad\\_images/npr3\\_lg.jpg](http://www.fruitfromwashington.com/History/railroad_images/npr3_lg.jpg)

5 See <http://www.azpbs.org/arizonalodges/grfx/looptourmap.jpg> and <http://www.classicrail.com/paper/atsfindiandetour.JPEG>

6 See, for example, the cover of *Clauson’s Touring Atlas of the United States*. From the Osher Collection <http://usm.maine.edu/maps/exhibit9/images/100.jpg>

7 See Woodward. Also see Peters: 66—“Chicago-based Rand McNally, pioneers in the

use of wax-engraved, and thus cheaply reproducible railroad maps, issued their first machine-colored railway map of the U.S. and Canada in 1874.”

8 <http://www.cardcow.com/47037/fred-harvey-hotels-and-restaurants-hotels/>

9 In 1952 *National Geographic*, itself a culture broker, featured an article about a (typical) American family, the Grays, and their family vacation along the Lincoln Highway, providing another mediated model for families to aspire to, as well as reiterating the nationalistic and pedagogic imperatives of such trips. See Gray.

10 By the time the program was shut down in 1943, “*Time* magazine estimated that its total expenditure was \$27,89,370,” ultimately employing “approximately ten thousand writers” (Bold 1999, xiv).

11 The WPA guides were produced from 1935-1941, and produced over 400 volumes.

12 For example, in the 1955 *North Carolina Guide*, racial segregation is not only presented as matter of fact, but the documentary style suggests that this is the *natural order of things*: “Throughout the town [Durham] are parks and playgrounds for both races” (169); “a dirt road leads to CHOWAN BEACH (for Negroes) (419). Robinson.

13 A knowledge that was based in movement through space, and thus geographical, and insistently visual—“taking in the sights.”

14 The Guides, produced with Federal funding and oversight, were replaced by local agencies, and by membership-based Automobile Association, such as AAA, which provided members with “personalized” trip

itineraries.

15 This ad for the 1954 Chevrolet Delray Coupe has the accompanying text: "That family up there has everything it takes to enjoy a wonderful vacation—a fine place to go and a fine new Chevrolet to get there." Not only are the cabin and new car unquestioned markers of privilege available only to some, the additional presumption of the ad prescribes the terms of wonderful time as wholesome family activity in accordance with the gender segregated domestic sphere. Ad from the Newberry Library's collection.

16 This ad for Eastman Kodak Film reasserts the normative American nuclear family recreating together in the car. But against this taken-for-granted background, another significant aspect of the "mapping of America" is evident: the commemorative practice involved in the "vacation snapshot," by which family members are located within the miniaturized landscape of the vacation, which anticipates its narrativization and consumption in the future, in the scrapbook (see below), and thus underscores the importance of photographs within the landscapes of desire and nostalgia. Not only does the introduction of cheap cameras democratize photography, it begins to shape the ways in which vacationers insert themselves into the landscape, and in fact the ways in which their vision of the landscape it framed, becoming an anticipation of the photograph. The act of photographing the site becomes primary to the experience; the particular ways we configure our pose within the landscape becomes pre-scripted, a replication of the others that have come before. Ad cour-

tesy of the Newberry Library collection.

17 It's no accident that Ford Motor Company's 2001-2002 ad campaign for its line of SUVs is entitled "NO BOUNDARIES," and that in several of its TV ads, the company, speaking through its president, the great-grandson of Henry Ford and Firestone, alone with Edison, and "whoever was president at the time" touring off road in their Model Ts as being the "original off roaders." These ads are not only clearly commodified nostalgia, with their sepia-toned replicated "home movies," but also locate a spirit of "American" individualism firmly with a white male upper-class power block.

18 Not, however, a break from either the domestic sphere, now traveling, or from the family. Additionally, the labor of maintaining the sense of leisure, labor that was to remain invisible, not only fell to nameless and faceless domestics and other service sector workers, but, internal to the family it fell to the wife/mother for whom "vacation" often entailed the addition of chores, not a lessening of them, and additional work in creating the elaborate charade of making this work appear either invisible or leisure (chopping and prepping raw meat, and the clean up from BBQ).

19 Although the road trip defined the normative American family vacation, it was, in fact, a more encompassing national ritual. Icons of the counter culture, such as Hunter S. Thompson and Jack Kerouac worked within the road trip theme. Hunter S. Thompson fetishizes the road trip, cruising in a top-down convertible Cadillac, while

dismantling the “American dream” itself.

20 <http://www.discoveramerica.com/>

21 <http://usm.maine.edu/maps/exhibition/9/3/sub-/selling-an-image>. In this case, a 1942 Map entitled “Travel Strengthens America,” there is an emphatic connection made between travel and US military success and might in WWII, as well as an intertextual reference to Manifest Destiny, particularly in the militaristic flag-clad large female figure, again facing West. The Progressivist agenda is also clearly evident in the scientific and engineering command over nature, and, by extension, over the enemy.

22 (Sun Oil Co. Road Map and Historical Guide—front and back covers, post WWII. <http://www.library.yale.edu/MapColl/oldsite/map/12C.jpg>)

23 Map of Principal Events in the life of George Washington—Standard Oil, 1952. <http://usm.maine.edu/maps/exhibit9/images/114f.jpg>;

24 The Shrines of George Washington. [www.usm.maine.edu/maps/exhibit9/images/115f.jpg](http://www.usm.maine.edu/maps/exhibit9/images/115f.jpg). See also, “Autotrails to and from Gettysburg.” Chicago: Rand McNally & Co. for the Gettysburg Chamber of Commerce, 1925.

25 Parco Petroleum Products Road Map of Nebraska cover 1931. <http://usm.maine.edu/maps/exhibit9/images/116f.jpg>. From the Osher Collection. This cover was also used for the 1930 Kansas Road Map, at the Newberry Library’s Rand McNally Road Map collection.

26 Crown Gasoline Auto Road Map of Georgia, 1925. <http://usm.maine.edu/maps/>

[exhibit9/images/33.jpg](http://usm.maine.edu/maps/exhibit9/images/33.jpg). Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., for Standard Oil. Part of the Osher Collection.

27 Esso New Jersey Road Map (post WWII). <http://www.library.yale.edu/MapColl/oldsite/map/12A.jpg>; Esso Road Map of Pennsylvania, 1951. <http://www.library.yale.edu/MapColl/oldsite/map/12B.jpg> ).

28 See also: Road Map of Arkansas, 1931. <http://usm.maine.edu/maps/exhibit9/images/32.jpg>). Chicago: Rand McNally & Co. for Louisiana Oil Refining Corporation, Osher Collection.

29 Here is it particularly relevant to insert the meaning that Kathleen Stewart (2007) ascribes to this notion of the ordinary as “...a shifting assemblage of practices and practical knowledges, a scene of both liveness and exhaustion, a dream of escape or the simple life”(xi).

30 The “Big Three” map making firms: The Rand McNally Company, The H.M. Gousha Company, The General Drafting Company — were responsible for the majority of all road maps and atlases produced in the U.S. during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, (by the 1960s the three were producing over 200 million “oil maps” per year. Aerman 1996:1) and their images of race were to be reproduced and consumed by a huge touring public for several generations. Road Maps and tour guides were often the first impression travelers had of a region to which they were travelling, dictating the encounter and pre-ordaining the perpetuation of such images even when they were not found to correlate to any “on the ground” reality.

31 <http://usm.maine.edu/maps/exhibit9/>

[images/32.jpg](#).

32 Fred Harvey, in plotting the rail tourists' Southwest adventures, is famous for his "invention of the Southwest." See: The Fred Harvey Collection, "Traveling the Rail in Grand Style: Photographs and Supplemental Materials of the Fred Harvey Hotels, 1896-1945," [http://harvey.library.arizona.edu/finding\\_aid/7nm/4/welcome.html](http://harvey.library.arizona.edu/finding_aid/7nm/4/welcome.html). Also see: Luke.

33 This map, from the 1938, is part of the Rand McNally map collection at the Newberry Library (RMcN AE190).

34 This page from one such scrapbook displays Route 66 across California, the route itself becoming destination. This is from an unmarked scrapbook box, part of the Newberry Library's Map Library.

35 Unmarked scrapbook collection, Newberry Library.

36 There are an estimated 50,000 collectors of "Black Americana" according to Karen Lee Ziner. See also Pilgrim.

37 Although the "discovery" of America by Columbus is a consolidating moment in America's national mythology, the cartographic and cosmographic crisis it engendered reveals the contradictory and oppositional discourses on the order of the world that raged for at least 100 years after Columbus. See, for example: the *Typus Cosmographicus Universalis* of 1532 (<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MAP/holbein.jpg>), 40 years after Columbus' first voyage. It combines the Ptolomaic graticule with a cosmology that includes wind cherubs, the world as limited and surrounded by oceans and constituted by the tri-partite continental mass

of Eurasia/Africa, and unknown regions of land and ocean inhabited by fantastic beings. The map embodies the epistemological contradictions of the time, simultaneously framing and centering the world while its frame is penetrated by the suggestion of uncontrollable and unknown landmasses, beings and phenomena.

38 There is considerable irony here, as it is primarily through visual media that this cultural production unfolds, and yet, in the ordinariness of the items, their ubiquity and disposability, they circulate "unobserved" and are thus, arguably, ideologically most potent.

## **Works Cited**

### **Map Exhibit Websites**

"Going Places?: Gender and Map Use in 20th-Century Road Map Art" Text by Christina Dando (University of Nebraska at Omaha © The Newberry Library, 2002.) <http://www.newberry.org/smith/slidesets/ss33.html>

"Hitting the Road" Road Maps From the Map Collection of Yale University Library (Text from *Hitting the Road: The Art of the American Road Map*, By Douglas A. Yorke, Jr. and John Margolies. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1996.) <http://www.library.yale.edu/MapColl/oldsite/map/road.html>

"Road Maps: The American Way" and On-line exhibit from the Osher Map Library and Smith Center for Cartographic Education at



the Univ. of Southern Maine  
[http://www.usm.maine.edu/  
 maps/exhibit9/history.html](http://www.usm.maine.edu/maps/exhibit9/history.html)

### Archival Collections

The Bancroft Library, University of  
 California, Berkeley.

The Hermon Dunlap Smith  
 Cartographic Center at the  
 Newberry Library, Chicago.  
 Rand McNally Map Collection,  
 Newberry Library, Chicago,  
 Illinois.

### Books and Articles

Akerman, James, R. American  
 Promotional Road Mapping  
 in the Twentieth Century.  
*Cartography and Geographic  
 Information Science* 29 (July 2002):  
 175-91.

———. Blazing a Well-Worn Path:  
 Cartographic Commercialism,  
 Highways  
 Promotions and Automobile  
 Tourism in the United States,  
 1880-1930. *Cartographica* 30  
 (1993): 10-19.

———. Gousha and National Survey  
 Gifts Enlarge the Newberry's  
 Holdings of American Road  
 Maps. *Mapline* 96 (Spring 2003):  
 1-4. [http://www.newberry.org/  
 smith/Mapline/articleindex.html](http://www.newberry.org/smith/Mapline/articleindex.html)

———. Selling maps, selling highways:  
 Rand McNally's 'Blazed trails'  
 program. *Imago Mundi* 45 (1993):  
 77-89.

Barthes, Roland. 1973. *Mythologies*,  
 trans. Annette Lavers. London:  
 Granada Publishing.

Baudrillard, Jean. 1983. *Simulations*,  
 trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton,  
 and Philip Beitchman. New York:

MIT Press.

Belasco, Warren James. 1979. *Americans  
 on the Road: From Autocamp to  
 Motel, 1920-1945*. Baltimore:  
 Johns Hopkins Univ. Press.

Berlant, Lauren. 1997. *The Queen of  
 America Goes to Washington City:  
 Essays on Sex and Citizenship*.  
 Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press.

Bold, Christine. 1999. *The WPA Guides:  
 Mapping America*. Jackson: Univ.  
 of Miss. Press.

Conrad, JoAnn. 2004. Mapping Space,  
 Claiming Place: The (Ethno-)  
 Politics of Everyday Geography  
 in Northern Norway. In *Creating  
 Diversities: Folklore, Religion  
 and the Politics of Heritage*. Ed.  
 by Anna-Leena Siikala, Barbro  
 Klein, and Stein R. Mathisen.  
 Helsinki: Studia Fennica: 165-  
 189.

———. 1999a. Lost Innocent and  
 Sacrificial Delegate: The  
 JonBenet Ramsey Murder.  
*Childhood* 6. 3: 313-351.

———. 1999b. The Docile Bodies of  
 (Im)Material Girls: The Fairy-  
 Tale Construction of JonBenet  
 Ramsey and Princess Diana.  
*Marvels & Tales: Journal of Fairy-  
 Tale Studies* 13. 2: 125-169.

Corner, James. 1999. The Agency of  
 Mapping: Speculation, Critique  
 and Invention. In *Mappings*. Ed.  
 by Dennis Cosgrove. London:  
 Reaktion Books: 213-252.

Cosgrove, Denis. 1999. Introduction:  
 Mapping Meaning. In *Mappings*.  
 Ed. by Dennis Cosgrove.  
 London: Reaktion Books: 1-23.

Eco, Umberto. 1990. *Travels in  
 Hyperreality*, trans. William

- Weaver. NY and London: Harvest Books/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Faulkner, Janette and Robbin Henderson. 1982. *Ethnic Notions: Black Images in the White Mind*. Berkeley, Ca: Berkeley Art Center.
- Gottdiener, Mark. 2001. *The Theming of America*. Boulder, Co.: Westview Press.
- Gray, Ralph. 1952. Vacation Tour through Lincoln Land. *National Geographic Magazine* 101: 141-184
- Holmes, Nigel. 1991. *Pictorial Maps*. N.Y.: Watson-Guption Publications.
- Hummon, David M. 1988. Tourist Worlds: Tourist Advertising, Ritual, and American Culture. *The Sociological Quarterly* 29: 2: 179-202.
- Jakle, John A. 1985. *The Tourist: Travel in Twentieth-century North America*. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press.
- Jakle, John A. and Keith A. Sculle. 1994. *The Gas Station in America*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press.
- Joy, Henry. 1917. The Traveller and the Automobile. *Outlook* 115 (April 25): 739-742.
- Kammen, Michael. 1991. *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*. New York: Knopf.
- Kerouac, Jack. 1976. *On the Road*. New York: Penguin.
- Kincaid, James. 1998. *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting*. Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press.
- Klein, Norman. 1998. *The History of Forgetting*. New York: Verso.
- Kozol, Wendy. 1994. *Life's America: Family and Nation in Postwar Photojournalism*. Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press.
- Lewis, Martin W. and Kären E. Wigen. 1997. *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography*. Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press.
- Lippard, Lucy. 1999. *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art, and Place*. New York: The New Press.
- Lipsitz, George. 1995. The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy and the "White" Problem in American Studie. *American Quarterly* 47. 3 (Sept): 369-387.
- Luke, Timothy. 1995. Inventing the Southwest: The Fred Harvey Company and Native American Art, The Heard Museum, Phoenix, Arizona, September 29, 1995-May 4, 1997," <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/tim/tims/Tim464.htm>.
- Mitchell, W.J.T., ed. 1994. *Landscape and Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mechling, Jay. 1987. The Symbolic Alligator. In *American Wildlife in Symbol and Story*. Ed. by Angus K. Gillespie and Jay Mechling. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press: 73-98.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1996. Florida Seminoles and the Marketing of the Last Frontier. In *Dressing in Feathers*. Ed. By Elizabeth Bird. Boulder, CA: Westview Press: 149-166.
- Morrison, Toni. 1993. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. New York: Random House-Vintage.
- Nichols, John. 2000. Some Thoughts on Humiliation. In *Dancing*

- on the Stones: *Selected Essays*. Albuquerque, NM: UNM Press: 75-83. First printed in *Discovered Country: Tourism and Survival in the American West*. 1993. Ed. by Scott Norris. Albuquerque: Stone Ladder Press.
- Patton, Phil. 1986. *Open Road: A Celebration of the American Highway*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Peters, Cynthia. 1984. Rand, McNally and Company in the Nineteenth Century: Reaching for a National Market. In *Chicago Mapmakers: Essays on the Rise of the City's Map Trade*. Ed. by M. Conzen. Chicago: Chicago Historical Society for the Chicago Map Society.: 64-72.
- Pilgrim, David. 1991. New Racist Forms of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, at <http://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/newforms/homepage.htm>.
- Post, Emily. 1925. *By Motor to the Golden Gate*. New York: Century.
- Robinson, Blackwell P., ed. 1955. *The North Carolina Guide*. Chapel Hill, NC: Univ. of North Carolina Press.
- Rosaldo, Renato. 1989. *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Rothman, Hal K. 1998. *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West*. Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas.
- Rugh, Susan Sessions. 2008. *Are We There Yet? The Golden Age of American Family Vacations*. Lawrence, Kansas: Univ. Press of Kansas.
- Sorkin, Michael, ed. 2001. *Variations on a Theme Park*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Stephens, Sharon. 1997. Nationalism, Nuclear Policy and Children in Cold War America. *Childhood* 4.1: 103-123.
- Stewart, Kathleen. 2007. *Ordinary Affects*. Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press.
- Stewart, Susan. 1993. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press.
- Truettner, William H. 1991. Ideology and Image: Justifying the Westward Expansion. In *The West as America*. Ed. by William Truettner. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press: 27-53.
- Weigle, Marta and Barbara Babcock, eds. 1996. *The Great Southwest of the Fred Harvey Company and the Santa Fe Railway*. Tucson: Distributed for the Heard Museum by the University of Arizona Press.
- Weingroff, Richard F. 1996a. Federal Aid Road Act of 1916: Building the Foundation. In *Public Roads On-line* 60. 1 (Summer). U.S. DoT, Federal Highways Administration. <http://www.tfhr.gov/pubrds/summer96/p96su2.htm>
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1996b. From 1916 to 1939: The Federal-State Partnership at Work. In *Public Roads On-line* 60. 1 (Summer). U.S. DoT, Federal Highways Administration. <http://www.tfhr.gov/pubrds/summer96/p96su7.htm>
- Woodward, David. 1977. *The All-*

*American Map: Wax-Engraving  
and Its Influence on Cartography.*

Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.

Yagoda, Ben. 1988. Unfolding the  
Nation. *American Heritage* 39. 3  
(April): 34-36, 38, 40-41.

Ziner, Karen Lee. n.d. "Collecting Items  
of a Hurtful History," at [http://  
www.projo.com/special/black/blk.  
htm](http://www.projo.com/special/black/blk.htm)



## Responses

---

**Casey R. Schmitt**

*University of Wisconsin-Madison*

What is true of a picture of a place," writes geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, "is also true of a real place" (1991, 692). Those stories we tell, those images we depict, and those legends we spread all actively engage and shape the spaces around us, influencing the means by which we perceive our immediate and non-immediate environments. JoAnn Conrad's article on the role of road maps in shaping American national sentiments and identity serves as a kind of case study for the application of the more essential premise articulated by Tuan.

Conrad deftly demonstrates the role that road maps, tourist brochures, and other commercially motivated visual representations of American territory have played in the creation of that territory's shared cultural meaning. Indeed, "official" American discourses continue to prioritize narratives of Manifest Destiny, personal freedoms, and civilized progress into uncharted territories (Nash 1973; Slotkin 1992; LeMenager 2004). To argue that railroad companies, travel agents, automobile manufacturers, and the proprietors of any of the countless American vacation destinations would embrace such themes in the pursuit of personal profits, thus encouraging their prevalence in American society through their widely distributed promotional materials, seems almost simplistic. Considering only one type (or sub-set) of the many, many representational forms through which Americans depict and,

in turn, perceive and understand their national environment only scratches the surface of the larger concept of culturally-instigated place-creation. Conrad's paper, however, in its concentration upon the depiction of a space, reaches beyond the discussion of railroad and highway maps alone and holds implications for the analysis of other texts, images, and the like which have contributed, over time, to American concepts of nationhood.

In the simplest of its forms, "space," writes Tuan, "can be variously experienced as the relative location of objects or places, and—more abstractly—as the area defined by a network of places," whereas "place" represents more fixed objects and ideas (1977, 12). An American space, in this sense—as defined by the borders and boundaries, roadways and waterways, densely labeled cities and unmarked open regions on any given map—is a collection of relationships between those places identified by the mapmaker. Many have written on how human discourse selectively identifies these places and relationships, influencing the ultimate meaning of the space (Agnew and Smith 2002). Conrad is far from the first. Henri Lefebvre perhaps most notably argues that space is a construct, a creation of cultural, social, and economic drives, experienced through a bodily filter and perceived by the human being to resonate with the very qualities that the human being him or herself has thrust upon it (1991). Tuan recognizes the ways in which the words, stories, and means of cultural expression used to depict a landscape shape the human perception and reaction to that landscape. "Individual words," he writes, "and, even

more, sentences and larger units impart emotion and personality, and hence high visibility, to objects and places" (1991, 685). When physical sensations of place become shared within a community as words, conventional sayings, and stories, the connotative and symbolic forms of landscape solidify. "The meaning of an actual physical place," he writes, "is the result of a historical and social process, built up over time by large and small happenings" (1991, 692). It is the depiction of these types of events—the Civil War, westward expansion, wagon train incursions, family vacations, and men eating watermelons—that Conrad examines in her work.

For this reason, it is perhaps a bit curious that Conrad does not draw more directly upon the work of Lefebvre, Tuan, and other such theorists. Her argument's most radical difference from this work rests in its concentration upon imagery over text—a difference that, quite simply, is not all that radical at all. Conrad's assertions that the ways in which we depict and represent our nation shape our own personal and collective identities or that the spread of such representation reifies the dominant national narrative at the expense of "alternative" or "counter mappings" have been made before and are rarely contested (Lefebvre 1991; Slotkin 1992; Agnew and Smith 2002; LeMenager 2004). What, then, is the merit of Conrad's contribution?

I would argue that this article's value lay in its especially strong attention to the commercially driven nature of the texts, images, and other documents that have contributed to and directed the development of the American national narrative in particular. This, too, is not a new

idea; it surfaces in the late 1800s work of Frederick Jackson Turner and has, of late, reemerged in the work of Richard Slotkin (1992), Roderick Nash (1973), Mary Lawlor (2000), and Stephanie LeMenager (2004), all writing on the importance of the Western frontier legend in American culture. The glorification of the Western expanse in American—and, thus, the glorification of personal space and freedom, of exploration and progress—undoubtedly draws from companies and individuals seeking to capitalize on a resource-rich frontier, as well as the narratives of American history / destiny they produce. Conrad, however, calls attention to an aspect of the frontier legend that Slotkin, Nash, Lawlor, and LeMenager do not. Her consideration of the rail and road map, in particular, illustrates how concepts of national space in mass-produced imagery find their way into the lived experience of the average American. She reaffirms what others have said—that "neither the nation nor the space it occupies can be postulated *a priori* as pre-existing or fixed, but are the outcome of specific historical, narrative processes"—but delves especially deep into a single case study to show how even those items tucked away in glove compartments or slid beneath passenger seat cushions can influence personal perceptions of American nationhood as much as any patriotic banner, newsprint, film, or novel.

Conrad does not, perhaps, do quite enough to explain *why* road maps, rail maps, and the like differ from any other personally encountered depictions of American nationhood—that is she fails to explain why maps might influence our collective visions of nationhood in a particularly unique manner when other

objects, like children's toys (such as G.I. Joe™ and Barbie™, for instance), sporting events (such as baseball and the material culture surrounding it), and even food (such as apple pie, perhaps, or Coca-Cola™) all certainly contribute to collective notions of American-ness as well, but her case study works quite suitably to call our attention to those often less-considered cultural objects that influence self-perceptions. Conrad might strive, in future work, to examine more closely *how* the individual *interacts* with the map in his or her understanding of national space. For instance, what does it mean for an individual to push thumb-tacks into a U.S. map to trace where he or she has been? What does it mean for a person to ignore landmarks and highway signs in favor of trusting the information printed on a map? I would suppose such actions (both of which I have witnessed personally on more than one occasion) represent an internalization of the national space, a unification of personal history with prescribed narrative, but a further study must be conducted before any true conclusions can emerge.

Finally, Conrad might also consider the role of the map in the age of air travel, Internet, and personal electronic devices. Her article does a fine job of exploring the past influence of maps on American nationhood, but has little to say about increasingly popular online mapping websites (like Google Maps and Mapquest), Internet phones, and personal GPS systems in an age when fewer and fewer people utilize printed roadmaps and more and more opt to fly from destination to destination, leaving roadside sites and regions in between unexperienced and unseen. What do these new developments in mapping technologies and

personal travel add to Conrad's arguments? What might they force Conrad to change? How do they, too, influence "the picture of a place" and the "real place" itself? I look forward to Conrad and others addressing these questions in the future.

### **Works Cited**

- Agnew, John A, and Jonathan M. Smith, ed. 2002. *American Space/American Place: Geographies of the Contemporary United States*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Lawlor, Mary. 2000. *Recalling the Wild: Naturalism and the Closing of the American West*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Lefebvre, Henri. 1991. *The Social Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell.
- LeMenager, Stephanie. 2004. *Manifest and Other Destinies: Territorial Fictions of the Nineteenth-Century United States*. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press.
- Nash, Roderick. 1973. *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Revised Edition. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Slotkin, Richard. 1992. *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Tuan, Yi-Fu. 1977. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- . 1991. Language and the Making of Place: A Narrative-Descriptive Approach. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*

Jill Terry Rudy  
Brigham Young University

While I counter JoAnn Conrad's statement that "maps play a critical and yet largely unchallenged role in the ideological work" of fixing the meaning of "America" (5), I appreciate her focus on maps as disposable everyday items and their links with cultural production and the "project of nation-hood" (*Ibid*). Conrad in this sweeping historical and geographic study approaches maps as "throw-away commodities" that attain a power to interpellate American citizens by replicating "ordinary 'commonplaces' of the national imaginary" (23). She is justly concerned that these commonplaces and commodities encourage tourism while perpetuating images that designate some national subjects as "caricatured people inhabiting an abstracted place" while others enter this "abstracted space" as escaping vacationers seeking simplicity and relaxation (*Ibid*). There is no reason to counter the eclectic examples conveying Conrad's convincing view that maps play a critical role in this ideological work.

Yet, this role of maps is hardly unchallenged. Back in the late 1980s a college acquaintance of mine announced that she could no longer even look at maps because her graduate studies in literary theory had taught her that maps control and falsely represent people and the world. Although concerns about the role of maps have been going on for decades, Conrad's approach to maps as ordinary items is a contribution, and the topic of mapping itself remains timely, especially

in conjunction with discussions of national identity moving into discussions of transnationality. Expanding the theoretical frame of interpellations with more contemporary work on mapping will only enhance this project.

Given this article's images of maps from the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway (AT&SF) and its affiliated Fred Harvey hotels and restaurants, it is not surprising that the current discussions of mapping include concerns of Native American scholars and scholars of Native America. Guest editors of a recent special issue of *American Quarterly* on "Alternative Contact: Indigeneity, Globalism, and American Studies" use Shari M. Huhndorf's *Mapping the Americas* (2009) to applaud the shift from nationalism to transnationalism (Lai and Smith 425). Yet, these editors promote Huhndorf's transnationality over the nationalistic approach of Native American scholars like Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Craig Womack, Robert Warrior, and Jace Weaver without fully acknowledging why these scholars would start with a focus on native communities. Huhndorf criticizes the nationalist approach, "The concern of nationalism with cultural and political restoration deflects questions about the economic, environmental, and social changes that ongoing colonization has brought to Native America" (Lai and Smith 425). But her critique deflects attention from what native communities already know about the consequences of colonization and that the need for "cultural and political restoration" is the overt acknowledgment of the "economic, environmental, and social changes" wrought by colonization. Additionally, adding Lisa Brooks's approach to maps



and mapping from the introduction to her book *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* (2008) would extend Conrad's discussion of maps as everyday items to consideration of ways maps, books, and other forms of image making are the same thing, *awikhigan* in Abenaki. Rather than demonizing maps, as my associate learned in the 1980s, Brooks's way of thinking with maps also adds actual lands, people, and waterways to the mix of social imaginaries.

Because of Conrad's broad approach to this topic of maps and shaping a national citizenry, we think of the construction of the continental United States as a historically and discursively constituted place. Yet her adherence to an Althusserian interpretive frame leads also to some sweeping generalizations. Rail travel is mostly considered here the activity of the elite although in the nineteenth century railways like the AT&SF produced their maps and other extensive promotional materials, such as the *Indians of the Southwest* (1903) guidebook written by former American Folklore Society president George A. Dorsey, to attract a wide ridership of tourists and settlers. The Native Americans in this article quickly become iconic representations on maps rather than the real people that Dorsey portrays who keep their traditions and adapt modern conveniences like carriages and rail travel. Similarly, the brief discussion of Pullman Porters carries none of the nuance, and not a citation, of Jack Santino's *Miles of Smiles, Years of Struggle: Stories of Black Pullman Porters* (1989).

This brings up other sources that could enrich Conrad's unexplained final focus on maps and racialization which here only relates to African Americans. Con-

rad does not mention that Susan Rugh includes a chapter on African American family vacations in her cited book, again leaving a generalization that whites went on vacation and other Americans served them. Conrad's discussion of postcards and other derogatory images of African Americans would benefit from using the term "motif" as she traces recurring images. This discussion also evokes Patricia Turner's discussion of similar everyday items in her "Watermelons" chapter in *Rooted in America* (1999) and especially is augmented, in terms of the travel and the iconography of everyday items, by considering Psyche Williams-Forson's astute book *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs* (2006). Thinking of the intertextual connections I enjoyed making with this article, I now wonder how many other texts will come into play with Conrad's piece and what other work may be sparked by it.

Yet, one concern I have with the methodology of this piece is its nearness to American studies but how it misses an important element. In his 2008 presidential address to the American Studies Association, Philip Deloria discussed American studies methodologies and noted three core components: texts, contexts, and social theory (2009). While this article brings together many images and items that are maps or are related to maps, and clearly adopts a social theory to study the ideological implications of those items, it skimps on context in favor of long swaths of geography and time. The shift from railway travel to road trips occurs quite quickly here, and soon the interstate highway system with fast food chains appears almost fully formed. The theoretical approach emphasizes the his-

torical specificity of these moments, but the choice of a wide swath reduces that specificity. By making these long moves across time and space, Conrad inadvertently decontextualizes her study object just when it can be linked productively to policy. At the most recent American Studies Association presidential address in November 2010, Ruth Gilmore Wilson used the engaging phrase, "Policy is the new theory." By choosing the wide swath, Conrad misses opportunities to study how national policy claimed and delivered lands to railroad builders, moved neighborhood enclaves for the interstate highway system, or put mapping into the business of railroads, oil companies, and other national and transnationalizing corporations. As physical maps wane while electronic mapping systems wax full, Conrad publishes this piece at a fine specific moment to consider how everyday items, social imaginaries, representational practices, and government policies become expressive systems accruing traditions and constructing nations.

### **Works Cited**

- Brooks, Lisa. 2008. *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Deloria, Philip J. 2009. Broadway and Main: Crossroads, Ghost Roads and Paths to an American Studies Future. *American Quarterly* 16.1: 1-25.
- Dorsey, George A. 1903. *Indians of the Southwest*. Chicago: Passenger Department of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway.
- Lai, Paul and Lindsey Claire Smith. 2010. Introduction. *American Quarterly* 62.3: 407-436.
- Rugh, Susan Sessions. 2008. *Are We There Yet?: The Golden Age of American Family Vacations*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.
- Santino, Jack. 1989. *Miles of Smiles, Years of Struggle: Stories of Black Pullman Porters*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Turner, Patricia A. 1999. Watermelons. In *Rooted in America: Foodlore of Popular Fruits and Vegetables*. Edited by David Scofield Wilson and Angus Kress Gillespie. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press: 211-223.
- Williams-Forsen, Psyche. 2006. *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, and Power*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

## Putting Words to Work: The Politics of Labor's Vernacular

Pamela Conners

*University of Wisconsin, Madison*

*This paper explores what happens to the narrative tradition and agency of vernacular communities when institutions intentionally provoke and deploy those communities' vernacular styles as a means to achieve political ends. An examination of how the AFL-CIO and ACORN collaborated to create an online video series using workers' stories in service of the Living Wage campaign illustrates this dynamic. By placing this text in its historical, cultural, and mediated contexts, the analysis demonstrates how the orchestrated representation of workers' voices subverts the authority of the vernacular as well as its power to engender community.*

In 1932, the radio show *Vox Pop* took its name from its mission to put the voices of the people on the radio. Its emphasis on the everyday citizen took many forms, including quiz shows, interviews, and human interest stories – all of which variably represented and defined the notion of “the people” in a democratic republic. Perhaps the most dramatic attempt to authentically capture the average citizen's perspective on the pressing issues of the day came in the form of surprise “person on the street” interviews. While on air, broadcast personalities dropped microphones out of windows and asked people questions that ranged

from the political to the personal to the absurd (Loviglio 2005). The impromptu nature of these interviews, however, belied the extent to which the interviewer and the institution still control the socio-political perspective through which the interviewee's words are interpreted. By prompting the people to answer certain questions while employing the ability to frame those answers with commentary from the broadcasters, radio executives recognized that they could construct narratives in support of business interests from the unscripted voices of everyday Americans.

As shows like *Vox Pop* illustrate, institutions sometimes intentionally engage the vernacular in pursuit of a political agenda. Be it the rise of audience participation shows on the radio in the 1930s or the proliferation of participatory media on the Internet, institutions' efforts to present or perform speech by everyday people suggests that the vernacular has commercial and political appeal. In presenting audience participation shows, radio stations often sought to advance a faith in democracy and capitalism through the performance of democratic access to the airwaves. Similarly, digital participatory media find value in the presentation of amateur media content produced by individuals and groups with no necessary connection to a specific organization. As the online video website YouTube states: “The community is truly in control on YouTube and they determine what is popular on the site” (YouTube, “Fact Sheet”). The website explicitly asks its consumers to see themselves as the producers of the content, untainted by institutional influence.

The media practice of valuing the vernacular as primary to shaping public culture and political perspectives has created opportunities for marginalized communities to effectively publicize and circulate their dissenting voices in pursuit of change (Howard 2008). The resistive power of the vernacular, however, must be reconsidered when institutions seek to deliberately invoke a vernacular performance—such as “person on the street” interviews—in order to advance a particular political agenda. In this paper, I explore the implications of this strategic vernacular engagement for the transgressive potential of the vernacular voice. More specifically, I seek to determine what happens to the narrative tradition and agency of communities when their vernacular expressions are intentionally provoked and deployed by institutions as a means to achieve political ends.

This dynamic is illustrated through an examination of how institutions use an online setting to frame the voices of workers as they recount their life and work experiences. The emergent relationship between the sovereign and the resistant vernacular presents interesting challenges for the communicative traditions of workers. The analysis in this paper examines how low-wage workers are represented in YouTube videos as a part of the Living Wage campaign and discusses the implications of that representation. Unlike past moments in labor history when American culture reflected a celebration of the worker as an agent of change and the foundation of production, the YouTube videos point to a diminishment of the workers’ voices and participation in the labor movement. I argue that the AFL-CIO and ACORN’s choice

to circulate the voices of workers on the Internet in service of the Living Wage campaign demonstrates how the strategic deployment of the vernacular can undermine the very tradition it attempts to engage. In other words, the provoked performance of workers’ voices subverts the authority of the vernacular as well as its power to engender community.

This paper begins with a summary of the entwined relationship between vernacular and institutional discourses and the ensuing struggle over authority, power, and agency. I then review the cultural salience of labor’s vernacular voices in the United States to situate an analysis of worker testimonials posted online during the 2006 midterm elections. The AFL-CIO and ACORN’s Living Wage video series on YouTube offers a rich text for illustrating the symbolic interplay between a labor vernacular and a labor organization in a contemporary online context. The analysis then examines the particular constraints of YouTube and the other institutional frames through which the vernacular actors are interpreted.<sup>1</sup> Finally, I conclude with an exploration of the rhetorical nature of the workers’ appeals and the way in which those appeals create a pitiable image of both the individuals appearing in the videos as well as the broader community the AFL-CIO and ACORN suggest they represent.

### **Vernacular (Re)presentations**

Scholars across disciplines have explored the cultural significance and social power of the vernacular voice. Folklorists have aimed to celebrate and examine the narrative traditions of non-institutionalized discourses—the voices and spirit of groups of people that solidify commu-



nities and express identities. Similarly, communication scholars have called for critical attention to the cultural and political implications of the vernacular's circulation in the public sphere. The vernacular, paradoxically, can be both liberated and oppressed through its confrontation with institutionalized, and often dominant, discourses. Scholars have considered how the mediation of vernacular has both enabled and challenged its circulation and transgressive power. These studies offer important insights into the way in which identities and communities are shaped through vernacular culture—a culture that is inevitably intertwined with its institutional foil.<sup>2</sup>

The vernacular, much like folklore, reflects the shared rhetorical and cultural practices of discourse communities that maintain consistencies and continuities across time and space (Georges and Jones 1995). The vernacular exists, not in and of itself, but rather is recognizable through its difference from institutional discursive practices. While a distinction between vernacular and institutions provides a useful vocabulary for characterizing different spheres of cultural performance, most scholars recognize their inability—particularly in a thoroughly mediated age—to isolate one from the influence of the other. As John Dorst observed on the cusp of the digital age, in a very practical sense, folklore cannot be interpreted separately from the apparatuses that enable its circulation (1990).<sup>3</sup> The vernacular must be understood as hybrid—its emergence stems from the distinctive authority it attains from being noticeably alternative to the institutional expression (Howard 2005).

Through vernacular discourse, individuals consciously or unconsciously align themselves with culturally specific groups organized around common experiences. A shared linguistic style or a recurring narrative pattern often serves as a marker of membership in a vernacular community. Folklorist Archie Green identified one such community through discourse about work, which he characterized as laborlore (1993; 2001). Studies of laborlore point to the ways in which this occupational vernacular builds solidarity among those who relate to one another through their expression at work and about work (Korson 1960; Green 2001). Green's examination of work culture illustrates how workers' self-expressions ensured connections in the workplace and beyond it. The circulation of laborlore also instills in "individuals a sense of dignity on the job and within their movement (Green 2001; 50)." Moreover, workers' stories and songs often function to help workers make sense of the relationship between their labor, capitalism, and society (Gillespie 1980). Thus, laborlore may construct social bonds among workers as well as engender particular perspectives about the cultural and political structures that make the conditions of their work.

Even though scholars of laborlore have often focused on particular industries' vernacular practices, the examination of a working vernacular need not be occupationally specific. The folkloric nature of these expressions lies in the extent to which they build upon shared experiences that resonate with others within but also across industries. Whether through songs, jokes, theatre performances, traditions, or social ac-

tion, workers developed cultural connections with one another through their symbolic interaction. Evolving over time and across physical and discursive spaces, lore draws upon its historically and contextually constructed meaning to ensure some consistency in its style and/or content while simultaneously resonating with different individuals who adopt and adapt the vernacular to fit their specific cultural and social situation. In this way, folklore—and particularly laborlore—is consistently relatable and identifiable insofar as it reflects shared experience even though it is essentially fluid in nature.

This dynamism ensures that the meaning, interpretation, authority, and power of vernacular expression shift depending on the context of its emergence. Particularly in a mass-mediated age, the interaction between the vernacular and its institutional forms within which it circulates and against which it becomes recognizable affects how audiences perceive the vernacular agents as well as the broader community with whom they may be associated. Studies have pointed to the impossibility of examining vernacular apart from institutionalized forms and forums (Burns 1969; Hauser 1999; Ono and Sloop 1995).

Vernacular hybridity has prompted scholars to investigate the power dynamic between the often oppositional, but inevitably intertwined discursive realms. Just as the media exploit “the commercial potential of folksiness,” vernacular actors can exploit the media (Clements 1974, 318). While institutional presence might frame the interpretation of vernacular voices in such a way that perhaps silences or negates a folk community, the power of the institution is

not entirely hegemonic (Berger and Del Negro 2004). The vernacular can co-opt the institutional authority, drawing its power in part from the institutional framework from which it expresses its difference. With “the institutional [as] an agency for the performance of vernacular discourse”, the vernacular can disrupt or challenge normative behaviors and practices to invite social transformation (Howard 2008, 508). This transformative and democratizing potential of the vernacular has been the focus of numerous studies that suggest that the interplay between institutions and the vernacular can be liberating, not merely constraining (Rheingold 2000; McKinley and Jensen 2003; Howard 2005; Jenkins 2006). In addition, mediated forms that offer a visual as well as an aural component can enhance the vernacular’s ability to inspire and motivate collective social action (White 2003).

The perception that everyday voices resonate with audiences in these ways makes the invocation of the vernacular an appealing strategy for political action, but the presentation of marginalized voices does not necessarily instigate social change or empower the disempowered. In addition to determining ways in which participatory media and vernacular expression might challenge oppressive situations, scholars must also attend to situations in which they might not. The potential for the vernacular to rearticulate dominant discourses or deconstruct institutional structures often goes unrealized (Ono and Sloop 1995). Thus, celebration of the possibility that the vernacular may triumphantly resist institutional power should not distract attention from the ways in which vernac-

ular culture might also be undermined or co-opted in service of institutional aims. The emergence and proliferation of participatory media does not in and of itself ensure a democratization of mediation (Spinelli 2000). For example, in his study of audience participation on the radio in the 1930s, historian Jason Loviglio shows that the impulse to broadcast the voices and narratives of ordinary Americans on the radio was primarily a business decision; radio executives sought to frame the discourse of the everyday person to characterize the public interest in a way that would ultimately serve the financial interests of business. While purporting to be engaging the voice on the street as a symbol of the participatory and democratic nature of radio, broadcasters invoked the vernacular as a means for framing the consumptive desires of the American public. With ultimate control over who spoke and which of their words were broadcast, radio producers could manage the representation of the average American in a way that comported with a market and consumptive ideology (Loviglio 2005).

Contemporary participatory media must likewise be examined to uncover implicit and explicit power shifts. Any given situation that engages vernacularity raises questions about what might be appropriated, who reserves or acquires agency, and how individual and collective identity is negotiated. The contexts of vernacular emergence contribute to its reception by different audiences. Mediation of vernacular online enacts a representation of the way in which groups self-identify; further, its discursive circulation contributes to how others identify those groups. Studying the mediation of

the vernacular illustrates the complexity of the relationship between the medium and its subject, the message and its interpretation, and context and meaning.

The following analysis of the AFL-CIO and ACORN Living Wage campaign videos examines three primary constraints that shape how audiences interpret the workers' voices and perceive their identities. First, the videos must be read in light of the cultural and political milieu in which they emerge. Any narrative consciously and unconsciously prompts consideration of how the words and voices of the storytellers engage in a dialogue with discourses and events that precede them. Establishing the historical context that informs both the creation of the messages and the audience's reception of them acknowledges that lore does not simply construct a new way of seeing, but rather makes meaning for audiences in conversation with previously existing symbols, beliefs, and perceptions. Second, I examine the specific institutional framework through which audiences see and hear the workers' narratives. In addition to the macro context, these stories interact with immediate situational components that shape how audiences interpret them. Third, I analyze the words of the workers to show how the narratives themselves create an image of wage work and the workers. Together these contextual and textual components function to diminish the potential of the labor vernacular to challenge cultural norms and expectations. Instead, the videos invoke a vernacular performance that subjugates the workers' own participation in the labor movement.

### **The Cultural Capital of Labor's Voices**

Historically, workers' voices have functioned to stimulate both political and social recognition of labor. Depictions and self-expressions of workers in the labor movement during the New Deal era affirm the extent to which a labor vernacular can invite agency and solidarity among those who seek social change. In addition to the circulation of vernacular expressions of laborers about their work in local communities, more mediated representations of labor and industry reached audiences across the country through the radio, which often broadcast worker testimonies about their everyday experiences. This "laboring of popular culture"—as historian Michael Denning (Denning, 1996) calls it—has often been overlooked because no particular political party or any one institution captured its expansiveness and omnipresence. Rather, the discourse of labor transcended institutions, regions, and individual identity through its reproduction and representation in American culture; books, radio shows, music, and theatre productions found working class life to be a marketable commodity (Denning 1996). A powerful and pervasive work vernacular helped to articulate the laborer as the essential point of production and as essentially American (Buhle 1997).

The culture of the late 1930s reinforced the political recognition and reification of labor and a working class. In particular, iconic images of workers, songs, and cultural performances served as a defiant counter to the popular press's depictions of the working class as comprised of "good-for-nothings" and "suspicious-looking foreigners (Buhle

1997, 161)." Pictorial representations of workers were often connected to union membership. Union papers and buttons carried cartoons and "labor action photographs" that projected images of workers unifying around the CIO or other labor organization. Through these images, Paul Buhle explains, artists intentionally strove to capture the "ordinariness" of the Americans who fought against the oppression of their employers in order to respond to negative press about unionism. These vernacular discursive traditions promoted working class solidarity and produced an image of the worker as citizen. With radio available as a frequent medium for circulation, the ubiquitous vernacular voice expressed their agency in challenging oppressive structures and subjugating discourses through song, performance, and stories. The messages of the workers were an essential force in union organization. Their voices constituted the labor movement.<sup>4</sup>

The social and political milieu of the thirties illustrates the ways in which labor culture – the source of production – was acknowledged, consumed, and even celebrated. The image of a once-present working class solidarity may be marked in part by the vernacular appeals for collective action and the extent to which that on-the-ground community was fostered and promoted by the institutions of organized labor.<sup>5</sup> This history points to the ability of the vernacular to transcend the restrictive and potentially coercive power of mediation and institutional constraints and engender a strong working class identity that legitimized the agency of wage laborers.

Cultural and political shifts in the labor movement since the 1930s, however,



resituates the nature of the working class vernacular voice as it functions to challenge normative and institutionalized practices. The centrality of the working class in public consciousness declined in the post-war era. Legislative and rhetorical transformations during the 1950s led to deterioration in the unions' political-economic influence. The changes in discourse about and from the working class stand out clearly. For example, in the years following World War II, under George Meany's leadership, the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) not only narrowed whom it served, but it also scoffed at workers' discursive and political representations of themselves and their work.<sup>6</sup> Meany publicly denounced striking and argued against reaching out to unorganized workers, people of color, and women. Moreover, he derided folk singing as foolish and useless, despite other labor advocates' claims that it helped promote solidarity (Lichtenstein 2002).<sup>7</sup> In 1951, C. Wright Mills argued that the unions work against the best interests of workers and only suppress the aspirations of the working class. His indictment of labor unions reflected what would come to be the prevailing public image of unions, the AFL-CIO in particular. The AFL-CIO's disinterest in organizing the unorganized, reluctance to act in the interests of a broader constituency of workers, and its distance from the civil rights struggles of the 1960s contributed to its depiction as merely a job agency and special interest group. The increasing bureaucracy of unions and suspicions of corruption discredited them in the eyes of the public. As Georgetown University student and future U. S. president

William Jefferson Clinton proclaimed in 1967, unions were publicly perceived as one more thing "against which man must assert himself." (Quoted in Lichtenstein 2002, 168)

The rhetorical trajectory of a working class vernacular reflected this political fragmentation of labor culture and organization. During World War II, the proliferation and circulation of working class iconic imagery subsided. Nostalgic characterizations of the working class emerged primarily through mass media representations, such as films, cartoons, comics, murals, that intimated that the working class was a thing of the past (Buhle 1997). The devaluation of laborlore and vernacular expression coincided with a rise in a post-war consumerist culture. Elizabeth Cohen identifies the post-war era as a consumer movement in which the American people were championed as "purchaser citizens" because their very act of personal consumption was deemed a civic contribution (Cohen 2003, 118). Whereas laborlore and working class culture had previously connected citizenship with both production and consumption, the second half of the twentieth century provoked a shift in emphasis to consumption. Patriotism was best expressed through purchasing, not producing. The cohesive identity of a working class culture diminished with the prevalence of a consumerist ideology.

The political impact of this paradigm had consequences for the public perception and treatment of wage workers. The late 1950s saw management asserting more power over workers, with little protection provided by unions and the state. More and more, industries that had

once been restrained through labor organizing found ways to break strikes and bust unions (Davis 1986; Cohen 2003). The 1960s exacerbated differences among interest groups, with a state that legislatively supported the logic of free enterprise, the absence of strong unionization, and the segmented articulation of class (Edsall 1991). Thus, identifying common interests on which to build challenges to economic and political structures became more difficult. The sixties and seventies witnessed the blurring of the autonomy of the working class. By the 1980s, unions were demonized in public discourse and their political engagement became a liability for those issues they sought to endorse. These shifts in working class consciousness, culture, and unionism illustrate the challenges that confront the contemporary labor movement.

### **Labor Online**

The voices examined in the following case study confront a cultural milieu much different than the one in which a labor vernacular thrived. While unions and trade organizations seek to rehabilitate their public image, their political and social standing in 2006 had not fully recovered from the fall from grace in the second half of the twentieth century. Wage workers, too, have fewer rights in the workplace and fewer protections against exploitation. As the trend toward Americans measuring an individual's value to the nation primarily in terms of an ability to consume has waxed, championing the sources of production—the workers—has significantly waned.

It is within this cultural and political climate that the AFL-CIO teamed up with Association of Community Orga-

nizations for Reform Now (ACORN) to present itself and to represent workers. Aware of the subordinated status of labor and labor solidarity in the United States, the AFL-CIO made strides in the 1990s to redefine their mission, policies, and approach to the labor question. In an effort to rebuild the public image of unionism and increase public awareness about the challenges of low-income work, the AFL-CIO expanded its strategy for social and political action to include the life and livelihood of workers beyond the day-to-day negotiations on the shop floor. (Lichtenstein 2002)

Self-identified in their website's tagline as "America's Labor Movement," the AFL-CIO has made an explicit attempt to move beyond the confines of union membership in order to help the unorganized organize, "provide a new voice for workers," and rebuild a broad national labor movement (AFL-CIO 2007). The union has sought to expand its reach through alliances with other social and economic justice organizations on the national and local levels. Although officially it acts as the national center for trade unions, the AFL-CIO now participates in campaigns for labor policies that specifically affect non-unionized workers.

One strategy they have employed involves placing the images and voices at the forefront, calling on workers themselves to explain the personal impact of particular government policies. In collaboration with ACORN, they developed and posted online a series of video testimonials as a part of the 2006 effort to increase the minimum wage, also known as the Living Wage campaign.<sup>8</sup> That year, six states had ballot referenda that pro-

posed a roughly one-dollar increase in the states' respective minimum wages.<sup>9</sup> Entitled "7 Days @ Minimum Wage," the videos purport to present "7 real people with 7 real stories of living on the minimum wage."<sup>10</sup> Each video features either a person or a couple describing the challenges of paying for their basic necessities despite consistent hard work. The short five to ten minute films appeared one day at a time on the well-known website YouTube whose tag, "Broadcast Yourself," encourages the posting of individual and amateur video content.<sup>11</sup> Only a few thousand people viewed each of the minimum wage testimonials. One of the videos specifically promoted in a special feature section of YouTube's web page received just over 23,000 hits prior to the election, the largest hit count of any of the seven videos.

Of concern in this analysis is not the efficacy of the videos in terms of their immediate impact on voters' choices.<sup>12</sup> The value of examining these videos lies in recognizing of how the representation of the video testimonials may shape public perception about wage work and workers and what they suggest about how the institutions view the workers. The "7 days @ Minimum Wage" online series creates an image of the workers and has indirect and potentially long-term implications for how low-income Americans are publicly recognized. These videos demonstrate an effort to circulate the vernacular expressions of workers among a wider public. How these videos are distributed and the messages they promote offers insight into the way the AFL-CIO and ACORN imagines the collective identities of low-workers and their role in the labor movement. Examination of this

video series explores the implications of and for the workers' vernacular as it is engaged by organizations that work to advance a progressive labor agenda.

### **Framing Workers' Voices**

In addition to the broader cultural milieu for these videos, each video emerges in the context of several interpretative media that influence their meaning and reception. The institutions that produced the videos, defined their purpose, and circulated them on the Internet frame how workers' words are heard and seen. These institutional actors—AFL-CIO, ACORN, Roseanne Barr, and YouTube— instruct the viewers about how they should interpret the videos, how they should recognize the workers, and how they should respond. In addition, adopting an amateur production style, the videos subordinate the laborers' vernacular to the institutional structures that provoke its articulation, craft its production, and explain its meaning.

The structure of YouTube ensures that not everyone experiences each page in the same way.<sup>13</sup> New advertisements, different "related video" suggestions, and new viewer comments continually to update the video pages and change what the viewers see and experience. However, the basic elements of the pages remain consistent and these elements guide how the viewer sees and interprets what they hear. From the description that appears to the right of the video to the "Related videos" that provides suggestions about what to watch next to the comments submitted by viewers just below the video, the viewer is told what to think about what the video means. The structure of YouTube's website places the videos in

proximity to viewer “comments” and indicates that the “7 Days @ Minimum Wage” series is sponsored by the AFL-CIO and ACORN.

Alongside each video as it appears on YouTube, the AFL-CIO and ACORN announce to the viewer that “7 Days @ Minimum Wage brings you 7 real people with 7 real stories of living on the minimum wage, hosted by Roseanne Barr and sponsored by the AFL-CIO and ACORN.” Describing themselves as sponsors performs their distance from the creation of the videos, attesting to their desire only to relate the “real” sentiments expressed by the “real people” without interference. Ironically, the effort to make the videos seem uncontrived through the pronouncement of the videos’ realism only further calls attention to the machinations that surround the videos.

This written summary statement that accompanies each video does not advocate a particular action the audience should take or a sentiment they should feel. That kind of direction is reserved for the introductory and summary remarks provided by the person featured in all the videos: Roseanne Barr. An actor with working class roots known for her long-running sitcom about a working class family entitled “Roseanne,” Barr appears as the narrator for each video. She expresses her outrage over the workers’ condition and implores her audience to feel similarly appalled at the wage workers’ oppressive and unjust lifestyles—assuring her audience that “as an American, you will not be proud of what you hear and see.”<sup>14</sup> At the conclusion of the videos, she offers a plan of action for viewers. For example, at the conclusion of Jessica’s video (day 4), she states:

Nobody can live on five dollars and fifteen cents an hour. Do you want to help? Well, if you live in Arizona, Colorado, Missouri, Montana, Nevada or Ohio, you can vote yes on November 7 to raise the minimum wage. Or visit our videoblog to post your comment and find other ways to raise hell and the minimum wage.

The videoblog to which she refers then appears as a URL on the screen following the words, “Roseanne, ACORN, and the AFL-CIO thank you. Please come back tomorrow.” The workers’ stories serve to support the outrage and the cause that the institutional actors define. While the short summaries imply that the institutions simply seek to support the workers by distributing their stories, the words articulated by Roseanne and in the closing credits affirm the degree to which the workers’ stories actually support the institutions’ message.

Isolating and interviewing these workers and then posting the edited video recordings to YouTube raises questions about how the workers are portrayed and what message is conveyed through the vidcasts’ production aesthetic. The videos of “7 days @ Minimum Wage” perform a vernacularity consistent with YouTube videos made by individuals who lack professional equipment or training. They display an amateurism that implies that the camera merely captures what the workers say rather than orchestrating their appearance. The videography suggests the use of handheld cameras that deny any purposeful stagecraft. The poor lighting and unremarkable spaces in which each tes-



testimonial is filmed intimates spontaneity of the workers' expressions independent of any institutional design. The recognizable vernacularity of these vidcasts exists in how they adopt a style that reflects a contrast to professional and institutional norms. Because the videos lack professional technique, they implicitly ask the viewer to recognize the speakers as innocent and sincere; they are not actors, but "real people." The simplicity and understatement of the visual elements in the videos invite audiences to accept the workers' expression as honest, forthright, and undisturbed by outside influence. Unpolished and unscripted, these videos perform anti-institutionalism, reflected in the apparent casual framing and amateur development of the final product. The styling of the videos pleads for a perception that the workers speak independent of institutional influence; they performatively claim their authority through the construction of vernacularity.

The vernacular posture lies within the institutional frames that it implicitly and explicitly denies. The voices of the workers become implicated in and secondary to the official structures that surround it. The videos can only be interpreted by viewers through this mediated lens. Before, during, and after each worker's narrative, the institutions speak for and on behalf of them. As Linda Alcoff notes, "speaking for" is inescapable, but these videos do not place the workers in conversation with the institution or the audience (1991-1992). The resulting representation of the workers identifies them as sad and helpless. Rather than being heralded as participants in a movement for political or economic change, the work-

ers are identified simply as evidence for the action advocated. The workers' voices function as pawns in service of the institutional narrative, rather than as voices summoning solidarity. The strategic documentation and dissemination of these non-institutional voices in service of a political agenda realigns the formation and reception of the vernacular actors' identity, agency, and voice from an act of self-presentation to one of institutional re-presentation. The question then remains, what narrative gets related through this framework in which the workers speak?

### Interpreting Workers' Voices

In total, the "7 days @ Minimum Wage" series includes eight videos and eight workers. While only seven stories are presented, the AFL-CIO and ACORN explain that one worker's testimony was so compelling that it had to be presented in two parts "with only one cut, and that's just to preserve her privacy and keep her from getting fired from her job."<sup>15</sup> That worker, Jessica, had the first part of her story included in YouTube's featured videos page and the total running time of both videos is fourteen minutes and fourteen seconds. In addition, while there are seven stories presented over seven days, a married couple—Paul and Susan—share time in their video. In sum, the videos featured eight workers<sup>16</sup>:

Day 1: Paul & Susan, "Denver couple Paul Valdez and Susan Windham tell their story of living on the minimum wage. Paul receives \$35 for a full day's labor in back-breaking construction work."

Day 2: Erin, "Erin talks about needing to work increasing hours at her minimum wage, grocery store job to make ends meet."

Day 3: Jeffrey, "Jeffrey shares his story of taking care of his newborn son with his minimum wage paycheck. After paying for rent, diapers, formula, and the electric bill, there is little left for groceries."

Day 4: Jessica (Parts 1 & 2), "Jessica, an educated mom of four, tells her life-story of struggle to get ahead and make a future for her family. Jessica does everything she can to break out of a daily cycle of pain inflicted by having to scrape by on the minimum wage."

Day 5: Chris, "Chris tells a shocking American tale of day to day existence on the edge of homelessness. Without a regular 9-to-5 job, Chris searches for work every day. If he can't make \$35 a day, he will lose his room and be forced onto the streets."

Day 6: Amanda, "Amanda talks about missing the opportunity to do 'normal' things with her family, like go to the movies or buy birthday presents for her siblings, because her minimum wage paycheck doesn't cover the things she needs."

Day 7: Mallory, "Mallory shares her story of dreaming of a better future of education and independence, but facing no opportunities on a minimum wage paycheck."

As with the stock descriptions of each video, these individual synopses define the primary problem the workers' face and prepares the audience to sympathize with each worker's plight.

Although each day represents workers who presumably have different occupations and do not know one another, their stories adopt common themes in their explanation of what they all definitely share: subsistence "close to the current federal minimum wage."<sup>17</sup> The similarities in their rhetorical appeals and experiential assertions suggest that the video producer asked them all the same questions. And, of course, the producer made choices in the editing room about what to include and what to leave out of the final cut. Thus, while the workers speak without a script and describe their own personal experience and perspective, the overarching themes of the videos reflect the influence of the institutional voice. The worker's stories act as vignettes for the institutionally constructed narrative.

Two primary appeals cut across each worker's story: appeals to pity and to justice. While these neither of these kinds of appeals is inherently problematic, the context of their invocation shapes their reception. Particularly in light of the historical and immediate interpretive frames for the videos, the pleas for pity and just action diminish the agency of the workers themselves. The vernacular performance provoked and framed by institutions in the prevailing cultural milieu articulates the powerlessness of the workers, accentuates their difference from the audience members, and isolates them from the organizations acting on their behalf.

The appeals to pity develop through the workers' description of their inability to overcome the miserable living conditions caused by their low income. In the videos, each person testifies to the challenges of everyday subsistence on a low hourly wage. The oft-repeated expression "it's hard" is verified by the sad stories they each tell of living paycheck to paycheck, trying to provide for their children, and working just to ensure a place to sleep at night. Despite their consistently hard work, these laborers speak to their own inability to escape the circumstances that mark their condition because "I just look at my paycheck and I want to cry. 'Cuz it's just, you know, you just feel like you work so hard every day and it's like barely anything in return (Erin, Day 2)." The claims are amplified by the insistence that nothing changes despite how diligently they work. On day three, Jessica speaks to the lack of recognition and compensation for her time and commitment: "You would think that you would get paid what you're worth. And, I am not. My co-workers are not. But there's nothing else for us to do. It's nowhere else to go. Because at the next job you're starting at the bottom again." The workers stress their resilience against the odds: "It makes me feel disgusted sometimes, but I chunk it up and keep on goin', cuz that's the only way I can do. I do what I have to do to make a living for me and my family (Jeffrey, Day 3)." The agency that each worker claims in these statements is directed inward – they can act individually to perform well on the job. Beyond their individual competence, the workers imagine no political agency that would enable them to change the oppressive conditions. Their appeals invite intervention on their behalf, not in a shared commitment to collective action.

The workers also speak to their victimization, continually confronting seemingly insurmountable challenges. They emphasize the structural imbalances and institutionalized forces that make their economic hardships impossible for them to overcome. As Paul says on day one, "You get behind in bills and just, they start doing this and that to you. Adding more money for late charges. It's just a revolving door. It's just hard to get out of that cycle." Susan echoes this problem: "Electricity has gone up. Housing has gone up. Food, you know, there's a big difference in the food bill. Everything. You know, there's just no way a person making even \$10 an hour anymore can really make it." Victims of an oppressive system that continues to add more challenges, the workers' conditions are inescapable: "They're settin' so many standards to get, you know, help by the government now, like with food and housing, it's just so hard that if you're working minimum wage, you're more than likely need to be living with somebody where you don't need to pay rent (Amanda, Day 6)." These disturbing tales repeatedly call attention to the pitiable conditions of the workers and their own powerlessness.

The appeals that the workers make as they recount their experiences invite not solidarity in a struggle to change the system, but instead plea for personal and political empathy. *Argumenta ad Misericordiam*—or arguments that "appeal to pity"—invite attention to the misery of the speaker. Such appeals ask the audience to recognize the devastating material circumstances that constrain the choices and opportunities for the person or persons making the appeal. The limitation of this kind of argumentative appeal,

as explained by philosopher Douglas Walton, is that it draws attention primarily to short-term consequences (1997). Rather than raising awareness about the systemic cause and plausible solutions, appeals to pity focus attention solely on the problem itself. Audience members become spectators of horror, responding with sympathy, not action. As Stephen Browne shows in his analysis in Theodore Weld's *American Slavery*, in inviting the audience to react compassionately, the sentimental style distracts audiences from considering the underlying cause and the broader social and political implications of the misery (1994). Appeals to pity evoke reactions of voyeurism and possibly compassion, but not acts of revolution or reform. *Argumenta ad misericordium* invite audiences to pay attention to the identities and personal dramas of the victims which means that the videos function more as a characterization of the workers than as a call to action.

This is not to say that appeals to pity cannot create instrumental arguments for change. This possibility, however, is contextually contingent. Since the words of the low-wage workers in the YouTube videos are situated within the material and discursive frameworks of the institutions which already subjugate the workers' ethos, the appeals only enhance their marginalization and difference rather than serving as grounds for an alliance with the audience. The workers articulate their desire for an increase in the minimum wage advancing themes that emphasize their lack of agency in changing the pitiable conditions that comprise their life and work experiences. The stories distance the workers from the audience to whom they address their appeals.

In the collective narrative created by the individual testimonies, the workers' economic fate rests solely in the hands of others. Rather than inviting audiences to act with them, they ask the audience to act for them.

In addition to the pleas for help, the workers' appeal to a principle of fairness. They express a desire to experience the opportunities presumed to be fundamental to the American Dream and ask the audience to recognize the workers as victims of an injustice. Most of the workers express that it is "not fair" that despite working hard, they cannot afford to adequately support themselves and their families. The speakers attest to their value as workers and citizens deserving of access to what they lack. For example, Jessica dreams of political leaders that will say, "I care about human beings. I care that everybody should be able to have food on their table, have affordable healthcare, have things that they need, live on this earth and then be able to die respectfully." Susan also speaks to the inhumanity of denying fair treatment to all people: "Let's respect the backbone of America – the people that are working hard to keep it together. We need them as much as we need that computer wizard, you know? They are just as important to America." The appeals for recognition build on a claim to an inalienable right as American citizens to certain food, health care, and basic needs.

The video series' narrative argues that an increase in the minimum wage will function to correct the injustice that should be intolerable in American society. Pointing to their exclusion from the modest benefits and security of better wages, Susan, on Day One, explicitly la-



ments the loss of a middle class: “There has to be middle class in America. There always has been a middle class. Our society is based on it. Versus, you know, like Russia. The rich and the poor. The poor get poorer and the rich get richer. We’re not about that. This is America.” She associates security with an economic middle class and suggests that the stagnating minimum wage offends the American way. Similarly, others remark on the inability to save and purchase homes due to their low wage work. Mallory, on Day Seven, says, “It’s hard to live by, um, paying my rent and food and stuff. I have to put that first, of course, but I don’t have any spending money for myself to save for a car or college or housing.” On Day Three, Jeffrey claims that a minimum wage increase will “help me or anybody, you know, that’s rentin’, or anything like that, where they could put money back maybe to better theirself (sic), where they can get a home and stuff like that.” The wage laborers emphasize their desire to consume, save, and get an education. Inviting recognition of their plight as victims of an injustice—their lack of access to recognizably American values and opportunities—demonstrates an effort to bridge potential differences with their audience by summoning the valued American commitment to “justice for all.”

However, this claim that potentially aligns the worker with its unknown audience through a recognizable and shared value—fairness—is undermined by the fact that the appeal comes from a voice already framed and articulated as subordinate and powerless. Their appeal to fairness calls for the audience to act for the workers to undo an injustice and

the appeal to pity within the institutional frame has already focused the audience’s attention on merely witnessing and sympathizing with their plight. The image of the subjugated and helpless worker undercuts a call for collective redemption in the name of American justice. The workers request inclusion in the American Dream, which reinforces their lack of agency and recalls their own expressions of powerlessness to participate in the struggle to make a change.

The calls for sympathy and the appeals to justice function in service of a noble political goal—a living wage—but the two appeals together act to reinforce a pathetic image of the wage workers. The wage increase that the workers and the organizations advocate in the 2006 living wage campaign amounted to approximately one dollar. While such an increase marks progress toward relieving financial stress on low-wage working people, the new wage would not necessarily bring about the opportunities envisioned by the workers in the videos – saving for college, moving to a new apartment, buying a car or a home. Mallory, for one, says that “if I was to get a raise of a dollar, or a dollar six to \$6.85. It would help me a lot to save money in the bank for those things (Mallory, Day 7).” Articulating a belief in a vast improvement in their dire financial life through a one dollar increase suggests a particular naïveté on the part of the workers. The appeal to justice through a disproportionate solution to the problems they describe identify them as ignorant and/or as mere pawns in service of a narrative of benevolent reform enabled by the institutions and a movement driven by their work—not the laborers’.

## Implications

Examination of these vernacular performances in the “7 days @ Minimum Wage” video series illustrates how the workers’ appeals function in an institutional and cultural framework that devalues the workers’ own role in seeking political and material change. The laborers serve as subjects to the movement, not participants in it. Their pleas for recognition, help, and access reinforce their marginalization. Whereas vernacular performances by laborers on the radio in the 1930s had functioned to celebrate the solidarity of the working class and promote the power of unity among them, the contemporary YouTube AFL-CIO and ACORN Minimum Wage videos instead emphasize the isolation, vulnerability, and helplessness of the waged workers.

By identifying workers as they do in these videos, the AFL-CIO enforces a particular image of them that denies their own political agency. In particular, the nature of the participatory media enhances the idea that the workers lack control over not only their circumstances, but also their circulation; they were not broadcasting themselves—as YouTube’s tagline suggests—but being broadcast. In this explicit effort to constitute a broader movement around labor and the working class, the unions rely specifically on the discursive othering of the workers themselves. Of course, these are not the only representations of wage workers circulating in the public. However, they demonstrate the way in which, even through benevolent intention, the orchestrated performance of vernacularity might do more to reinforce the othered status of oppressed groups, rather than empower their participation in public conversation.

When the relationship between vernacular and institutions unfolds in service of political ends, the result has significant ramifications for how marginalized voices achieve recognition and form their identity in the public sphere. To the extent that the vernacular is subject to provocation and manipulation, it loses its inherent value as a dialogic and ephemeral form of communication through which communities can be constituted. As the living wage videos illustrate, the vernacular voices may get co-opted into an institutional narrative. Framed contextually and structurally through the lenses of AFL-CIO and ACORN/YouTube, the workers’ vernacular isolates and disempowers the speakers, rather creating connections between them and discursively constructing their own agency in the labor movement. The AFL-CIO and ACORN locate the strength of their voice in the weakness of the worker.

Although other studies show how powerful vernacular expression can be in articulating human experience and shaping political culture, the co-optation of that expression by institutions in service of specific political goals can challenge the power of that discourse. The communal strength of vernacular discourse rests not only in its freedom of expression, but also in its freedom of circulation. The act of making vernacular voices tools of institutional action imagines the vernacular as subordinate and controllable. Thus, once the vernacular expression becomes politically purposeful, its political power diminishes. The institutions’ production and distribution of the videos suggests that the vernacular necessarily depends on the institutional, whereas the institution’s attention to the vernacular is purely voluntary.

The presentation of workers' voices on YouTube by the AFL-CIO and ACORN as a part of the living wage campaign illustrates how strategic and political deployment of the vernacular reconfigures the authority of the vernacular voice. While the history of the labor movement points to the agency of vernacular expression, the YouTube videos expose the extent to which power of the everyday can be withdrawn in the very moment in which it is recognized. This case affirms the need to consider how online participatory media can disable marginalized voices even as it actively creates a space meant to empower them. The isolation and control of the vernacular that the YouTube structure enables and the AFL-CIO employs denies the community that vernacular expressions typically invite. The shared identity of workers is erased by the individualized containment of these voices. Because each of the workers' voices is articulated individually, they do not function dialogically with one another. Rather, they are explicitly removed from the communal context, thereby empowering AFL-CIO and ACORN to define that community. The "sense of dignity" that Archie Green says a labor vernacular can engender is lost.

The analysis of the "7 days @ Minimum Wage" campaign two primary lessons in the study of the political and purposeful engagement of vernacular expression by institutions. One, examination of vernacular texts must begin with an awareness that the voices of everyday people can be manipulated, particularly since those voices do not surface independently of the media that circulates them. When and how vernacular voices emerge inevitably shapes their meaning

and their reception. Thus, particularly organizations that seek to intentionally engage a vernacular voice to advance the interests of the marginalized or oppressed must be conscious of the ethics of that action. Two, this paper thus suggests the need to further develop an ethics of representation with regard to vernacular. A provocation or performance of the vernacular functions as a marker and maker of cultural identity as much as a naturally occurring and spontaneous emergence of the vernacular.

### Notes

1 The word "constraint" should not be read as necessarily connoting a negative influence. Rather, I use the term as suggested by Lloyd Bitzer in his seminal article, "The Rhetorical Situation." He notes that constraints might be "made up of persons, events, objects, and relations which are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action. Standard sources of constraint include beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions, images, interests, motives and the like (8)." Thus a constraint is anything that shapes the construction of meaning, whether it be positive, negative, or neutral. Lloyd F. Bitzer, 1968. *The Rhetorical Situation*. *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1 (1): 1-14.

2 Lantis argues for the use of the term "vernacular culture" to characterize the everyday narrative and practices of discourse communities: "Vernacular culture...focuses attention on the overt—on acts and artifacts—and on its cultural meaning (213)." Lantis, Margaret. 1960. Vernacular Culture. *American Anthropologist* 60:202-16.

3 See also Linda Dégh who argues “that the media have become a part of folklore (25)” in *American Folklore and the Mass Media*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.

4 Certainly, the working class solidarity that thrived under the New Deal should not be overstated or idealized. As historians such as Alice Kessler-Harris have shown, the systematic exclusions of workers based on race, gender, and ethnicity subvert both the purported benevolence of the New Deal era and the existence of a centralized and recognized working class (Kessler-Harris 2001).

5 The CIO actively promoted the voices of workers on the radio. They used radio as a means of bridging ethnic, racial, and geographical divisions within the working class (Denning, 1996). In addition to speeches from national labor leaders, radio programs featured the voices of workers themselves, talking about their organizing experiences (Cohen 1990). For example, WCFL radio in Chicago provides a window into how mediated vernacular voice may not always and necessarily bow to the institutional perspective in which it is intimately and inevitably bound. With the goal of advancing the causes of workers steeped in labor struggles, this radio station even worked with the CIO to develop a speaker’s bureau that provided laborers with studies in public speaking as well as the economics and politics of labor, industry, and capitalism (Godfried 1997). Workers who successfully completed these courses frequently found themselves on the radio recounting their experiences in labor struggles, pointing to the ways in which they had resisted the power of their employers and sought out public support of boycotts and picket lines.

6 For an insightful analysis of the culture of the AFL, the CIO, and their subsequent union, see Clayton Sinyai, *Schools of Democracy: A Political History of the American Labor Movement* (Ithaca: ILR Press, 2006). Sinyai demonstrates how the AFL in particular dismissed craft workers and immigrants as lacking in civic virtue and incapable of organization.

7 For a more sympathetic biography of George Mean, see Robert H. Zeiger, “George Meany: Labor’s Organization Man,” in Melvyn Dubofsky and Warren Van Tine, eds. *Labor Leaders in America* (Urbana: University of Chicago, 1987).

8 The United States federal government first enacted a minimum wage law as a part of the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act. Designed to help secure a living wage for workers, the federal government imagined the guaranteed minimum as a way to ensure and encourage the purchase power of the working class. However, over the years, increases in the minimum wage stagnated to such a degree that by the turn of the 21st century, the minimum wage was roughly 70 percent of what it was worth in 1968 (Lichtenstein, 2002). Living wage activists have since responded with campaigns across the country that target legislative and ballot action in cities, counties, and states (Luce 2004). Public debates over the minimum wage invite characterizations of the people who must subsist on the low hourly wage and the material inequities they experience. Making the argument for an increased minimum, advocates often point to the indignities of living on a low hourly wage and articulate the injustice of letting hard-working Americans suffer materially in spite of their



responsible commitment to their jobs. For examples of people demonstrating the challenges of minimum wage through personal experience, see Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001 and *30 Days* [2005], dir. Morgan Spurlock, 288 min., Arts Alliance America, 2008, DVD.

9 In 2006, the federal minimum wage was \$5.15 an hour. States, counties, and cities may all adopt minimum wage rates that are higher or lower than the federal level. If the state minimum is lower than the federal rate, then the federal rate applies. Current and previous federal minimum wage rates can be found at on the United States Department of Labor website: <http://www.dol.gov/ESA/minwage/chart.htm>. Other state and local rates are available at <http://www.dol.gov/esa/minwage/america.htm>.

10 The link for the video blog on the AFL-CIO website uses the tag line “7 real people, 7 real stories (<http://www.aflcio.org/issues/jobseconomy/livingwages/index.cfm>).” The quote “7 real people with 7 real stories of living on the minimum wage” came from the campaign’s website, which is no longer accessible online ([www.sevendaysatminimumwage.org/](http://www.sevendaysatminimumwage.org/)). See also the YouTube page dedicated to the campaign: <http://www.youtube.com/user/7daysatminimumwage>.

11 The “Seven Days @ Minimum Wage” videos are available on YouTube, [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and the AFL-CIO website about the minimum wage, [http://www.aflcio.org/issues/jobseconomy/livingwages/americanneedsaraise\\_7days.cfm](http://www.aflcio.org/issues/jobseconomy/livingwages/americanneedsaraise_7days.cfm).

12 Consistent with other living wage elections, all seven states approved increases in the minimum wage. Living wage campaigns have consistently received wide public support. See Luce, *Fighting for a Living Wage* and a Pew Research Center poll released in April 2006: Michael Dimock, “Maximum Support for Raising the Minimum. Pew Research Center Publications”. <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/18/maximum-support-for-raising-the-minimum>.

13 It should be noted that in the roughly three and a half years since the videos were first posted on YouTube and the publication of this paper, YouTube has undergone a number of changes in its format and certainly its content has grown exponentially. For the purposes of this analysis, I will focus on the features that have remained consistent over that period of time.

14 Quoted from Roseanne Barr’s introduction to Paul and Susan’s video on Day 1.

15 Quoted from Roseanne Barr’s introduction to part one of Jessica’s video on Day 4.

16 The descriptions of each speaker is cited from the information box positioned the right of each video on the YouTube page.

17 Barr uses this phrasing in her introduction of all the videos.

### **Works Cited**

- AFL-CIO. 2009. “7 Days @ Minimum Wage.” Accessed March 29. [http://www.aflcio.org/issues/jobseconomy/livingwages/americanneedsaraise\\_7days.cfm](http://www.aflcio.org/issues/jobseconomy/livingwages/americanneedsaraise_7days.cfm).
- AFL-CIO. 2009. “7 Days @ Minimum Wage: Amanda (Day 6).” Accessed March 29. Accessed March 29. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mzJJ\\_LeQFqI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mzJJ_LeQFqI).

- AFL-CIO. 2009. "7 Days @ Minimum Wage: Chris (Day 5)." Accessed March 29. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x1UVInfjicU>.
- AFL-CIO. 2009. "7 Days @ Minimum Wage: Erin (Day 2)." Accessed March 29. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dq32NP9BiNA>.
- AFL-CIO. 2009. "7 Days @ Minimum Wage: Jeffrey (Day 3)." Accessed March 29.
- AFL-CIO. 2009. "7 Days @ Minimum Wage: Jessica (Day 4/ Part 1)." Accessed March 29. <http://www.com/watch?v=Ps0JyNakyQQ>.
- AFL-CIO. 2009. "7 Days @ Minimum Wage: Jessica (Day 4/Part 2)." Accessed March 29. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v4zHlgWEY4U>.
- AFL-CIO. 2009. "7 Days @ Minimum Wage: Mallory (Day 7)." Accessed March 29. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b2oSm58ig4o>.
- AFL-CIO. 2009. "7 Days @ Minimum Wage: Paul & Susan (Day 1)." Accessed March 29. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=edjWDKnulxs>.
- 30 Days* [2005]. Directed by Morgan Spurlock. 2005. New York, NY: Arts Alliance America, 2008 DVD.
- AFL-CIO. 2009. "America Needs a Raise." Accessed May 5. <http://www.aflcio.org/issues/jobseconomy/livingwages/index.cfm>.
- Barr, Roseanne. 2009 "Roseanne World." Accessed 5 May . <http://www.roseanneworld.com/home/>.
- Berger, Harris M. and Giovanna P. Del Negro. 2004. *Identity and Everyday Life: Essays in the Study of Folklore, Music, and Popular Culture*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- Bitzer, Lloyd F. 1968. "The Rhetorical Situation." *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1 (1): 1-14.
- Buhle, Paul. 1997. *The Knights of Labor to the New World Order: Essays on Labor and Culture*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- Burns, Tom. 1969. "Folklore in the Mass Media: Television." *Folklore Forum* 2: 90-106.
- Clements, William M. 1974. "The Rhetoric of the Radio Ministry." *Journal of American Folklore* 87: 318-27.
- Cohen, Lizabeth. 1990. *Making a New Deal*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2003. *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. New York: Knopf.
- YouTube. "YouTube – Broadcast Yourself." 2009. Accessed on 20 March <http://www.youtube.com/t/about>.
- Davis, Mike. 1986. *Prisoners of the American Dream: Politics and Economy in the History of the US Working Class*. London: Verso.
- Denby, Priscilla. 1971. "Folklore in the Mass Media." *Folklore Forum* 4: 113-25.
- Dégh, Linda. 1994. *American Folklore and the Mass Media*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Denning, Michael. 1996. *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American*

- Culture in the Twentieth Century*. London: Verso.
- Dimock, Michael. 2009. "Maximum Support for Raising the Minimum." Pew Research Center Publications. Accessed May 5. <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/18/maximum-support-for-raising-the-minimum>.
- Dorst, John. 1990. "Tags and Burners, Cycles and Networks: Folklore in the Telectronic Age." *Journal of Folklore Research* 27(3): 179-91.
- Edsall, Thomas Byrne with Mary D. Edsall. 1991. *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Ehrenreich, Barbara. 2001. *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America*, New York: Metropolitan Books.
- Georges, Robert A. and Michael Owen Jones. 1995. *Folkloristics: An Introduction*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Gillespie, Angus K. 1980. *Folklorist of the Coal Fields: George Korson's Life and Work*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Godfried, Nathan. 1997. *WCFL, Chicago's Voice of Labor, 1926-78*. Urbana : University of Illinois Press.
- Green, Archie. 1993. *Wobblies, Pile Butts, and Other Heroes: Labor Explorations*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- . 2001. *Torching the Fink Books & Other Essays on Vernacular Culture*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Hauser, Gerard A. 1999. *Vernacular Voices: The Rhetoric of Publics and Public Spheres*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.
- Wage and Hour Division (WHD), United States Department of Labor.. 2009. "History of Federal Minimum Wage Rates Under the Fair Labor Standards Act, 1938 – 2007." Accessed May 5. <http://www.dol.gov/ESA/minwage/chart.htm>.
- Howard, Robert Glenn. 2005. "Toward a Theory of the World Wide Web Vernacular: The Case for Pet Cloning." *Journal of Folklore Research* 42(3): 323-360.
- . 2008. "The Vernacular Web of Participatory Media." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 25(5): 490-513.
- Jenkins, Henry. 2006. *Convergence Culture*. New York: New York University Press.
- Kessler-Harris, Alice. 2001. *In Pursuit of Equality: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20<sup>th</sup> – Century America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Korson, George. 1960. *Black Rock: Mining Folklore of the Pennsylvania Dutch*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press.
- Lantis, Margaret. 1960. "Vernacular Culture." *American Anthropologist* 60(2): 202-16.
- Lichtenstein, Nelson. 2002. *State of the Union*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Loviglio, Jason. 2005. *Radio's Intimate Public: Network Broadcasting and Mass-Mediated Democracy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Luce, Stephanie. 2004. *Fighting for a Living Wage*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- McKinley, Michelle A. and Jensen, Lene O. 2003. "In Our Own Voices: Reproductive Health Radio Programming in the Peruvian Amazon." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 20: 180-203.
- Mills, C. W. 1951. *White Collar: The American Middle Classes*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wage and Hour Division (WHD), United States Department of Labor. 2009. "Minimum Wage Laws in the States - January 1, 2009." Accessed May 5. <http://www.dol.gov/esa/minwage/america.htm>.
- AFL-CIO. 2009 "Mission Statement" Accessed May 5. <http://www.aflcio.org/aboutus/thisistheaflcio/mission/>.
- Ono, Kent A. and John M. Sloop. 1995. "The Critique of Vernacular Discourse." *Communication Monographs* 62: 19-46.
- AFL-CIO. 2009. "Raising the Minimum Wage: Talking Points and Background." Accessed May 5. <http://issues/jobseconomy/livingwages/upload/minimumwage.handbook.pdf>. Accessed on 5 May 2009.
- Reser, Erin M. 2005. "Strategies of Negotiation in Mainstream Media: Vernacular Discourse and Masculinity." In *The Full Monty. Popular Communication* 3: 217-237.
- Rheingold, Howard. [1993] 2000. *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Sinyai, Clayton. 2006. *Schools of Democracy: A Political History of the American Labor Movement*. Ithaca: ILR Press.
- Spinelli, Martin. 2000. "Democratic Rhetoric and Emergent Media: The Marketing of Participatory Community on Radio and the Internet." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 3(2): 268-278.
- White, Shirley A. 2003. "Introduction: Video Power." In *Participatory Video: Images that Transform and Empower*. Edited by Shirley A. White. New Delhi: Sage Publications: 17-30.
- YouTube. "YouTube Fact Sheet." 2009. Accessed May 5. [http://www.youtube.com/t/fact\\_sheet](http://www.youtube.com/t/fact_sheet).
- Zeiger, Robert H. 1987. "George Meany: Labor's Organization Man." In *Labor Leaders in America*. Edited by Melvyn Dubofsky and Warren Van Tine. Urbana: University of Chicago.



## Responses

---

**Gene Cooper**

*University of Southern California*

Labor lore vernacular was spoken, sung, and otherwise performed and consumed in our home throughout my childhood. We listened to the records of Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Paul Robeson, and Marian Anderson. We learned and sang union songs at a pro-labor summer camp where each color war team was named after a union (my team was the International Ladies Garment Workers, and I can still sing the union anthem, honest!). The older kids at camp that summer performed Clifford Odets' "Waiting for Lefty", which climaxes when workers stop "waiting" and organize themselves. My parents read to me from story books in which joining the union solved the family's financial problems, making it possible to buy the otherwise unaffordable toy in the shop window. All of this left a deep impression on my consciousness.

My father even ran for State Assembly on the American Labor Party ticket in our Brooklyn assembly district when I was in second grade (1954-5). He lost, but the ALP was successful enough in NYC to repeatedly send Vito Marcantonio to congress as representative of the working class, speaking to and for the workers in labor movement vernacular.

As my tales of the 1960s entertained my son a generation later, the 1930s always loomed large in my father's consciousness, memories, and stories. Furthermore, all my parents' friends shared their values and spoke in the phrases of labor vernacular, as did

their children, who were my friends. Thus, when Pamela Connors writes of the culture of the late 1930s with its "iconic images of workers, songs, and cultural performances" that "reinforced the political recognition and reification of labor and a working class" and "promoted working class solidarity", my childhood experiences bear witness to the appropriateness of her characterization.

Furthermore, there is no doubt that "the discourse of labor transcended institutions, regions, and individual identity" largely through the vehicle of "books, radio shows, music, and theatre productions" in which working class life was portrayed with dignity, and power and prosperity were secured through worker solidarity. It is equally true, however, as Connors points out, that cultural and political shifts since the 1930s, especially the rise of post WWII consumerist culture, have resituated and devalued the working class and its vernacular expression (Harvey 1990; Turner 2003).

Thus, "by the 1980s, unions were demonized in public discourse" and, especially after Ronald Reagan's crushing of the air traffic controllers strike, they came to be seen as part of the problem rather than part of the solution, consistent with Reagan's Republican vision. Also, in the increasingly global economy of the 1980s and 1990s, the shift of production to cheap non-unionized labor overseas further undermined the power of organized labor in the US. Connors' account of the imagery, positioning, and characterization of minimum wage workers in an AFL-CIO YouTube video is, thus, a dramatic representation of how far we have come since the 1930s... on the slide down.

In today's media environment, the "workers' stories and songs [that] function to help workers make sense of the relationship between their labor, capitalism, and society" are almost completely absent; thus, "[t]he resulting representation of the workers identifies them as sad and helpless". Rather than being heralded as the vanguard in a movement of revolutionary change, the workers in the YouTube videos are objects rather than subjects. They are merely "evidence for the action advocated", the increase of the minimum wage. The appeals that the workers make as they recount their experiences invite not solidarity in a struggle to change the system, but instead a plea for personal and political empathy, for pity. In the collective narrative created by the individual testimonies in the videos, the workers' economic fate rests solely in the hands of others. Rather than inviting the audience to act with them, the workers ask the audience to act for them. Whereas vernacular performances by laborers on the radio in the 1930s had functioned to celebrate the solidarity of the working class and promote the power of their unity, the contemporary YouTube minimum wage videos emphasize, instead, the isolation, vulnerability, and helplessness of the wage workers.

While Conners doesn't address the issue directly, her article forces us to ask what the way forward might be for the working class in this era of globalized capital. It is difficult to say, although it is certainly worth thinking about. What will the labor lore vernacular of the future be like? Perhaps it will be composed in the form of a text message...TTFN.

### Works Cited

- Harvey, David. 1990. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Turner, Terence. 2003. Class Projects, Social Consciousness, and the Contradictions of Globalization. In *Globalization, the State and Violence*. Edited by Jonathan Friedman. NY: Altamira Press.

## Problematizing the Vernacular

Barry Brummett

*The University of Texas at Austin*

Pamela Connors has written an excellent paper that will engender much fruitful dialogue. In beginning that conversation with this response, I mean in no way to denigrate a thoughtful, well-crafted study. I want to engage Connors's work by problematizing the idea of the vernacular. First, I will urge expansion of the vernacular beyond the spoken word. Second, I will question the extent to which there can be a true vernacular, in the usual sense, in an era of mass mediation and global capitalism.

Connors regards the vernacular as "speech by everyday people" (39). This is not wrong, but I think it is narrow. I suggest that we see the vernacular as a wide range of systematic signs consisting of speech but also gesture, posture, grooming, clothing, home decoration; in other words, the *style* that is a system of communication (Brummett 2008). A number of scholars such as Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood (1979), Marcel Danesi (2003), and Virginia Postrel (2003) have argued that when objects, good, clothing, grooming, and gestures become signs within a style, they become like a language in their systematicity. It seems reasonable, then, to think that a vernacular could be seen as a system of these elements of style. Let me also note that a vernacular is often a system of signs typical of, or bespeaking, particular social groups. Elements of style not only work like a language but are also often identified with social groups. If there is

a working class vernacular, as Connors correctly argues, then there is also a systematic working class vernacular of clothing, grooming, and the other elements of style.

If we accept a sense of the vernacular as *style*, incorporating elements beyond only the verbal, the importance of my second main point becomes clear. It is hard and hardly worthwhile to commodify a verbal style of expression alone. One can scarcely make a dollar off of accent and idiom. Ally accent and idiom with commodities and one attracts the interest of global capitalism, creating value in the act of mediating and mass-distributing signs of that vernacular. Amish pronunciation may be interesting; Amish furniture is big business.

When global capitalism develops a commercial interest in the marketing of a vernacular in this wider sense, it puts its considerable power to work *defining a vernacular and informing the global audience of that definition*. Corporate interests will tell the global audience, or perhaps I mean market, what a vernacular is and who it represents. They will do it in a way to make vernacular commodities more marketable. The power of global capitalism, and the tools of mediation at its command, problematizes the vernacular in this way: *Do signs represent or do they create commodified vernaculars?*

The question would not arise were local communities of all sorts insulated from the power of capitalism and mediation. One would visit a place and report back, through global media, on vernacular practices observed there. Suppose, however, in an increasingly integrated and commodified global market, media tell a group what their vernacular is and,

more important, suppose those groups in their various communities believe it? Is the vernacular of style that we see then a true vernacular or a commodified simulation produced so as to sell more Cajun stuff in New Orleans, more Navaho stuff in Arizona, all of it made and mass marketed by capitalism?

Conners's example of Roseanne Barr is, I think, more problematic than it might seem. Roseanne's vernacular is not, of course, only verbal. She has a style of grooming, clothing, gesture, and so forth. Her television show presented an even wider range of signs claiming to be working class vernacular. One can, and perhaps should, ask: How much did that show represent a real vernacular one could find somewhere, and how much did working class people take cues from her show as to which vernacular of style (or style of vernacular) they should perform?

A more poignant example could be hip-hop. Does what one may see in videos and movies reflect a vernacular of style that real people in some place express, or do people take cues from the latest Chamillionaire video as to which vernacular they should perform? I do not think there is one simple answer, but I do think it is useful to complicate and problematize the idea of the vernacular precisely because of the world in which we live.

Vernaculars can now be manufactured as much as discovered. These vernaculars might draw people to them in shifting and temporary communities, whereas in an earlier age a vernacular were more likely to have been the expression of a stable and longstanding community. Understanding how institutions use

vernaculars in an age of global capitalism and mass mediation of images, an age of nearly universal commodification, is an important next step in our understanding beyond the foundation that Conners has given us.

### **Works Cited**

- Brummett, Barry. *A Rhetoric of Style*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press. 2008.
- Danesi, Marcel. *My Son is an Alien: A Cultural Portrait of Today's Youth*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. 2003.
- Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood. *The World of Goods*. New York, NY: Basic Books. 1979.
- Virginia Postrel. *The Substance of Style: How the Rise of Aesthetic Value Is Remaking Commerce, Culture, and Consciousness*. New York, NY: HarperCollins. 2003.



## Audiences and Vernacular Rhetoric

Christina M. Smith

*Ramapo College of New Jersey*

Scholarly interest in the creation, circulation, and contestation of vernacular rhetoric has increased dramatically with the growth of new media. The opportunity for previously marginalized groups to disseminate their message has expanded because new media forms offer ways to gain access, albeit constrained and controlled, to the public sphere. Pamela Conners astutely notes in her article, however that any circulation of vernacular rhetoric must be viewed in concert with the institutional structures that inform its production and enable its consumption. Conners' article provides readers with a provocative example of the strategic deployment of vernacular communication in the service of institutional goals.

Specifically, Conners argues that the institutional appropriation of vernacular expression on the part of labor organizations ultimately functions to interrupt the potential of vernacular laborer discourse for coalition-building among not only low-wage workers, but the wider working public as well. Commenting on the use of low-wage workers as institutionally framed and narrated subjects in a series of seven short YouTube videos intended to highlight the plight of minimum wage laborers, she notes, "...the videos invoke a vernacular performance that subjugates the workers' own participation in the labor movement," thus demonstrating "...how

online participatory media can disable marginalized voices even as it actively creates a space meant to empower them" (43, 55).

In discussing the videos, Conners details the two primary frames constructed by the AFL-CIO and ACORN to shape and influence audience interpretation of the productions. First is the frame of "appeals to pity". Addressing examples pulled from visual and textual representations in which the subjects lament their precarious positions in society, Conners suggests the subjects are consequently rendered "sad and helpless." The workers' "... voices function as pawns in service of the institutional narrative, rather than as voices summoning solidarity." (49). Second, Conners illustrates the frame of "fairness" with references to the descriptions by the videos' subjects of their inability to achieve the American Dream. She offers the view that institutions' use of these frames in presentations of vernacular performances "articulates the powerlessness of the workers, accentuates their difference from the audience members, and isolates them from the organizations acting on their behalf" (50).

I would like to raise one point of contention with the discussion of these two frames. Though the author does acknowledge that appeals to pity can create arguments for change, I argue that more change-engendering potential in visual depictions of suffering exists than Conners allows. She suggests that individual experience is less transformative than embodied political action. The two, however, are not mutually exclusive; the longstanding importance

of personal narratives and the sharing of individual experience for mobilizing action and fostering social change must be acknowledged. In discussing visual representations of occupied Palestinians, Azoulay (2008) argues that an ethical relationship exists between the photographer, the person depicted, and the viewer, a relationship she calls the "civil contract of photography." Thus, images of injustice possess heightened persuasive power, as case studies of the Burning Monk, Kent State, and the 1963 Birmingham photographs (all depictions of individuals) illustrate (Skow and Dionisopoulos, 1997; Hariman and Lucaites 2001; Johnson, 2007). Though these studies focus on still photographs, the civil contract is equally applicable to moving images.

In the end, the essay offers a useful case study for examining the complex interplay between institutional entities that utilize vernacular discourse to advance their causes and the vernacular communities in which that discourse originates and acquires meaning. The appropriation of vernacular discourse by institutional entities raises important questions about power, control, and censorship. My work analyzing the United States Armed Forces' use of YouTube videos that resemble those produced by soldiers suggests the fluidity of boundaries between truly vernacular material and that which is intentionally marked as vernacular by powerful organizations. Considering the weight accorded such seemingly vernacular productions, the boundaries of authenticity are important to expose and challenge.

In light of these implications, I would like to discuss one aspect that is absent

from the author's current rendering, but that nevertheless should be addressed in studies of vernacular discourse on the Internet: the role of the audience. Conners' analysis of the videos leaves little room for resistance. Rather, the subjects in the videos appear as victims of the institutional framing imposed by the AFL-CIO and ACORN. Perhaps more importantly, the resistive role played by the audience remains unaddressed in the article. In fact, audiences are quite savvy in detecting and challenging inauthentic vernacular discourse. From the online "outing" of LonelyGirl15 to the outrage of constituents of a censored political blog, the collective intelligence of consumer audiences challenges a one-sided view of institutional power (Burgess and Green, 2010; Howard, 2008). Conners notes the low number of views received by the videos and suggests that this could be due to the fact that they were deemed by audiences as overly-institutional both aesthetically and rhetorically. Recent scholarship in media and cultural studies also highlights the growing capacity of fans to not only challenge media content, but also create and circulate their own material (Jenkins, 2006). The existence of content in response to the labor videos could also provide insight into the consumption of the institutional productions.

Additionally, it would be useful to explore the viewer commentary accompanying the videos to ascertain how audiences responded to the productions. Hess (2009) provides a thorough analysis of how audiences challenged institutional messages by the Office for National Drug Control Policy. Hess ends his study with larger questions

about the (in)ability of the YouTube medium to serve as a productive space for vernacular discourse. Thus, a further analysis of viewer interpretation of the videos could reveal the ways in which diverse audiences responded and might open up opportunities for resistance to the institutional hegemony advanced by the AFL-CIO and ACORN.

Skow, Lisa M., and George N. Dionisopoulos. 1997. "A Struggle to Contextualize Photographic Images: American Print Media and the "Burning Monk." *Communication Quarterly* 45: 393-409.

### **Works Cited**

- Azoulay, Ariella. 2008. *The Civil Contract of Photography*. Cambridge, MA: Zone Books.
- Burgess, Jean, and Joshua Green. 2010. *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Hariman, Robert, and John L. Lucaites. 2001. "Dissent and Emotional Management in a Liberal-Democratic Society: The Kent State Iconic Photograph." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 31: 4-31.
- Hess, Aaron R. 2009. "Resistance Up in Smoke: Analyzing the Limitations of Deliberation on YouTube." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 26: 411-434.
- Howard, Robert G. 2008. "Electronic Hybridity: The Persistent Processes of the Vernacular Web." *Journal of American Folklore* 121: 192-218.
- Jenkins, Henry. 2006. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press.
- Johnson, Davi. 2007. "Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 1963 Birmingham Campaign as Image Event." *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 10: 1-25.





# Food in Binary: Identity and Interaction in Two German Food Blogs

Kerstin McGaughey  
Boston University

## Abstract

*Food blogs are increasingly gaining importance not only in the virtual sphere but offline as well. This paper looks at the creation of identity and process of interaction in two German food blogs. Drawing on current theories of Internet and community space this paper will interpret what is occurring in this online group. While the food blogosphere was born in the realm of new media (the Internet) it must by its nature rely on the offline food world, as well as traditional media spheres such as print and television. The German food blogging community acts as an example to observe how bloggers represent themselves and interact amongst each other in this relatively new medium. Media and food are both constantly evolving, and thus an article of this kind is restricted by the paper on which it is written. Therefore, this project is not intended as a final conclusion on the topic, but rather as an introduction to the possibility for exploration and expression.*

## Introduction

Food blogs have become a wildly popular platform for individuals to write about their recipes, restaurant meals, opinions, and food experiences in a public forum. Some argue facetiously that everyone with a fork and an Internet connection has a weblog of his or her own. While this is not accurate, it may not seem too far-fetched. Every major newspaper with a food section now has at least one food blog, if not several, on their websites. Writers who began by posting

their personal thoughts and recipes regularly on their blogs now have major book deals<sup>1</sup> and jobs working for the Food Network.<sup>2</sup> While food constitutes only a small portion of the topics written about in the blogosphere, this still accounts for thousands of blogs on food in many different languages.

This paper will focus on how two German food bloggers portray their identity through their blogs, and how their interactions with their readers and other bloggers shape a sense of community unique to the medium.<sup>3</sup> A unique convergence is occurring in food blogging: while the food blogosphere was born in the realm of new media (the Internet) it must by nature of its subject rely on the offline food world, as well as traditional media spheres such as print and television. This mixing of media is what Henry Jenkins calls convergence culture: the blending of media and users who are willing to follow it.<sup>4</sup> It is evidenced all over the food blogosphere: blogger Adam Roberts' erstwhile television deal with Food Network as its host of the weekly food celebrity web show "FN Dish;" and pastry-chef-turned-expat-blogger-in-Paris David Lebovitz's several published cookbooks.

While English-language blogs, like Roberts' "Amateur Gourmet" and Lebovitz's eponymous blog, are highly popular internationally, they are only one portion of the food blogosphere that exists. Just as Hollywood has its celebrities along with the countless actors who are in L.A. trying to make a break, or simply to follow a passion, food blogs have their own set of stars and lesser-known individuals, all engaging in the media for their own

reasons. This paper will focus on a specific subset of blogs, namely two blogs out of Munich including the internationally popular blog, "Delicious:Days," written in English by Nichole ("Nicky") Stich, as well as the German-language blog "Cucina Casalinga" by Nathalie<sup>5</sup>, which is more locally / nationally focused.

There are countless variations of food blogs, which makes choosing a set for study challenging. Susan Herring has created a methodology for what she calls Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis<sup>6</sup>, in which she discusses how to choose a corpus of online data. She suggests three different methods, including choosing random, motivated, or convenience samples.<sup>7</sup> In this case, a random sample was not feasible, as it would have required the virtually impossible task of collecting every German blog on the Internet from which to randomly choose.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the choice was made for these two blogs out of a combination of motivation and convenience: both of these blogs were chosen because they are by women writers out of Munich, which narrows down geographical and gender variations, but also because they provide examples representative of the food blogosphere at large, as well as social norms and trends in German society offline. These were also samples of convenience, as the author was already following several German blogs before this project was started.

The similarities between these blogs raises questions about the significance of two women blogging about food out of Munich. Women bloggers, while they are less popular than their male counterparts, can claim authorship of at least half of blogs on the Internet and are more likely

to be blogging about creative pursuits.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Munich is known for its flourishing tourism and food industries. While every region in Germany prides itself on its distinctive food cultures, it is arguable that Munich is even more aware of its cuisine, due at least in part to the foreigners who come and enjoy the food. Both bloggers in question write about shopping in several of the city's specialty food shops and local fresh produce markets, as well as their favorite regional Bavarian foods.

Stich and Nathalie are bloggers who cook much of their own food and post about it. This is a general trend in food blogging, though these two particular blogs are also scattered with trips around Germany and abroad. When traveling, and also sometimes while at home, they will post about the foods they ate in restaurants. However, both of these bloggers write mostly about their own personal cooking experiences. These two blogs are examples of convergence culture: the bloggers take personal, family, and national food cultures that have been passed through traditional methods of communication and post them on the Internet, creating a community that is entirely dependent on both virtual experiences online and physical experiences in the kitchen.

This paper will look at the online community of these two German food blogs, drawing on current theories of Internet and community space, the evolution of the blog and blogging communities, and other studies of "virtual ethnography" to interpret how these bloggers portray their identities through their blogs, food, and what kind of interactions occur as a result of

engaging in the medium. While this work by no means can encompass all aspects of this new and constantly evolving topic, it will act as a stepping stone for further analysis, providing a window onto possible themes and tropes that appear in many food-related blogs.

### A Brief History of Weblogs

"There are only a few things you need to know about weblogs." This quaint introduction by Rebecca Blood to the edited anthology *We've Got Blog* was written in 2002, three years after the first weblogs, or blogs, took off. This book of essays on the topic was, at the time, revolutionary: one of the first collections of essays to look at blogs from a self-reflective angle, but also using the "old-fashioned" media, that of print books. All of the essays had been originally published on the Internet, but it is fascinating to look at how they come together in print.

What becomes evident right away when reading through this collection is that blogs have changed dramatically in the six years since this book was published. Another contributor, Derek Powazek, acknowledges a change just in the three years since blogs first evolved, arguing that originally, blogs were sites with links to other sites: "each was a mixture in unique proportions of links, commentary, and personal thoughts and essays."<sup>10</sup> Now, blogs are multimodal, and include videos, Twitter feeds, and photographs to expand the way content is presented to the reader. An initial core group of 23 blogs developed in the end of 1998/beginning of 1999, according to some sites maintained by individuals who listed all the blogs they were aware

of. In August of that first year, Pyra Labs, a small dot-com company out of San Francisco, launched Blogger.<sup>11</sup> Along with LiveJournal, a blog hosting platform started the same year with an open-source codebase, Blogger made a big impact. Suddenly, instead of requiring significant knowledge in web design, HTML, and other coding languages used to create and maintain websites, bloggers only needed to know how to write the equivalent of an email. Blogger created templates, organized content, archived posts, and hosted the weblog. Users simply filled out a couple fields: a title for the post, and the content of their desire. And so, the blogosphere was born.

Blogger didn't take off immediately, as the dot-com bust put a dent in the Pyra Lab's assets. Nevertheless, the company survived and was popular enough that by 2003, WordPress, an open source blog hosting system, was launched among several other blog hosting companies. According to Technorati (today's much more sophisticated version of the blog listing websites), there were at the end of 2008 133 million blogs on the Internet posting an average of ten posts per month.<sup>12</sup>

The blogosphere has become so large, and is evolving at such unbelievable rates, that Technorati has published an annual "State of the Blogosphere" since 2004. This large statistical study analyzes blogs for content and demographics, creating the most detailed statistics to date on blogs. Overall, according to Technorati's report in 2008, the majority of bloggers are men; however, a Perseus report in 2003 suggested women write around 50% of blogs.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, looking at a selection of food blogs on the web, there

is a certain impression, supported by general observation, that in the food blog niche, the majority are women. European bloggers are the second-largest group after North American, and the largest age group of bloggers is 25-34 years old. Moreover, while most bloggers do not make enough money to live off their blogs, 25% of bloggers have a household income of over \$100,000 a year and 75% of bloggers are college graduates. This means, the average blogger is from the Northern Hemisphere, is probably white, wealthy, and educated, and thus has the time, money, and resources to devote to regular, successful blogging<sup>14</sup>.

Despite its thorough research, Technorati does not have specific data on food blogs. Their results indicate a typical blog covers on average three topics (such as politics, news, and health), and they included "cooking/food" among the topic of "other," which accounts for 43% of blogs. The most popular topic, at 54%, is "personal/lifestyle" which could very well also include blogs that write about food<sup>15</sup>.

Another way to calculate a general idea of the figures is by looking at search engines and other aggregators. A few food bloggers (Elise Bauer of Simply Recipes<sup>16</sup>, Kalyn Denny of Kalyn's Kitchen<sup>17</sup>, and Alanna Kellogg of Kitchen Parade<sup>18</sup>) put together a search engine for food blogs in 2006, which uses Google software to search only food blogs for content. Foodblogsearch.com, according to the authors, searches over 3,000 food blogs, adding 1,000 in 2009 alone. The online social community Foodbuzz.com boasts that it "aggregates, organizes, and curates" over 10,000 food blogs, and is also growing daily.<sup>19</sup>

Like in other topics, food bloggers connect via comment sections in blogs, post about each others' sites, list other blogs on their blogrolls, and engage in group blogging memes.<sup>20</sup> The complex web of social interaction in the blogosphere is compounded by millions of readers in addition to the thousands of bloggers and thus makes a statement of its size nearly impossible.

Nevertheless, the German food blog community is much smaller than its English-speaking counterpart. In 2010, Topblogs.de ranked 293 food bloggers who submitted their blogs for ranking. However, while all of these are in German, it does not appear that German speakers writing in English are represented here.<sup>21</sup> It is difficult to come up with a definition of a "German food blog," not to mention figures on how many there are. German language blogs are hosted by bloggers of different nationalities, not only from German-speaking countries. In addition, some German bloggers use English as their main language. Still others write in both languages. Furthermore, a "food blog" can be written by anyone from someone who collects cookbooks to someone who reviews restaurants, to someone who writes about their baking experiences. For the purposes of this paper, a German food blog will be defined as a blog with food in any form as its main focus written by any person living in Germany or a German-speaking country (writing either in English or German) or anyone worldwide writing in the German language.

### **New Media: The Internet and Social Interaction**

In order to analyze these particular food



blogs, it is necessary to understand what is going on in the Internet as a larger whole. The Internet allows for a unique set of circumstances to play out. Not only does the Internet act as a sphere for social interaction in and of itself, but it also relies on the offline world as reference and definition. Jenkins' studies of how we interact with media, as well as Hine and Herring's analyses of Internet cultures provide a framework from which to start a study of new media.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, Erving Goffman's social theories can also be applied to the events that are occurring on the Internet.<sup>23</sup>

Henry Jenkins uses "convergence culture" to define content blending across different media platforms and an audience willing to follow this flow of information, which he argues "[...] occurs within the brains of individual consumers and through their social interactions with others."<sup>24</sup> Blogs are a prime example of convergence culture, because they take content from other websites, as well as from other media such as film, print journalism, books, etc, and post them on a website for other people to comment and react upon. Just as content can travel from print to digital, the reverse occurs as well with many bloggers being profiled in magazines and getting book and television deals. Content in these instances is evolving from one media platform to another and, in the process, is being filtered and interpreted by countless users. This is the act of convergence culture: content shifting from one kind of media to another, and arguably the act of forming an online community space. Online communities are formed around drawing connections, and one can do so by taking advantage of many different

forms of media: books, websites, Twitter, and blogs all are different platforms with which people can engage in a topic, and the discussion frequently crosses over from one to the other.

With this in mind, the Internet is by no means fully understood as a space for community creation. Research on the Internet as a space for social interaction and community formation has been done since its conception. Linguists, especially, have played a large role in determining how the Internet has affected language use and vice versa. Other disciplines, too, have discussed the Internet, and several methodologies have been developed to create a framework for Internet analysis.<sup>25</sup>

Herring has proposed both a framework for Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA), as well as for Web Content Analysis (WebCA) aimed specifically at helping to analyze blogs.<sup>26</sup> She argues that traditional modes of analysis, in which language-specific coding is the main focus, lacks the comprehensiveness required in an all-inclusive study of blogs.<sup>27</sup> She instead suggests an expanded paradigm, which includes the use of image, theme, feature, link, and exchange analyses in addition to language (discourse) analysis. For examples of these paradigms in blogs, see Table 1 below.

Although comprehensive, Herring's analyses are not exclusive of other ways to analyze how bloggers are portraying themselves on the Internet and interacting amongst each other. Herring builds into her framework the ability for expansion by including ellipses for extra categories of analysis that signify future developments in WebCA. She

Paradigm	Example
Image	Photographs, icons, and banners
Theme	Tags on posts identifying them as containing information on subjects such as “dessert” or “poultry”
Feature	Website design elements including blogrolls, archives, and links to personalized Amazon bookstores
Link	Comments and posts that include links back and forth which snowball into a complex web of interaction
Exchange analysis	Comments and posts that turn into discussions, but also blog events, and bloggers using other media such as email, texting, etc. to communicate with each other
Language (discourse) analysis	Linguistic structures in posts and comments

Table 1: Examples for Herring’s Paradigms for Web Content Analysis (WebCA). Adapted from Herring “Web Content Analysis.”

argues that in any existing system, blog researchers have had to adapt methodologies to fit their own needs.<sup>28</sup> WebCA is no exception, and in this paper Herring’s paradigm will be applied and expanded to include “food analysis,” as the topic of food plays a defining role in the medium through how it portrays the unique character and community of a food blog. Herring’s theory will be used as a reference in tandem with Goffman’s concepts to analyze interaction and identity in the two blogs in question.

Blogging activity can also be framed using Erving Goffman’s concepts to describe an individual’s portrayal of self in a society: the self as social ritual, strategic gamesmanship, and dramatic performance.<sup>29</sup> These three metaphors can be studied in blogs by looking at all the components Herring discusses. In blogs, these components express themselves in the form of, among other

things, comments sections, posts, recipes, and their photographs.

The metaphor of social ritual is an engagement in “face-work,” that is the process of performing socially recognized and approved moral acts to improve one’s face (or reputation) in society.<sup>30</sup> The comments section of blogs is where much of the blogging rituals are negotiated – and they are being negotiated because the medium is still relatively new, and social norms are being developed daily. For example, in one post on Stich’s blog “Delicious:Days,” she described a weekend at an Italian villa, which she disclosed as having been paid for by the proprietors. One commenter questioned the ethics of this post-vacation update, to which Stich promptly and directly responded that when “free-bees” are offered, there is no obligation on the blogger’s part to return any favor in posting, and if they do post it is on their

own terms.<sup>31</sup> Her post and response also alluded to several other bloggers joining her in the weekend, which supported her claim to legitimacy.<sup>32</sup> In Goffman's terms, this is known as "saving face": in her response, Stich affirmed her moral face in the blogging group by defending herself against accusations of abusing her blog by becoming free advertising for companies.

The second metaphor Goffman describes is that of the game-like qualities of social interaction. As with games, "serious activities" allow members of the group to portray esteemed qualities while at the same time taking risks publicly for their own gain. The outcome of social interaction is unpredictable, and can only be determined by the myriad players involved. Too much difference amongst those involved and the social encounter is incoherent, and too little difference makes it uninteresting. Successful gamesmanship results in positive interaction and the sense of belonging in a group.<sup>33</sup> This metaphor translates over to food blogging through the bloggers' and readers' daily interactions in comments sections, where common ground is found and experiences are validated through shared vacation stories and suggestions on where to find ingredients and how to use them. However, the act of blogging itself is arguably acting with game-like social strategies, which Adam Roberts addresses head-on:

"[Some of my] posts were dismal failures but they were done in the same spirit as my biggest successes. So the lesson is you've gotta take huge risks and see what happens: sometimes you'll cringe at the lack of response, other times you'll come home and find

60 e-mails in your inbox [...]. Be bold, be daring, and be willing to fail and you will succeed."<sup>34</sup>

Roberts is suggesting that bloggers put themselves out into the blogosphere and make themselves vulnerable with their posts, and sometimes they are validated through readers' comments, and sometimes they are not. However, each post is a strategically written process with the readership's experiences in mind in order to draw the maximum response.

Finally, Goffman uses the metaphor of a dramaturgical performance to explain the portrayal of self. Branaman describes this theory most succinctly:

Performance entails individuals' attempt to impress upon others and often themselves that their character is what they claim, that actions mean what is intended, and that the definition of the situation is what is implicitly claimed.<sup>35</sup>

The most direct way in which these bloggers perform is through their food. As anthropologist Mary Douglas discusses, groups and individuals form strong identities around the foods they eat. Groups form taboos, or "off-limits" foods in order to define (and exclude) participation in the community.<sup>36</sup> Food blogs are no exception: bloggers perform their identities through the recipes they choose to cook, photograph, and share with their readers.

Together, Herring and Goffman's theories provide a foundation from which to begin a discussion of the formulation of an identity and community in food blogs. Some critics might be skeptical that an online identity is in fact a valid

identity that can be researched, given the anonymity and ease with which individuals can lie about themselves online. However, Goffman would argue that claims of self are a result of many different representations in, and influences of, society, and that this creates a dualistic definition of self: the self-as-performer and the self-as-character, most easily described as the person who wears the mask, and the mask itself.<sup>37</sup> We only gain a *sense* of reality through our actions, but they are always framed by the way society perceives us.<sup>38</sup> Thus, online portrayals of self are arguably just as valid as offline portrayals, simply in a different context of social norms and rules.

Questions of the legitimacy and efficacy of Internet communities extend further into the concept of virtual social interaction. Ethnographer Christine Hine argues that many people believe the Internet *encourages* previously existing social interactions; that it promotes the continuation of a conversation from the offline world in the virtual world. However, she points out that it is in fact becoming increasingly clear that the Internet is *causing* social discourse.<sup>39</sup> A great example of this is the blogosphere in which conversations occur within the Internet that would not occur outside of it. Food bloggers who post recipes or restaurant reviews might cook and eat the foods they blog about even if they did not blog, but the virtual conversations, friendships, and the subsequent recipes they cook off of other people's blogs would not occur otherwise. Furthermore, the Internet sparks these conversations because of its ability to overcome obstacles not easily

ignored offline. Geographic distances (though not language differences) are far less important online, allowing users world-wide to engage in conversation. In addition, users can easily find people with common interests through online profiles (unlike in offline settings, where people do not tend to list their likes, dislikes, and hobbies for the world to see). These factors, in addition to the myriad opportunities for engagement in blogs, (including but not limited to blogrolls, comments, and links) invite a community to evolve in a way that is unique to the medium.

#### **Analyzing Food Blogs: "Delicious:Days" and "Cucina Casalinga"**

As a member of the broader food blogging community myself, I acknowledge that my place in this community is both as a member and as a researcher. This provides several positive attributes to this study, including the ability to look at the community as an insider, but with the knowledge and privilege of an academic. Hine argues that an Internet ethnography allows the researcher to observe in ways face-to-face ethnographers cannot, but she points out that at the same time this relinquishes the authority that a researcher's interaction with a community can acquire.<sup>40</sup> However, I maintain that in order to interact with a culture one must use the culture's means of communication. Bloggers and their audiences communicate primarily online, and when offline communication occurs, it usually enriches instead of causes the online experience. Therefore, in the process of analyzing the blogging community, one must use online interaction as a primary source, and



offline forms of communication – when available – to supplement, not to claim authority.

As mentioned, this paper looks at two blogs: “Delicious:Days” and “Cucina Casalinga.” There are many blogs written in German from many different geographic locations. The nature of the blogosphere (and the Internet itself) is that geographic area does not, on the surface, appear to matter. However, a blog analysis shows that these two blogs do portray their own regional influences on their blogs. Both bloggers write out of the same city in Germany and both are employed in high-paying industries (Stich’s day job evolves around internet web design and Nathalie is employed in the banking industry). Despite these similarities, their blogs have vastly different feels to them.



Figure 1: Homepage of Nathalie’s “Cucina Casalinga” blog: <http://cucina-casalinga.blogspot.com/>

Nathalie’s blog is operated by the blog hosting site “Blogger.” She has customized the template she uses, so that readers initially see a banner that reads “Cucina Casalinga” in red lettering with white bordering that is set over a photograph

of chopped fresh vegetables (see Fig. 1).<sup>41</sup> The site’s background color is a pastel yellow, and the other theme colors for the site are orange, red, and green (post titles are orange, links are maroon, and headers are green). The warmth of these colors already induce a reader to think of southern climates, which Nathalie’s blog focuses on through her frequent vacations to Italy, and her home cooking, which is heavily influenced by that country. Nathalie does not post advertising on her blog, but has links to blog events, blog monitoring sites that she is listed in, and Google followers. She gives her readers the option of following her through RSS feeds (“Real Simple Syndication” or “Rich Site Summary”), so that they know when she has updated without having to check her website every day.<sup>42</sup>

Stich’s blog is stylistically very different from Nathalie’s (see Fig. 2). She has designed and built her blog herself, with her partner Oliver Seidel. The left two thirds of her banner has the title of her blog in white over a photograph that changes monthly. In February 2010, the picture was of a pink flower, and the color scheme

of her website had pink post titles and links, and light gray headers. This color scheme also changes monthly with the photograph, and has been both purple and green, always in pastel shades. Each

post is labeled with one or more grey and white circular icon that corresponds with her ten post categories (from “recipes: savory” to “discoveries”). Above the title, Stich also has a welcome message:

“delicious:days is our playground and will let you take a peek into our steamy kitchen, mouthwatering recipes and delightful nibbles included, all served on a tasty plate. Can you say yum?”

On the far left she has an icon advertising one of her blog’s awards: in February 2009 she was listed fourth in UK’s Time’s Online “50 of the world’s best food blogs.” In the center of her banner she regularly updates a food news feed, and on the far right she rotates advertising her new eponymously titled cookbook, as well as the recently-launched beta version of her recipe organizing software “RecipeShelf” (complete with iPhone application).

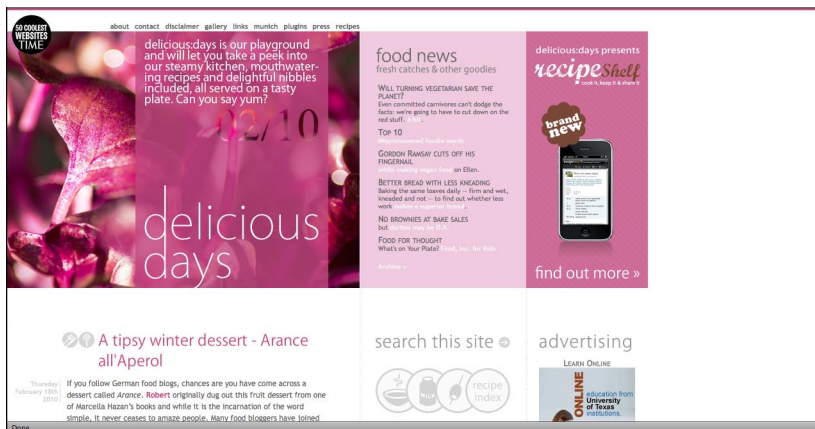


Figure 2: Homepage of Nichole Stich’s “Delicious:Days” blog:  
<http://www.deliciousdays.com/>

Using Herring’s WebCA paradigm and Goffman’s metaphors for social engagement, these blogs can be examined in order to discuss how bloggers Stich and Nathalie portray themselves and

interact with others through the medium of the blog. Specific components of the blog (Herring’s images, themes, features, links, language use, and exchanges) support the two research questions, which provide a contextual framework for Herring’s analysis methodology. Goffman’s metaphors for social participation are used to supplement this analysis.

### Identity: The Portrayal of Self Through Food and Internet

The first research question addresses the identity of the blog and blogger, which can be analyzed using all of Herring’s analysis components, as well as Goffman’s metaphors for self-portrayal in a society. Practically, this analysis looks at elements of blogging such as its features – the title of the blog, the “about” section, and the design of the blog, as well as its language,

and images. As Hine mentions, identity is a difficult category to address on the Internet, since users create their identities online, picking and choosing, and most often filtering, from their offline identities how they want to expose themselves to the virtual world.<sup>43</sup>

This is precisely where Goffman’s use of the mask and the

mask wearer come into play – users of the Internet are picking which mask they choose to portray to their online friends. The analysis of a blogger’s identity is not an attempt to decipher her offline

identity (what Goffman would call the “self-as-performer”), but rather precisely her creation of self as she projects it through her blog (Goffman’s “self-as-character”).<sup>44</sup>

When it is next to impossible to verify someone’s identity, as is usually the case on the Internet, it is necessary to regard the Internet as its own culture and people’s identities on it as their authentic Internet characters—even if they may differ from people’s identities offline. This does not mean that identities should be assumed, but more that identity formation should be looked at as an indicator of who the author is, and (perhaps more importantly) who she wants to be seen as.

Identity is created in almost every component of the blog. For food blogs, perhaps the most important form of identity creation is the foods themselves the bloggers choose to write about. This will be discussed in more detail, but foodways play a large role in a person’s identity in a larger group. Foodways include the entire cultural, economic, and political food system: what we eat, how, when, and with whom are all ways that a person can claim allegiance to, or distance from, a group of people (be it a group of blogs or a nation). Identifying with a particular group’s food is empowering, and simultaneously limiting: it dictates our exposure to various types of foods. However, blogs offer a safe exposure to food to a large and diverse readership.

Nathalie’s blog is an example of what Lucy Long would describe as culinary tourism: she allows her readers to become armchair travelers by viewing her vacation photos, as well as recipes venturing from the daily pasta dinner to the festive homemade duck pate or

vegetable terrine<sup>45</sup>. The foods she writes about define her experiences abroad and at home. For her readers, her posts and photographs show them a world many can relate to: on a post about a trip to the Amalfi Coast in Italy, one commenter responded,<sup>46</sup>

“Oh I love Amalfi! I visited it last February for the first time and was completely fascinated by the colorful ceramics, lemons the size of my fist, the blue ocean... and the food is exactly the same restaurant [as the one you ate in]. I had pasta alla limone :)”<sup>47</sup>

The food Nathalie eats abroad acts as a statement of Nathalie’s identity, and extends into her home kitchen as well. She cooks with high-end ingredients, emphasizing the fresh and homemade. She has labeled some of her posts with the category “Dinner for One,” in which she demonstrates that although she is cooking for herself, she makes herself meals such as veal cutlet with brussels sprouts, and sausage with potato salad. Even when no one is physically joining her to eat, her readers are virtually looking over her shoulder at her food choices. This is an interesting phenomenon, and represents how the online identity that is shaped by offline experiences in turn influences the offline identity as well.

An analysis of a blog’s features also displays its author’s identity. From the title, which is the first glimpse a reader has of the blogger, to the layout, which shows what the blogger finds important to put where, the way a blog looks and reads is arguably just as important as its content. The title “Delicious:Days” invokes a sense of a rich cache of food, but also accompanies Stich and Seidel’s stylish

sense of design and mouth-watering photographs. “Cucina Casalinga” references the Italian influences in Nathalie’s food, and her professed love of vacation south of the Alps.



Figure 3: Stich’s “Food News” section on “Delicious:Days”

Stich’s blog presents information in a multimodal format: her food news feed (see Fig. 3) at the top of her site is updated more regularly than her posts, and this gives her readers a reason to return to her site while she prepares her next update. Stich also includes lists on the right-hand side of her website, next to her posting section, which include her favorite cookbooks, music, and literature (each linked to Amazon where readers can purchase copies). Her tastes range from the strange and slightly disturbing singer-songwriter Devendra Banhart to “Plates and Dishes,” a book that chronicles the author Stephan Schacher’s

visits to roadside diners around the United States and Canada.

Stich’s posts are similarly eclectic. Updates have included recipes for a variation on Marcella Hazan’s arance fruit dessert,<sup>48</sup> homemade coffee liqueur,<sup>49</sup> and a cold remedy she named Thylehogichi after its ingredients (thyme, lemon, honey, ginger, and chili).<sup>50</sup> These all reflect her welcome statement in her banner, that she is giving her readers a glimpse into her kitchen, but she is also sharing her eye for design.

Nathalie’s design features are less multimodal than Stich’s. The focus of her blog is entirely on her posts. While she has categorized her posts, lists an archive, and links to a couple of blog events and blog monitoring sites, Nathalie does not post information such as her favorite music or books outside of her entries. In order for her to maintain the vacation feel of her blog, she saves posts from her travels for later dates, so that every week or two there is a post on Pompei or Ravenna, even if she is in Munich at the time. Most interestingly, she recently blogged a list of facts about herself, including facts about celebrity crushes (George Clooney) as well as her preferred drinks (room temperature flat water, wine and beer, tea, or drip coffee). At the end of the post, she mentions as an aside:

“And by the way – I write here more or less anonymously, because I don’t want professional acquaintances who Google my name to discover my blog right away. However, I will disclose my identity when asked.”<sup>51</sup>

It is not uncommon for bloggers to maintain a sense of anonymity on their



blogs. While most bloggers do not worry about their blogs affecting their jobs or other parts of their offline life negatively, many simply prefer to keep the two separate.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, and Nathalie admits this herself, her posts are scattered with bits and pieces of personal information. In the comments section of the above-mentioned post, she says

“In reality we read others’ blogs not because of the recipes, but because of the ‘homestories,’ or rather the introductions to the recipes. There is a small voyeur in each of us. ;-)”<sup>53</sup>

This statement complements Goffman’s metaphor that the self that is expressed in society, or here online, is the mask that one wears, and the self that is the internal, or here offline, personality is the performer. Readers always want to know more about the person behind the blog, whether she likes the same music or art as they do, or what she does besides cooking in her spare time. The act of writing a food blog is very much a constant negotiation of how much the online identity reflects the offline identity. A blogger creates her identity not only through the foods she chooses to write about, but the other information about herself that ends up in her posts. Very few bloggers post just a recipe; most add in a short introduction of why they cooked the food, or (at least) edits they have made to the recipe.

Identifying the virtual self is not just about how a blogger writes and presents herself online. In choosing to cook, consume, and write about food, these bloggers are performing an identity on multiple levels. Not only is identity performed in the process of photographing and writing a post, but it is performed

in the kitchen and at the dinner table as well. The very act of eating is performing an identity; for example, two different associations are made in choosing to eat chocolate ice cream or a mango. Both are luxuries, but while the former suggests a childish indulgence, the latter suggests a sophisticated snack. Susan Kalcik ties performance to food choice by pointing out that people choose the foods they eat because of who they are, but also because of who they wish to be.<sup>54</sup> A person eating blood sausage defines herself in different cultures differently – in many parts of Germany, someone eating blood sausage is identified as having a developed palate and being part of the knowledgeable who can value the taste and texture of what is considered there to be a delicacy. However, in the United States the consumption of blood sausage was rejected from the German-American community, because other cultures considered it a taboo food.<sup>55</sup> Thus, in choosing to post about the recipes they cook, the foods they enjoy, and the stores they shop in, food bloggers are constantly negotiating not only their own culture’s foodways, but their readership’s as well. They are engaging in a performance, a sculpting of an identity online that is defined by the foods that end up on their websites.

While one might think then that the process of negotiating so many cultures would create a very bland blogging community of watered-down cultural foods that are agreeable to the masses, this is far from the case. In her article on food as an expression of national identity, Anne Murcott takes the stance that nations are negotiated and imagined by a group, not entities separate from a group.

Furthermore, she argues that print media is a form in which this national identity is discussed, transformed, transported, and deciphered.<sup>56</sup> It is logical here to argue that the Internet plays the same role as print media. Murcott continues by asserting that food as a means of communication is another way of transporting the concept of a national identity. Thus, blogs are a platform on which national foodways are expressed and discussed. Moreover, they are a space where people can safely, without leaving their living rooms, cross over their own traditional cultural boundaries and engage with other foodways. In a restaurant, people have to consume the food they encounter (for a discussion of the aversions to consuming foods from other cultures that challenge one's own, see Douglas, Murcott, and Parasecoli),<sup>57</sup> whereas in a blog, readers can safely be exposed to new foodways without having to challenge their own personal eating culture. Blogs here play a role similar to a magazine or book, but the potential readership is much larger than that of traditional print media.

The medium of the blog offers many features for creating identity aside from its design features and content. The most direct expression of a blogger's identity is in the "about" section. This section is usually a separate page, not a



Figure 4: Blogger Profile for Nathalie of "Cucina Casalinga"

blog post, in which the blogger describes a bit about herself, as well as what the blog is about. Of course, this may or may not be the case for every blog. Nathalie links halfway down her homepage to her "Blogger" profile, which is the only part of her blog that is in English:

Despite its brevity, the profile gives the reader certain information. Nathalie has an established career that does not involve her culinary skills, so cooking is a hobby. She is not too interested in astrology, as it is only mentioned in her profile and not the rest of the blog. She most likely has money at her disposal, as she lives in Munich (one of the most expensive cities to live in Germany), works in banking, and cooks with high-end ingredients from shops like the Hofbräuhaus-Kunstmühle and Käfer, two gourmet specialty food shops in downtown Munich.<sup>58</sup>

Stich's blog "Delicious:Days" offers a foil to Nathalie's "about" section. Hers is accessible on the top left corner of her homepage and takes the reader to a section with the same layout as the rest of the blog. Scrolling down there are three paragraphs in which she introduces herself and her partner, Seidel (who manages the technical aspects of the blog), which are followed by black-and-white pictures of the two. Below this is a series of the dozens of mentions in print media, as well as awards the blog has received. Lastly, there is a series of questions and answers about the technical aspects of the blog, such as what camera they use and how to advertise on the blog.

Stich creates an initial informal feel in her "about" section by focusing on why she started her blog and what her inspirations are. She gives readers an idea of her offline life with phrases such as:

"I'm not a professional cook, my day job revolves around design and the internet business as such, which is my other passion [...] Co-author and technical genius behind this site is Oliver, we've been living together in Munich/Haidhausen since 2000 [...] Long story short, given you like it here on d:d [Delicious:Days], please do come by every now and then to check on new posts - we'd love to see you around."<sup>59</sup>

While Stich's "about" section is much more descriptive than Nathalie's, it ends on a more commercial note: blog advertising. Stich and Seidel run Delicious:Days as a brand, and they are clearly making money out of their "passion," as Stich infers on her blog. In addition to her use of advertisements and awards, Nicky has made and completed a book deal, the process of which she blogged about,<sup>60</sup> which is being published by one of Germany's largest cookbook publishers, Gräfe und Unzer. Although it is a contested subject and some bloggers refuse to advertise on their sites, making money off of blog ads is not necessarily a bad thing; in fact, according to Technorati, the majority of blogs do. European bloggers who advertise make an average of 9,040 USD a year, but most blogs make less than 200 USD.<sup>61</sup> Stich and Seidel sell ad space on their blog for 790 USD a month.<sup>62</sup> Calculating two ad spaces available at a time on the website (which is the current status), they are grossing about 20,000 USD a year. From a financial viewpoint, "Delicious:Days" is a very successful venture, and this does not include revenue from their cookbook, nor from their new recipe software they are soon to debut, that have come out of the blog.

"Delicious:Days" is an example of a blog written more like a branded column of the kind that other English-language blogs such as Adam Roberts' and Clotilde Dusoulier's engage in, whereas Nathalie's blogging style represents one that is more indicative of the diary-writer type. She does not post any advertising, and as such it appears that she makes no money off of her blog. As can be seen in the next section, Nathalie is focusing her blogging on the interactive, hobby aspects of the medium.

The differences between these two blogs can also be seen upon looking more closely at the images these bloggers use, and their subsequent posting themes. When Nicky posts on her blog, she seems to be focused on how it will look on her blog, how it fits together with what she's posted before, and what she'll be posting about next. While Nathalie pays attention to this as well, she mostly just posts what she is having for dinner, or what she decided to try out that afternoon. There are positive aspects to both of these approaches: while the former offers a polished view of the modern German cuisine, the latter shows what is being cooked on a daily basis in the middle class German (or more specifically Bavarian) home.

Much of Stich's posts are written around her incredible photography. The photos of her food set the theme for her writing: a post on roasted bell pepper and chorizo risotto starts with a photo of five impeccable, colorful bell peppers atop a stainless steel workbench (see Fig. 5) and ends with a bowl of risotto that is as nice as a picture of risotto can be.<sup>63</sup> Her post describes how she stumbled upon an easy method for peeling the peppers



Figure 5: Nichole Stich "Roasted bell pepper risotto dating chorizo cubes" Delicious:Days

and how to cook her recipe, with step-by-step pictures along the way. While her posts do not have a thematic trend necessarily – her risotto is followed by squid-ink-dyed grissini – it seems that the colors of her blog and her posts are just as important as the content. This makes for a very stylish, polished blog; her attention to detail in content and design is paramount.

Nathalie, on "Cucina Casalinga," also has many photos on her blog. However, they are not done in a home photo studio, they are shot as she goes about preparing her evening dinner. She intersperses posts on her dinners with posts about her favorite wines, vacations, as well as other kitchen and food-related comments. Nathalie focuses not on style as much

as on giving her readers a glimpse into her kitchen, and how she relates to the food she eats. The frequency of posting plays a role here too: Nathalie posts almost daily, whereas Stich posts only a few times a month. While Stich's photographs are beautiful, it is hard to know what exactly she's eating for dinner. For Nathalie, it is quite simple to figure out: she eats her posts. This is not to say that Nicky does not do the same, but it is hard to imagine she is making pink ravioli desserts<sup>64</sup> and black grissini<sup>65</sup> every night. Nathalie posts about her weeknight fish<sup>66</sup> dinners, but also about her potato puree topped with caviar and lime sauce dish for guests.<sup>67</sup>

From this brief analysis, one can conclude that Nathalie performs herself through her blog by giving her readers a sense of her offline self — in this case not her internal (unmasked) self, but her offline performed self. One could thus argue that there is the internal self, the performed self, and the digital self. This tiered reflection of identity is seen also in Stich's blog; however, she focuses much more on the digital self as a unique identity, rather than the digital self as a reflection of the performed or internal self. This is not to say "Delicious:Days" does not reflect Stich's offline personality, but she shapes and crafts it to reflect perhaps an idealized, designed self online.

This difference in how bloggers navigate the performance of self,



especially in reference to recipe choices and advertising, does not seem to create too much tension in the general blogosphere. Each blogger tends to understand that her blog identity is unique, and that there are countless ways to blog. Both blogs use different features of the medium to shape their virtual identity for the reader, and give glimpses of their offline identities as well.

### **Interaction: Meaningful Community-Building Online**

The second research question is how these two bloggers interact with other bloggers and readers. Herring's six components again can be used in this case, most specifically looking at links, exchanges, and language use. Specifically, interaction can be measured by looking at blogrolls, comments, and blogging memes. Because of the complexity of blogging, and the inability to know exactly who reads the blog and therefore who is in the blogging community, it is hard to pin down interaction. However, by looking at blogrolls, how and under what circumstances bloggers link to each other, and the kinds of blog memes they participate in, it is possible to come up with general conclusions.

To begin with, one easy way to know what interests a blogger is by looking at her blogroll. The blogroll is a list of blogs that the blogger finds interesting and posts somewhere on her site. In addition to being able to hop and jump from blog to blog all afternoon, it is a great way to study the intricate web of interaction. Nathalie lists seventy-seven food blogs on her site. Separately, she lists seven blogs on other topics. Of the food blogs listed there are six written in Italian,

three in French, and one in English. "Delicious:Days" is not included in her blogroll (neither is "Cucina Casalinga" listed on Stich's blog). Overall, it can be deduced from Nathalie's blog that her priority in creating connections with people is to interact with people who are interested in similar topics as she is. Most of the blogs she links to use blog hosts like Blogger, TypePad, or WordPress and thus have similar aesthetics to her own blog. Many of the bloggers she links to also comment on her posts and vice versa (as will be discussed later on).

Many bloggers maintain that the best way to get on their blogroll is to put them on your own. However, this does not hold up on more popular blogs like "Delicious:Days." While this might be considered a snub in most situations, when a blog attains a certain level of popularity, it is considered common sense for the blogger not to post all blogs that are linked to her because otherwise the blogroll would take up the whole blog. Stich lists twenty food blogs on her website and, in a separate list, twenty blogs on other topics. She directly addresses how blogs are listed on her site in the FAQ section of her "about" page:

"Neither threats work nor tons of chocolate, wait, chocolate may actually work. In other words, *delicious:days* is my playground and the links displayed in the blog roll are in fact part of my regular reading routine. As it changes, so will the links."<sup>68</sup>

For Stich, her blogroll is organic, and reflects her tastes and interests, not a desire to connect with other bloggers. "Delicious:Days" is writing for an audience, and expressing her own

identity through her interactions with others.

The comment sections for both of these blogs are quite active, but in different ways. Over ten consecutive posts, 32 people posted comments (some multiple times) on "Cucina Casalinga." Nathalie's posts received an average of 5.5 comments, almost a third of those who commented posted more than once, and 20% of commenting readers (6 people) posted four or more times. In comparison, 162 individuals left comments on ten consecutive posts on "Delicious:Days". Each post received on average 19.6 comments, with 16% returning commenters, and only 0.02% (3 readers) posting four or more times. While initially one would conclude that because Stich receives, on average, almost four times as many comments as Nathalie, that her community is more significant, but this is not necessarily true. Here again, Herring provides a useful framework from which to approach looking at these comments in terms of community: she argues that an online community includes measurable participation, a shared history, solidarity, criticism and conflict, a group's self-awareness, and a set of roles and hierarchy.<sup>69</sup> Both comment sections of "Cucina Casalinga" and "Delicious:Days" exhibit all of these behaviors, but they build into two different kinds of online communities.

Nathalie's commenters share a tangible history through reading and commenting on her blog, but also because Nathalie does the same on her readers' blogs. Those who comment most frequently on Nathalie's blogs are bloggers who Nathalie reads regularly herself, and who she links to on her blogroll (and

vice versa). This shows solidarity on the part of both people involved (reader and blogger), in addition to a set of roles and norms. When Nathalie comments in her own comment section, she usually responds to all who have commented<sup>70</sup> and has the final say on the topic. Nathalie's discussion of the element of voyeurism involved in reading and writing blogs is an example of the group's self-awareness: an open discussion and agreement of why participants in the group blog and read blogs.

In Stich's blog, participation can be measured by the number of comments posted, but the shared history is more often one in which a commenter who has been a long-time reader will post for the first time. Stich's posts, not the individual interactions with or amongst her readers, become the shared historical foundation. Conflicts occur, such as the reader who questioned the ethics of Stich's weekend paid getaway, but overall solidarity is displayed through comments like "kaltmamsell's" in response to Stich's cold-remedy: "Please consider it a iron proof [sic] of the trust I have in you that I will actually try this. Appetizing is not exactly what it sounds. But if you say so. Erm – thanks."<sup>71</sup> Through these same interactions, roles and hierarchies are established: Stich not only is an authority figure as the blogger, but her readers' comments displaying trust, or thanking her for a new recipe, solidify her status as a knowledgeable and helpful person. Just as Nathalie has the final say in her blog, so does Stich when she responds to comments (she does not respond to each comment, but does answer questions).

Not only do Nathalie and Stich's interactions fall into Herring's definition

of communal behavior, but they also fit into Goffman's concepts for the portrayal of the self. Rituals are established in the blogosphere and followed: spoken and unspoken rules such as "respond to all comments within reason," "blog regularly," "cite your sources." Identities are performed and confirmed on these blogs through comments as well. In fact, an example is one in which the two bloggers in question are interacting: Nathalie posted a comment on Stich's blog regarding finding a rare fruit mentioned in Stich's post in a local Munich specialty food store, Käfer. This high-end store stocks expensive, hard-to-find, high-quality meats, produce, and grocery items. To shop there is to perform the part of a member of the more affluent, food-conscious sector of society. Stich returned Nathalie's comment by confirming that she, too, had found the ingredient at Käfer.<sup>72</sup>

In addition to blogrolls and comments sections, blog events play an important and unique role in interaction on food blogs. Blog memes, in a chain mail format such as surveys, questionnaires, or quizzes, exist in blogs with other themes as well as other Internet media such as email. In some cases these blog events are called "blog carnivals;"<sup>73</sup> however, blog memes in food blogs are usually referred to as "blog events." Blog events are something that initially derived (in the food blog world, that is ) out of some early events that bloggers put together as a way of playing around with this new form of community. Events are theme posts, organized by one blogger, to which other bloggers submit their own posts around the theme. In the food blogosphere, the first blog event on record was called "Is

My Blog Burning?" (IMBB for short). It first started with Alberto of the blog Il Forno, and a post of his in which he explained how interesting it would be to harness the power of creativity among food bloggers into a

"[...] day where, just for the fun [sic], bloggers take up a certain theme and come up with a recipe (original or not) for it. It would be really interesting to see what people from different backgrounds come up with and a great chance to get new ideas."<sup>74</sup>

This seems like a normal segue today, but in the 2004 food blog world it was quite revolutionary: an Italian's soup recipe was posted side-by-side with a German's and they could be tried out and compared simultaneously. Not only was this a new form of expression, but it was popular precisely because it exploited what already made blogging popular: it was yet another way to use the medium to give voice to an individual, and to hear other individuals' voices in return. Bloggers jumped at the chance, and the inaugural event included thirteen participants blogging about soup. By the time IMBB was phased out, the last event on cooking with tea had over ninety participants. Another event that still continues today is Sugar High Friday, which began later in 2004 but is one of the longest-running food blog events on the web. Some bloggers who typically blog in other languages (including "Cucina Casalinga" among other German bloggers) have participated in these events by blogging in English, while others write their additions in their own languages. However, blog events by no means have to be held in English,

and German food bloggers have created countless fascinating blog events. Today, IMBB has turned into a website of its own,<sup>75</sup> run by other food bloggers than the original Alberto, and tracks blog memes all over the Internet.

Notably, of the two blogs being analyzed here, only “Cucina Casalinga” regularly participates in these events. “Delicious:Days” does not, with the exception of Sugar High Friday, one of which she has hosted on her own blog. Hosts and creators of blog events will often make banners that participants can post on their websites like ads<sup>76</sup>, not only to notify their readers of their participation, but also to spread the word about the event so other bloggers can submit their own posts. At one point in spring 2009, “Cucina Casalinga” advertised the following: “Dein Kochbuch das unbekannte Wesen” (DKduW), “Fremdkochen,” and “räuchern gestattet.” The first is a monthly event in which bloggers post about a recipe out of one of their cookbooks (the title references the fact that bloggers tend to have many neglected cookbooks); the second is in its second month and is an event in which bloggers cook a recipe from another blog that conforms to the month’s theme and cook it, which culminates in the host creating a PDF cookbook of all the recipes;<sup>77</sup> and the third is a reaction to a law passed in Germany to ban smoking in restaurants and is a meme on smoking different foods.<sup>78</sup>

All of these blog events serve to encourage the virtual community, precisely as bloggers intended them to. Not only do participants get to see what others are cooking, but it is a sure-fire way to get hits to their blogs, thereby

increasing their own involvement in and exposure to the community. Whether or not a blogger wants to use the blog as a medium for profit, almost all bloggers want to be seen and read regularly. To become involved with blogging events is one way of being a part of the conversation. Furthermore, blog events represent a way in which bloggers participate in Goffman’s theory that individuals perform an identity in social settings. Which blog event, how often, and on what topic bloggers participate in are all ways in which bloggers choose to perform certain roles and rituals in this virtual social setting.

One very interesting blog event that occurred four times is “Deutsche schicken sich gegenseitig Fresspakete” (freely translated by Rosa from the English: German Blogging By Post),<sup>79</sup> which came out of a European-wide event called Euro Blogging By Post.<sup>80</sup> This event steps out of the virtual realm and into the bloggers’ physical kitchens: bloggers sign up for the meme, the host creates an elaborate scheme “Secret Santa” style, and bloggers have a certain amount of time to put together and send packages (preferably reflecting their gastronomic region of Germany) by regular postal service to their assigned blogger. In return, they receive a package from a different blogger, which they photograph and blog about, posting their reactions and, in some cases, recipes in which they cooked with received ingredients.

This kind of interaction is Jenkins’ “convergence culture” at its core: using virtual and offline modes of communication to create a community of bloggers that transcends one singular medium. While in some ways, this offline



communication can be seen as establishing the blogging community (it is “finally” becoming something “real”), it is in fact just another way of taking advantage of all the forms of communication available today. Subsequently bloggers have used other media such as Twitter,<sup>81</sup> mobile phone cameras,<sup>82</sup> Facebook,<sup>83</sup> and so forth to communicate in multiple ways with each other and the reading audience.

Whatever the medium used to communicate, the food blogosphere is vast and intricate, and interaction within it deserves a much closer look. Even within the much smaller German food blogosphere, it is the many ways in which members can interact that makes the community viable, not to mention vibrant.

### Conclusion

Although the history of food blogs is very short, they have evolved into a valid medium from which to study how an individual creates an identity and interacts with others through their food and the Internet. “Delicious:Days” and “Cucina Casalinga” are two different examples of how food bloggers shape their identities within a virtual community. Using Herring’s Web Content Analysis framework, as well as Goffman’s social theories on the performance of self, one can see that these bloggers are shaping their identities and involving themselves in communities online in ways that they otherwise could not have done offline.

In “Delicious:Days”, Stich represents a digital self that she has shaped from her offline self to portray an idealized world with her partner in her Munich/Haidhausen apartment. Stich’s posts and her responses to comments are in the

manner of a knowledgeable acquaintance, not as much someone who is writing for peers. A traditional reference for this would be someone who is a newspaper columnist: Stich is a person readers can identify with, but also someone who has perfected the lifestyle and community she represents on her blog.

Nathalie’s “Cucina Casalinga” is an example of the diary-writer blog. She posts daily about her meals, wines, and travels, and, as a consequence, Nathalie shares much of her offline self. Her focus online is to connect with peers who have similar interests and hobbies as she does, and she seeks out Internet conversations with others. Her participation in blog events, and her back-and-forth comments with other bloggers suggest that she is involving herself fully in all of the communicative aspects food blogging has to offer.

Both of these bloggers work hard to shape their identities and their involvement with their readers. It cannot be argued that one expression is superior to the other, nor should it be. These are simply two different ways in which to engage with the same medium. These two blogs in themselves provide a rich treasure chest to study how people can shape and share their identities online in different ways through writing, photography, and design.

### Notes

- 1 Clotilde Dusoulier, "Chocolate & Zucchini: Daily Adventures in a Parisian Kitchen," *Chocolate & Zucchini*, 6 November 2006, <[http://chocolateandzucchini.com/archives/2006/11/chocolate\\_zucchini\\_daily\\_adventures\\_in\\_a\\_parisian\\_kitchen.php](http://chocolateandzucchini.com/archives/2006/11/chocolate_zucchini_daily_adventures_in_a_parisian_kitchen.php)> (October 13, 2009). Clotilde Dusoulier, "Clotilde's Edible Adventures in Paris," *Chocolate & Zucchini*, 22 April 2008 <[http://chocolateandzucchini.com/archives/2008/04/clotildes\\_edible\\_adventures\\_in\\_paris.php](http://chocolateandzucchini.com/archives/2008/04/clotildes_edible_adventures_in_paris.php)> (October 13, 2009).
- 2 Adam Roberts, "The Big Reveal: Introducing the FN Dish," *Amateur Gourmet*, 18 February 2008. <[http://www.amateurgourmet.com/2008/02/the\\_big\\_reveal.html](http://www.amateurgourmet.com/2008/02/the_big_reveal.html)> (October 13, 2009).
- 3 It is assumed here that these bloggers are engaging in an online community. However it should be acknowledged that "online community" is a term that is questioned in literature. For a thorough discussion of the term and the issues surrounding definitions of online communities, see Herring 2004, Crystal 2006, and Gruber 2008.
- 4 Another example of convergence culture would be smartphones, which use Internet- and computer-based technologies to allow their users not only to use the devices as phones, but also planners, social networking devices, and sources of information among countless other features.
- 5 Nathalie blogs without a last name, and as such she will be referred to only with her first name.

6 Computer-Mediated-Communication (CMC) is a term used for all interaction that uses computers, especially through the Internet. Crystal categorizes genres of the Internet and CMC as email, chat groups, virtual worlds, the web (www), instant messaging, and blogs.

7 Herring 1994: 350.

8 This would have bode questions of which blogs to include in this data set: Would a "German blog" only be one written inside Germany, or include Austria and Switzerland? Would a blog written in English by a German-speaking expatriate in Southeast Asia be considered a "German blog"? Furthermore, once these definitions had been chosen, it would have been just as difficult if not impossible to determine that all of the existing blogs were found, and how to provide meaningful context for analysis. The Internet is far too large to ensure certainty of gathering a complete data set of this kind.

9 See Sarah Pederson and Caroline Macafee's 2007 "Gender Differences in British Blogging," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12: 1472-1492.

10 Rebecca Blood's 2002 "Weblogs: A History and Perspective," in *We've Got Blog: How Weblogs Are Changing Our Culture*, edited by John Rodzvilla (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Pub.) 8.

11 Ibid.

12 "State of the Blogosphere 2008," *Technorati*, 22 September 2008, <<http://technorati.com/blogging/state-of-the-blogosphere/>> (October 13, 2009).

13 Pedersen and Macafee, 1493. Pedersen and Macafee notes that Technorati ranks blogs

by popularity, and popularity is measured in how many incoming links a blog has. Furthermore, studies have shown that men's blogs tend to be linked to more, and discussed more frequently in mainstream media than women's. This can account for the different statistics.

14 "State of the Blogosphere 2008," *Technorati*, 22 September 2008, <<http://technorati.com/blogging/state-of-the-blogosphere/>> (October 13, 2009).

15 Ibid.

16 Elise Bauer, *Simply Recipes*, <<http://www.elise.com/recipes/>> (13 October 2009).

17 Kalyn Denny *Kalyn's Kitchen*, <<http://kalynskitchen.blogspot.com/>> (13 October 2009).

18 Alanna Kellogg *Kitchen Parade*, <<http://kitchenparade.com/>> (13 October 2009).

19 "About Us," *Foodbuzz.com*, <<http://www.foodbuzz.com/pages/about>> (13 October 2009).

20 Blogging memes are like chain mail for the blogosphere, and their role in food blogs will be discussed further on in this paper.

21 "Essen und Trinken," *Topblogs.de*, <<http://www.topblogs.de/category/essen-und-trinken/>> (27 February 2010).

22 See Jenkins 2006: 3 and Herring, 1994.

23 See Branaman 1997: xliii.

24 Henry Jenkins, 2006: 3.

25 See Herring 1994, Crystal 2006, and Gruber, 2008.

26 See Herring 1994 and 2010.

27 See Herring 1994

28 Herring 1994: 11.

29 Branaman 1997: xliii.

30 Branaman 1997: lxvii-lxviii.

31 This is not only a topic that is played out amongst those participating in the blogosphere, but is one that the FTC has weighed in on as well. It recommends all blogs to have a disclosure policy regarding free gifts and other uses for blogs as potential marketing tools. For a complete discussion of these policies, see <http://blog.disclosurepolicy.org/>.

32 Nicole Stich, *Delicious:Days*, "Days of Bliss – Don Alfonso 1890," <<http://www.deliciousdays.com/archives/2009/11/13/days-of-bliss-don-alfonso-1890/>> (27 February 2010).

33 Branaman 1997: lxxi.

34 Adam Roberts, "How to Make Your Food Blog Popular," *Amateur Gourmet*, 8 October 2007. <[http://www.amateurgourmet.com/2007/10/how\\_to\\_make\\_you.html](http://www.amateurgourmet.com/2007/10/how_to_make_you.html)> (27 February 2010).

35 Branaman 1997: lxiv.

36 Douglas 1984

37 Branaman 1997: xlviii.

38 Branaman 1997: lxxv.

39 Hine 2000: 7.

40 Hine 2000: 48.

41 This banner recently changed from a background photograph of fresh chilies. It was the first banner change since she created the blog.

42 For a description of RSS feeds and how they are used in the Internet, see *What Is RSS?* <<http://www.whatisrss.com/>> (27 February 2010).

43 Hine 2000: 8.

44 Branaman 1997: xlviii. Furthermore, henceforth bloggers will be referred to with female pronouns, as both bloggers in this study are women.

45 See Long, 2003.

46 Translations are the author's unless otherwise noted.

47 Nathalie, "I-Amalfi" *Cucina Casalinga* 7 February 2010 < <http://cucina-casalinga.blogspot.com/2010/02/i-amalfi.html>> (27 February 2010).

48 Nicole Stich, "A Topsy Winter Dessert – Arance All'Aperol" *Delicious:Days*, <<http://www.deliciousdays.com/archives/2010/02/18/a-topsy-winter-dessert-arance-allaperol/>> (27 February 2010).

49 Nicole Stich, "Cooking with the Guys: Part Two – Homemade Coffee Liqueur" *Delicious:Days*, <<http://www.deliciousdays.com/archives/2009/11/26/cooking-with-the-guys-part-two-homemade-coffee-liqueur/>> (27 February 2010).

50 Nicole Stich, "Thylehogichi – or how to fight a nasty cold" *Delicious:Days*, <<http://www.deliciousdays.com/archives/2010/02/09/thylehogichi-or-how-to-fight-a-nasty-cold/>> (27 February 2010).

51 Nathalie, "Peppinellas Wahnsinnsliste," *Cucina Casalinga*, < <http://cucina-casalinga.blogspot.com/2010/01/peppinellas-wahnsinnsliste.html>> (27 February 2010).

52 See Technorati 2008.

53 Nathalie, "Peppinellas Wahnsinnsliste," *Cucina Casalinga*, < <http://cucina-casalinga.blogspot.com/2010/01/peppinellas-wahnsinnsliste.html>> (27 February 2010).

54 Kalcik, 1984:50.

55 Ibid. 40.

56 Murcott, 1996: 63.

57 Douglas 1984; Murcott, 64; and Parasecoli 2008: 127.

58 Nathalie, "Hofbräuhaus Kunstmühle und Viktualienmarkt," *Cucina Casalinga*, 2 September 2008, <<http://cucina-casalinga.blogspot.com/2008/09/hofbrumhle-und-viktualienmarkt.html>> (13 October 2009).

59 Stich, Nicole, "About," *Delicious Days*, <<http://www.deliciousdays.com/about/>> 13 October 2009.

60 Nicole Stich, "Archive for 'my cookbook,'" *Delicious:Days*, <<http://www.deliciousdays.com/archives/category/my-cookbook/>> (13 October, 2009).

61 Technorati, 2008.

62 That they are selling ad space in US dollars suggests that their target readership is in the United States, not Germany.

63 Nicole Stich, "Roasted Bell Pepper Risotto Dating Chorizo Cubes," *Delicious Days*, 23 December 2008, <<http://www.deliciousdays.com/archives/2008/12/23/roasted-bell-pepper-risotto-dating-chorizo-cubes/>> (13 October 2009).

64 Nicole Stich, "Pink Pasta – IMBB No. 2," *Delicious Days*, 27 January 2006, <<http://www.deliciousdays.com/archives/2006/01/27/pink-pasta-imbb-no22/>> (13 October 2009).

65 Nicole Stich, "Paint It Black – Grissini," *Delicious Days*, 8 January 2009, <<http://www.deliciousdays.com/archives/2009/01/08/paint-it-black-grissini/>> (13 October 2009).

66 Nathalie, "Riesen-Forelle aus dem Ofen," *Cucina Casalinga*, 7 August 2008, <<http://cucina-casalinga.blogspot.com/2008/08/mein-erster-post-seit-einiger-zeit-habe.html>> (13 October 2009).

67 Nathalie, "Kartoffeltörtchen mit Kaviar in Limettensauce," *Cucina Casalinga*, 1 March 2010, < <http://cucina-casalinga.blogspot.com>



com/2010/03/kartoffeltortchen-mit-kaviar-in.html > (1 March 2010).

68 Stich, Nicole, "About," *Delicious Days*, <<http://www.deliciousdays.com/about/>> 13 October 2009.

69 Herring 1994: 356.

70 Interestingly, this is a norm that is expressed in one of Stich's own posts titled "Foodblogging do's and don'ts," in which she lays out guidelines similar to Adam Roberts' ones on how to write a successful blog.

71 kaltmamsell, in "Thylehogichi – or how to fight a nasty cold," *Delicious:Days*, 9 February, 2010< <http://www.deliciousdays.com/archives/2010/02/09/thylehogichi-or-how-to-fight-a-nasty-cold/#comments>> (27 February, 2010)

72 Nathalie and Nichole Stich, in "And then she asked me if I wanted to try some..." *Delicious:Days*, 17 March, 2009, <<http://www.deliciousdays.com/archives/2009/03/17/and-then-she-asked-me-if-i-wanted-to-try-some/>> (27 February 2010).

73 Samuel Van Der Wall, "RPG Blog Carnival, May 2009: The Future Of Roleplaying," *Roleplaying Pro*, 1 May, 2009, <<http://www.roleplayingpro.com/2009/05/01/rpg-blog-carnival-may-2009-the-future-of-roleplaying/>> (12 March 2010).

74 Alberto, "Proposal for a Blog Cooking Day," *Il Forno*, 26 January 2004, <[http://ilforno.typepad.com/il\\_forno/2004/01/proposal\\_for\\_a\\_.html](http://ilforno.typepad.com/il_forno/2004/01/proposal_for_a_.html)> (13 October 2009).

75 Andrew Barrow and Ronald, *Is My Blog Burning?*, <<http://www.ismyblogburning.com/>> (13 October, 2009.)

76 However, unlike ads, there is no explicit revenue made with these banner ads, nor

is there any explicit revenue made in the blogging meme in general.

77 The name "Fremdkochen" is a play on words referring to the verb "fremdgehen," which means to be unfaithful.

78 Here again this is a play on words: formerly, restaurant smoking sections would have signs saying "Rauchen Gestattet," meaning "smoking allowed." "Räuchern Gestattet" literally translates to the same phrase, but "Räuchern" means to smoke and/or cure foods.

79 Rosa, "GBBP – DssgFP 1," *Neuhausener Nudelsuppe*, 28 March 2006, <<http://www.schnuppensuppe.de/blog/index.php?itemid=230>> (13 October 2009).

80 Andrew Barrow, "Euro Blogging By Post 1 – The Round-Up," *Spittoon*, 4 August 2005, <[http://www.spittoon.biz/euro\\_blogging\\_by\\_post\\_1\\_the\\_ro.html](http://www.spittoon.biz/euro_blogging_by_post_1_the_ro.html)> (13 October 2009).

81 Pim Té, "Chez Pim", *Twitter*, <<http://twitter.com/chezpim>> (13 October 2009).

82 Clotilde Dusoulier, *Clotilde's Moblog*, <<http://chocolateandzucchini.com/moblog/>> (13 October 2009).

83 Adam Roberts, "A.G. on Facebook," *Amateur Gourmet*, 30 August 2007, <[http://www.amateurgourmet.com/2007/08/ag\\_on\\_facebook.html](http://www.amateurgourmet.com/2007/08/ag_on_facebook.html)> (13 October 2009).

### **Works Cited**

Alberto. Proposal for a Blog Cooking Day. *Il Forno*. 26 January 2004. <[http://ilforno.typepad.com/il\\_forno/2004/01/proposal\\_for\\_a\\_.html](http://ilforno.typepad.com/il_forno/2004/01/proposal_for_a_.html)> (13 October 2009).

- Barrow, Andrew and Ronald. *Is My Blog Burning?* <<http://www.ismyblogburning.com/>> (13 October, 2009).
- Bauer, Elise. *Simply Recipes*. <<http://www.elise.com/recipes/>> (13 October 2009).
- Branaman, Ann. 1997. Goffman's Social Theory. In *The Goffman Reader*. Edited by Charles Lemert and Ann Branaman. Malden, MA Blackwell Publishing.
- Crystal, David. 2006. *Language and the Internet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Denny, Kalyn. *Kalyn's Kitchen*. <<http://kalynskitchen.blogspot.com/>> (13 October 2009).
- Douglas, Mary. 1984. Pollution. In *Food in the Social Order*. Edited by Mary Douglas. Russel Sage Foundation.
- Chocolate and Zucchini. <<http://www.chocolateandzucchini.com>> (13 October 2009).
- Dusoulier, Clotilde. Clotilde's Moblog. <<http://chocolateandzucchini.com/moblog/>> (13 October 2009).
- Foodbuzz. About Us. *Foodbuzz.com*. <<http://www.foodbuzz.com/pages/about>> (13 October 2009).
- Gruber, Helmut. 2008. Analyzing Communication in the New Media. In *Qualitative Discourse Analysis in the Social Sciences*. Edited by Ruth Wodak and Michal Krzyzanowski. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hine, Christine. 2000. *Virtual Ethnography*. London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE.
- Herring, Susan C. 2004. Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis: An Approach to Researching Online Behavior. In *Designing for Virtual Communities in the Service of Learning*. Edited by Sasha A. Barab, Rob Kling, and James H. Gray. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 2010. Web Content Analysis: Expanding the Paradigm. In *International Handbook of Internet Research* edited by Jeremy Hunsinger, Lisbeth Klastrup, and Matthew Allen. Springer, forthcoming 2010, Preprint in PDF: <<http://ella.slis.indiana.edu/~herring/webca.2008.pdf>> (20 February 2010).
- Jenkins, Henry. 2006. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press.
- Kalcik, Susan. 1984. Ethnic Foodways in America: Symbol and the Performance of Identity. In *Ethnic and Regional Foodways in the United States : The Performance of Group Identity*. Edited by Linda Keller Brown and Kay Mussell. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.
- Kellogg, Alanna. *Kitchen Parade*. <<http://kitchenparade.com/>> (13 October 2009).
- Long, Lucy M. 2003. Culinary Tourism: A Folkloristic Perspective on Eating and Otherness. In *Culinary Tourism*. Edited by Lucy M. Long. University of Kentucky Press.
- Murcott, Anne. 1996. Food as an Expression of National Identity. In *The Future of the Nation State: Essays on Cultural Pluralism and*

- Political Integration/*. Edited by Sverker Gustavsson and Leif Lewin. London, UK: Routledge: 63.
- Nathalie. *Cucina Casalinga*. < <http://cucina-casalinga.blogspot.com/>> (27 February 2010).
- Parasecoli, Fabio. 2008. *Bite Me: Food in Popular Culture*. Oxford, UK: Berg.
- Pederson, Sarah and Caroline Macafee. 2007. Gender Differences in British Blogging. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12 (2007): 1472-1492.
- Roberts, Adam. *The Amateur Gourmet*. <<http://www.amateurgourmet.com>> (13 October 2009).
- Rodzvilla, John (ed.). 2002. *We've Got Blog : How Weblogs Are Changing Our Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Pub..
- Rosa. GBBP – DssgFP 1. *Neuhausener Nudelsuppe*. 28 March 2006. <<http://www.schnuppensuppe.de/blog/index.php?itemid=230>> (13 October 2009).
- Stich, Nichole. *Delicious:Days*. <<http://www.deliciousdays.com>> (27 February 2010).
- Té, Pim. Chez Pim. *Twitter*. <<http://twitter.com/chezpim>> (13 October 2009).
- Technorati. State of the Blogosphere 2008. *Technorati*. 22 September 2008. < <http://technorati.com/blogging/state-of-the-blogosphere/>> (13 October 2009).
- Topblogs. Essen und Trinken. *Topblogs.de*. < <http://www.topblogs.de/category/essen-und-trinken/>> (27 February 2010).
- Van Der Wall, Samuel. RPG Blog Carnival, May 2009: The Future Of Roleplaying. *Roleplaying Pro*. 1 May, 2009. <<http://www.roleplayingpro.com/2009/05/01/rpg-blog-carnival-may-2009-the-future-of-roleplaying/>> (12 March 2010).
- What Is RSS? <<http://www.whatisrss.com/>> (27 February 2010)

## Response

---

**Lucy M. Long**

*Bowling Green State University*

**B**logs are a new form of expression that to those not versed in them may seem to be a perplexing use of one's time—sort of like writing in a diary and leaving it open, hoping someone will read it. To those involved with blogging, this form opens new ways of interacting with the world, of representing the self, and constructing community. Food, perhaps because of the universality of eating, is a particularly popular topic of blogs, some of which have turned into books, writing careers, and even films (for example, the award winning, *Julie and Julia*).

McGaughey, in this essay, explores the world of food blogs, explaining how they do more than simply relate experiences about food. She argues that they bring together physical and virtual realities into a convergence culture that is unique both to and within the blogosphere. Her discussion centers on two facets of blogging: the ways in which a personal identity can be constructed and expressed through blogs and the interactions surrounding blogs as constituting communities. She also asserts that food blogs are unique as a blog genre in that they both draw from and “overflow” into real life as well as other cultural forms, such as cookbooks, films, and published memoirs. Her observations are insightful and useful. I add to them here some perspectives from folkloristics on representation of self and notions of community that may further help us understand the popularity of this phenomenon.

First, blogs in general allow for representations of self that appear to be freed from the usual constraints of race, class, gender, or other external forces. The blogger can be whoever they want to be, focusing their identity on their relationship to food and their ability to write about it in an engaging way. They can disguise their personal attributes and craft an imagined persona. In a sense, this is not unique to blogs—we all do this to a certain extent in social spaces in which we are new or in public. McGaughey draws from Goffman's “front and back stages” concept here, applying them to virtual space. One feature that is distinctive to the new media is that, while the “stage” offers physical distance between bloggers and readers, it oftentimes offers ways for readers to discover more about those bloggers. Various search engines can be used to fill out their identity, finding their location, their occupational or educational background, and more personal social networking sites. Ironically, too, as a blogger develops more of their own voice, their on-line personality becomes more multi-dimensional, with off-line activities and identities referenced. An intimacy can then develop on-line that seems to cut through the usual mediators of appearance, personality style, or social skill leading to feelings of experiencing the authentic self more in on-line than face-to-face interactions. This feeling of authenticity can be powerful enough to draw individuals back to the virtual reality found in the blogosphere.

McGaughey recognizes that there are different approaches to blogs. One of the points of her paper is that two bloggers she analyzes as case studies demonstrate very different expectations for how



readers will respond to and use their writings. One is more informational; the other is more personable and invites interaction. Not all bloggers are seeking a virtual intimacy, but may be seeking creative outlets, or, even possible markets for their writing or ideas. The power of blogs, though, is that they allow us to speak for ourselves, not through someone else's translation of our voice.

Another way of looking at blogging that I suggest is an adaption of Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's notion of "objects of memory." Like arranging souvenirs into a collage, photos in an album, or knickknacks on a shelf, blogging offers a way to select from our experiences to construct a logical narrative of our lives, to make sense of our personal histories; we are here now because of things that happened in the past. They help us recognize the significance of past events, people, places, or even objects that may have at the time seemed mundane or trivial. They also help us hold on to feelings experienced at particular times in our pasts, letting us remember things that were special. Although this may sound like an overstatement, such objects of memory offer a way to affirm the fact that we exist and that our lives might hold some meaning. This gives deep psychological reasons for why we hold onto seemingly useless or worthless items. Blogs are similar. We can look back over them to see what we were feeling in the past, to find ways that we have grown, to see how networks have developed.

The second major theme McGaughey addresses is the idea of a community developing around blogging. We should perhaps ask here why the word "community" is being used—is this

a "native genre" used by bloggers themselves or is it an academic construct imposed upon this group of people by the writer? Why not use sociologist George Simmel's phrase "affinity group" that describes groups that form around a single common interest and then develop into dense social relationships?

In the popular imagination, the word "community" tends to be a vague concept referencing "warm and fuzzy" relationships. It can be a concrete, physical entity—a bounded, defined geographic area, such as a neighborhood—but community implies a welcoming atmosphere, a friendly neighborliness that goes beyond simply co-existence to caring for one another and a sense of mutual responsibility. Ideally, community provides the feeling that one has a place in life and matters to others, that one can expect acceptance and understanding when interacting with other members of that community. Using "community" to refer to groups of individuals, who read the same blog and respond to it, might seem to be stretching the concept, but I hear people talk about their online communities as places where they feel they can relax with friends. The fact that the virtual community is totally voluntary and can also be turned off and on according to the individual's own needs and interests makes it even more appealing than the "real" world in which the individual may have much less control. They can be part of it according to their own level of interest.

This voluntariness raises questions about the accuracy of the term as a scholarly concept. Folklorists Paul Jordan-Smith and Laurel Horton, in an analysis of music and dance groups, observed

that the participants themselves self-identified as part of a “community” when they felt a strong emotional connection between their own identity and the other participants (2001:103). The authors also borrow from Etienne Wenger to describe these groups as then becoming “communities of practice” (1998) with “a stable network of interpersonal relationships and a common body of semantically important resources for interpreting meaning” (2001: 105). The last idea expressed may be particularly relevant to McGaughey’s descriptions of food blogs. Perhaps, readers are drawn to them because they feel they share a way of looking at the world—food is important enough to write about, read about, and even argue about. The fact that online discussions intersect with and overflow into “real life” by individuals cooking and tasting foods included in the blog is even more affirmation of a common lens for evaluating the world outside the virtual one.

McGaughey’s article sheds much needed light on a phenomenon that is increasingly becoming a significant part of people’s personal and social lives. She also demonstrates ways in which food blogs offer opportunities for new ways of interacting around food, ways that will perhaps become increasingly important as the world continues to become fractured yet connected through globalization.

### Works Cited

- Jordan-Smith, Paul and Laurel Horton. 2001. Material Expressions of Communality Among Dance Groups. *Western Folklore* 60: 203-26.
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. 1989. Objects of Memory: Material Culture as Life Review. In *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: A Reader*. Edited by Elliot Oring. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press.
- Wenger, Etienne. 1998. *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

# UFO-Abduction Narratives and the Technology of Tradition<sup>1</sup>

Kimberly Ball

University of California, Irvine

## Abstract

*This article examines UFO-abduction narratives posted to online discussion fora, and argues that these narratives reflect millennial anxieties over an anticipated hyper-technological future figured as "alien." In particular, UFO-abduction narratives reflect concerns over developments in those technologies used to transmit information over space and time, i.e., technologies of tradition. These narratives thus thematize the circumstances of their own transmission, and developments in the transmission of traditional lore more generally.*

The first to point out a connection between UFO phenomena and the supernatural phenomena of tradition was astronomer Jacques Vallee, who, in 1969, suggested that the similarity among accounts of UFOs, demons, angels, fairies, and ghosts provides evidence against the extraterrestrial hypothesis of UFO origins (Vallee 1969). Folklorists have since heeded Linda Dégh's call to study reports of encounters with UFOs and those who pilot them as legends, hence as part of a tradition of anomalous-experience narratives describing human dealings with unusual beings of various kinds (Dégh 1977). In particular, Thomas Bullard and Peter Rojcewicz have contributed to an understanding of

the links between UFO- and fairy-lore, observing that informants' descriptions of aliens bear a remarkable resemblance to traditional accounts of anthropomorphic supernaturals, not least in the propensity of both groups to abduct human beings (Bullard 1989; Rojcewicz 1991).

A major factor distinguishing the two groups is the aliens' use of highly advanced technology, which is, from a human standpoint, futuristic. Accordingly, several scholars have interpreted the UFO-abduction narrative as a reaction to technological change, in one form or another (Dean 1998, 126-52; Luckhurst 1998, 38-40; Bullard 2000, 156-7; Barbeito 2005, 206-10; Dewan 2006, 197; Kelley-Romano 2006, 394; Brown 2007, 70-82, 85-99). I would like to contribute to this conversation by proposing that these narratives are especially concerned with developments in those technologies used to transmit information over space and time—what I am terming "technologies of tradition." I introduce this term to refer to any device for conveying knowledge or culture from one context into another, and to serve as a reminder that technology is intrinsic to tradition, even if it is only that most fundamental technology of tradition: language. Casting the matter in this way discourages the tendency to see technology as opposed to tradition, and allows the anxieties engendered by recent developments in new media to be contextualized within a long history of anxiety over changes to the ways in which elements of the past are brought into the future. The latest major development in the technology of tradition is the advent of the Internet, which represents the culmination of advancements in two spheres: digital

Cultural Analysis 9 (2010): 99-128

© 2010 by The University of California.

All rights reserved

information technology and mass media. Through an analysis of various motifs, I will argue that UFO-abduction narratives express anxieties over the rapid changes in these two spheres during the period in which these stories have been told, from the mid-twentieth century to the present. In particular, I argue that these narratives thematize the circumstances of their own transmission, which occurs today in large part via the Internet.<sup>2</sup>

Though referencing studies published by abduction investigators, this article focuses on the UFO-abduction narrative as it exists online, where numerous sites host discussion fora in which participants report their own and comment on one another's abduction experiences.<sup>3</sup> I have amassed a database of a little over 200 abduction narratives from English-language discussion fora, each of which is embedded in or, indeed, constituted by a discussion with multiple participants. Online-forum participants contribute their narratives spontaneously in an informal setting, responding to questions and comments from other participants who stand on a more or less equal footing with themselves. Instead of playing an active role, the researcher may choose, as I have done, to stand outside this process. As Jan Fernback and Trevor Blank have individually observed, the online discussion forum is therefore an ideal site to study legend, a genre that unfolds in conversation, often as a debate regarding matters of contested ontological status which informants might feel abashed to discuss in the presence of the academic researcher (Fernback 2003; Blank 2007). Despite these inherent advantages, there has thus far been little study of legends on the Internet. The UFO-abduction nar-

rative is a particularly apt subject for such a study, and a legend of particular interest at this time, in that it confronts one of the central concerns of our age: humanity's transformation through its engagement with technology.

### **Technology vs. Humanity**

Reports of anomalous objects in the skies go back at least as far as the description of Ezekiel's visions in the Old Testament, and the extraterrestrial hypothesis was adduced as early as the nineteenth century, when mysterious "airships" were sighted over various locations in the United States and presumed in the popular press to contain emissaries from other planets (Ezekiel 1, 4-28 NRSV; Sanarov 1981, 163; Denzler 2001, 5-6). The beginning of the UFO era is, however, usually dated to 1947, when "flying saucers" were first described by pilot Kenneth Arnold, who saw a group of disc-shaped objects above the Cascade Mountain range in the state of Washington; later that year stories surfaced about a crashed alien saucer in Roswell, New Mexico (Arnold and Palmer 1952; Coates 2001, vii). First-hand accounts of contact with the occupants of these craft began to appear in the 1950s and initially described benevolent beings who proffered gentle advice to willing human interlocutors (Leslie and Adamski 1953; Angelluci 1955)—but reports of a more sinister kind soon started to emerge. The best known UFO-abduction report of this era, and the first to exhibit a pattern that has since become familiar, was made in 1961 by Betty and Barney Hill, who, under hypnotic regression, told psychiatrist Benjamin Simon of being taken off a New Hampshire road by aliens who used mind control to force the



couple into their craft and subject them to medical examination (Fuller 1966).<sup>4</sup> Several similar accounts gained wide publicity in the 1970s, and in the 1980s and 90s UFO-abduction narratives became almost commonplace, as investigators obtained stories from hundreds of individuals who underwent hypnosis to recall periods of “missing time” they suspected might indicate alien interference with their memories.<sup>5</sup> Today, UFO-abduction narratives flourish online.

The UFO-abduction narrative is, then, a phenomenon of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. What distinguishes this era from previous eras is the proliferation of increasingly sophisticated technology and its growing presence in the daily lives of ordinary people. When the modern UFO era began in 1947, many of the household electronic devices in use today had already been developed, but ownership of these devices was not widespread, even in relatively wealthy countries. Advances in mass production in the 1950s and 60s together with increased prosperity in the wake of World War II greatly expanded the presence and number of such items in the average homes of industrialized nations. Electronic television sets, for example, became available for purchase by the general public in the 1930s, but the proportion of U.S. households owning televisions in 1950 was just 10%, increasing rapidly to 94% by 1965 (Steinberg 1980). By 2005, ownership had increased only slightly, to 98%, but the average number of televisions per household had grown to 2.6 (U.S. Census Bureau 2008). Other technologies have taken longer to infiltrate the home. The 1940s saw the beginnings of computer technology, but it

was not until the introduction of the microchip in 1975 that the home computer became a possibility. In 1984, just 20% of Americans used a computer, and most of this usage was confined to the workplace, but by 2007 this number had increased to 80%, with 76% of Americans owning personal computers (U.S. Census Bureau 1988; Pew Research Center 2007). Even more intimate than technology in the home, the use of technology in the body also increased dramatically during this period. The first electric pacemaker was implanted in a heart patient in 1958. Today, roughly 250,000 cardiac pacemakers are surgically implanted each year, and the use of other medical implants, such as neurological stimulators and cochlear devices, is growing (Haddad, Houben, and Serdijn 2006, 38). Perhaps the most startling developments have occurred in the realm of assisted reproductive technology, or ART. Since the birth of the first “test-tube baby” in 1978, an issue of great controversy at the time, in-vitro fertilization has become a relatively routine practice, especially in Europe and the United States, with some 200,000 ART babies born worldwide in 2004 (Horsey 2006).

Our current idea of the future is, logically, one in which technological advancement has continued apace, and technology has become embedded even more thoroughly in every aspect of our everyday existence. The aliens in UFO-abduction narratives, with their high-tech devices that allow them to intrude into the most intimate realms of human life (the interior of the home, the interior of the body, the “recesses of the mind”) aptly represent this vision of a hyper-technological future. UFO-abduction-forum participants regularly comment on

the advanced state of alien technology, which they attempt to contextualize by estimating how far in the future human beings might be expected to reach similar levels of technical expertise. AmentiHall, for example, characterizes aliens as possessing “technology and mental faculties far exceeding our own from hundreds to thousands of years,” while LooseLipsSinkShips puts a finer point on it, stating that the aliens use “technology that is roughly 2,500 years more advanced than where we are in the year 2007” (AmentiHall 2009; LooseLipsSinkShips 2007). Bart5050 goes further still:

If a species reached the industrial age say four billion years ago, manipulating the physical laws might be simple. We manipulate the physical laws of the universe every time we turn on a PC. Scale that up a few billion years. (Bart5050 2009, Post 9)<sup>6</sup>

The aliens in these narratives wield a futuristic array of high-tech devices, and it is their highly advanced technology that allows them to come to this world in the first place, but their connections with technology go further than this. Aliens also tend to exhibit the traits of technology. A common motif in both UFO-abduction narratives and popular representations of aliens—from the pod people of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* to *Star Trek*’s Spock—is that aliens lack emotion. This lack is usually regarded as connected with alien intelligence. As abductee and discussion-forum participant Mark Larson puts it:

[The aliens are] just a group of people without emotions. They lack emotion and are curious about our emotions: happy, sad, uneasy, frightened, love,

hate. What we have for emotions they have for intelligence. That’s the compromise. (Larson 2007)

Larson expresses a dichotomy that is common to both the human/alien and human/machine distinctions in the popular imagination. We anthropomorphize machines in terms of “intelligence,” imagining that there could be a consciousness at work in the computer or the robot, but we are less able to imagine a machine consciousness capable of emotion, which is felt to be more deeply human than reason. Lack of emotion links the alien and the machine. In the discourse surrounding UFO-abduction, this similarity prompts speculation as to the aliens’ true “nature.”

In an online discussion of the seeming affectlessness of the “Gray” aliens who usually figure in abduction narratives, Advancer states that “the Grayling must be seen as a robot controlled by a cowardly being, for this is what they are - nothing more than flesh with no free mind” (Advancer 2009). Roberto21 describes his alien abductors as “small beings who behaved, as always, in a totally robotic, mechanical way” (Roberto21 2009, Post 32). Bart5050 conjectures that they are beings “specifically engineered to make long journeys and gather material,” while Angel opines that the Grays may be “clones,” because “they all look the same” (Bart5050 2009, Post 3; Angel 2006). In line with this idea and noting Bridget Brown’s characterization of the Grays as “an army of uniformity,” scholar Patricia Barbeito suggests that this sameness “identifies [the aliens] as symbols of the effects of mass freproduction,” a symbolism that is reinforced in “hybrid-

ization" narratives, which confront human beings with their own "technical reproducibility" (Brown 1997, 5; Barbeito 2005, 206-7).

The engineering of humanity is the central theme in the "hybridization" narrative, as Stephanie Kelley-Romano terms those abduction stories in which aliens act to save their own species from extinction through a human-alien interbreeding project (Kelley-Romano 2006, 394-7).<sup>7</sup> During many abductions the reproductive systems of both sexes are examined at length, and ova and sometimes embryos are removed from female abductees while sperm is collected from males (Bullard 1989, 156; Rojcewicz 1991, 493). Some narratives go further, describing how fetuses resulting from the aliens' breeding program are implanted in and then harvested from female abductees before being placed in a high-tech facility abduction investigator David Jacobs terms the "incubatorium" (Jacobs 1992, 153). The scale of the incubatorium's "mass reproduction" is emphasized in the online narrative of Rz Blade, who reports having seen aboard a UFO "shelves and shelves full of babies in jars—thousands and thousands of them" (Rz Blade 2007).<sup>8</sup> Aliens are like devices or copies of a prototype rather than individual organic beings, and they treat their human abductees correspondingly as things to be mechanically reproduced and manipulated.

Another dramatic example of this is when aliens simply "switch off" people whom they do not wish to abduct but who are present during an abduction, rendering them unconscious or at least immobile for a time (Hopkins 1987, 34-5, 97, 110-11; Jacobs 1992, 55, 71). Abduc-

tion-forum contributor HighlanderConspiritor describes the experience thus:

[I] was with a friend, camping in my back garden. Bright lights above our heads. All I remember was he went nuts, screaming about aliens, while I just suddenly couldn't move and fell into a sort of deep sleep, totally numb with no thoughts while awake at the same time. Aware of things, if you know what I mean. I just remember being stood over for a long time by very tall thin people, and then waking up with my mate crying in the corner of the tent. (HighlanderConspiritor 2005)

The aliens' ability to reproduce and manipulate human beings in mechanical ways suggests the technologization of humanity, a suggestion reinforced by the terminology used to describe what aliens do to abductees in several narratives posted online. Dark Knight, for example, reports that aliens are "overwriting" her thoughts and performing a "data download" into her mind, while Phil describes a procedure in which a Gray "programs" an abductee by staring into his eyes (Dark Knight 2008; Phil 2009).<sup>9</sup> Aliens are, moreover, said to implant humans with tiny devices, which are supposed to locate, monitor, and/or control abductees (Hopkins 1987, 59). In one forum it is speculated that an abductee might have a "micro-stargate installed by aliens" in her uterus as part of the hybridization program (OmegaLogos 2009). The alterations made to abductee Cliff Dess are more thorough:

I had my left eye removed from the socket and things threaded through the optic nerve. Things were pushed

down the back of my throat and a fine needle which was pushed up through the table that I was lying on was inserted into the back of my neck [...] I have some of the most sophisticated technology integrated into my body that is state of the art [...] I believe the procedures that were performed on me were an advanced way of monitoring us. They are able to see what I see, hear what I hear and speak, so I am a prisoner inside my own existence. I do not believe that I am the only one with this technology integrated within. I believe this is being done rampantly throughout society to certain individuals who may be a threat to their agenda. (Dess 2007)

Many abductees feel that they have been electrically charged as a result of such implants or other alien procedures, and that this charge causes the equipment around them to sometimes malfunction (WorldShadow 2007; Dreamforaday 2009; Koval321 2009; Roberto21 2009: Post 1.). In a related phenomenon, abductees report hearing electrical sounds before, during, and after their abductions, and one abductee sporadically sees “wavelengths” or “grid lines...like on a computer,” after the aliens have “altered” him (Smersh 2008; Cravemor 2009; Mamasong 2009; NCDreamer38 2009; Proustwouldlikesumtea 2009). Such technologization may ultimately render human beings as affectless as aliens, for Dark Knight claims: “I also have not felt my emotions since the attacks started in 1998” (Dark Knight 2008).

The de-humanization of humanity through alien technology is a theme that is regularly discussed in UFO-abduction fora. In a story reminiscent of fairy changeling legends (ML 5085), abductee

Cliff Dess relates that during his childhood his mother was periodically replaced with a “clone” who acted “robotically” while his true mother was used by the aliens in their breeding program (Dess 2007). In Dess’s narrative, it turns out that humans are being replaced on a much larger scale, for Dess sees alien/human hybrids, whom he identifies in part through their “robotic” actions, intermingling with the human population wherever he goes, and one such hybrid communicates telepathically with Dess’s wife, telling her that “humans are becoming outnumbered” (Ibid.). Indeed, at one point Dess laments the decline of humanity into mindless consumerism and emotional coldness—which is part of the alien plot—with the statement that “we are becoming the hybrids of the future” (Ibid.). On another forum, Red expresses a similar idea:

We are all stressed out, but what is driving so many people over the edge? I have been called paranoid and delusional, and sometimes it hurts. But I stand by my theory that we here on Planet Earth are being invaded. They are using advanced technology to warp our minds, and to turn us against one another. (Red 2007)

In UFO-abduction narratives, it is technology’s increasing capacity to affect and alter humanity on many levels that the aliens, as the machine-like representatives of a high-tech future, portend. I propose that these narratives are especially concerned with the effects of developments in those technologies used to transmit information over space and time—what I am terming technologies of tradition. After all, what aliens seek during abduction is, largely, information.



### Aliens and Information Technology

Aliens gather various kinds of information during abductions. They study human anatomy at length and collect physical samples, especially of reproductive materials providing genetic information. Aliens are also interested in the knowledge humans possess, but rather than ask abductees questions, aliens often resort to a technique Jacobs refers to as “information transfer” (Jacobs 1992: 197). Sometimes this is accomplished through special equipment, as in the case of Roberto21, who describes the following experience aboard a UFO:

I was also able to see my whole life projected into images, extremely fast. I had the feeling that everything inside my brain, past memories, sensations, experiences, was also being watched and recorded by some kind of a device linked to me through the chair I was sitting on. (Roberto21 2009: Post 1)

Here, information is conveyed not through oral, written, or even telepathic communication, but as a kind of download, as from one machine to another. Information may also be transferred wirelessly, as it were, through a procedure Jacobs terms “mindscan,” during which an alien stares deeply into an abductee’s eyes, leaving abductees with the feeling that “data” has been “extracted from their minds” (Jacobs 1992: 97). Adding to the technological quality of this process is the mindscan interface, i.e., the aliens’ eyes.

The eyes are perhaps the most commented-upon feature of alien anatomy. Most abductees describe alien eyes as enormous and uniformly black, taking up most of the alien’s face (Bullard 1987,

243-4; Jacobs 1992, 223). Many, like abductee John\_Doe, remember the eyes as an especially frightening aspect of the abduction experience:

It had eyes that were big and almond shaped [...] there were no pupils. Its eyes were black and void, showing no signs of feeling [...] I still get nightmares of this entity looking at me (John\_Doe 2009A)

Noting the eyes’ seeming hardness and reflectivity, some abductees have likened them to an artificial covering of some kind, such as glass or plastic (Hopkins 1981: 189-90):

To me, it looked like they were wearing a very hard, shiny helmet around their heads –so I wasn’t really seeing the real head, and it looked like they had coverings on their eyes. They had the classical large, black, almond shaped eyes – but to me they looked like coverings. (Alexis\_Amy 2009)

In short, alien eyes resemble blank screens.<sup>10</sup> The interface between human and alien during information gathering is therefore akin to the screens that serve as interface between humans and various devices used to transmit and receive information: the television, the computer, the mobile phone. Abductees often report seeing a bluish glow during abduction, which mimics the glow from such a screen in a darkened room (GenericallyMajestic 2009; Roberto21 2009, Post 1; Ibeleave 2009; Spacemushrooms 2009; John\_Doe 2009A). And just as one usually confronts a blank screen before beginning an experience with information technology, the aliens’ eyes often serve as a gateway into the abduction experience

(Jacobs 1992: 96). The experience of abductee Mark Larson is typical:

I was about eleven years old when I woke up to a strangely, dimly lit room with three Grays over my bed, two on one side, the third "leader" on the right-hand side. My older brother was about ten feet from me in his bed sleeping. I gasped to holler out and tried to flex myself from my bed. I was paralyzed from the neck down and nothing came out of my mouth, no noise. My vocal cords were completely shut off. The three Grays were just bending their heads staring at me, like they could read my mind, their eyes wide and big. (Larson 2007)<sup>11</sup>

In addition to gathering information, aliens also use their eyes to implant visions, feelings, and thoughts into their human subjects, constituting a data-transfer in the other direction (Jacobs 1992: 99-106, 143-50, 197). This is what happened during the abduction of Funky-Zoo:

Then I suddenly woke up and I saw this short being, about 70 to 80 centimeters, in front of my bed looking into my eyes. At first I was terrified, thinking, what is this thing going to do to me? But then, while looking in its eyes, these calming thoughts came into my head. I remember thinking, "he is a good guy; he's here to help you; he won't hurt you; you're safe now." I remember looking in its eyes was very relaxing. (Funky-Zoo 2009)

The alien eye is the interface for a two-way exchange of information, much like the screens that serve as interface between humans and the digital database. The digital database is the defining technological breakthrough of the "Information Age,"

constituting a revolutionary development in the technology of tradition. The beginnings of digital information technology can be traced to machines built in the 1940s, the decade when the modern UFO phenomenon began. The development of Internet technology, which profoundly increases the scope and power of the database, starts with the United States' establishment of ARPA (the Advanced Research Projects Agency)<sup>12</sup> in 1958 as part of the Cold War quest to supersede Soviet technology, motivated in part by the USSR's Sputnik launches. The development of cyberspace is thus linked at the outset to the conquest of outer space. It is the speed of computer technology and its capacity to process through great expanses of information in brief periods of time that make possible the digital database; correspondingly it is the ability of Internet technology to transmit information rapidly through space that radically increases access to the digital database. These features of the database are mirrored in the great speed at which UFOs are reported to travel and the vast distances they are said to cover, indicating a power for transmitting information unparalleled in previous technologies of tradition. But there can be a horrific aspect to the inhuman scale of such power, and UFO-abduction narratives are, for the most part, horror stories.

To be abducted is to be overwhelmed by technology. Aliens almost never use bodily force to capture human beings, but rather rely on special devices beyond human ken to render humans helpless. A beam of light is sometimes used to transport abductees to the aliens' ship, or a mysterious technology is used to paralyze humans so that the aliens may do

their work unimpeded, as in the case of AmentiHall:

The next occurrence was a battle of battles. It changed my life and my perception of everything. I, as a soul, was fighting for my life, for control of my body. This being horribly violated my entire body and was attempting to control me. I was in my body but POWERLESS. The technology it used was beyond my comprehension. There was a loud frequency “scratching” or “crash sound” in my brain. (AmentiHall 2009)

During capture, and during information gathering, many abductees report feeling similarly “overwhelmed” by the hypnotic power of the aliens’ screen-like eyes, which they are “powerless” to resist (Jacobs 1992: 98-9). The information abductees receive from aliens can also be overwhelming, as in the experience of Dark Knight, during her “data download”:

I was inundated with swirling 3D shapes and numerous background sounds, very confusing, very disorienting [...] the movement, swirling shapes and noise, I couldn’t concentrate. Everything to overload your senses so you just shut down. (Dark Knight 2008)

In the often nightmarish terms of the UFO-abduction narrative, humanity is opposed to the alien technologies that threaten to overwhelm it, just as the latest technologies of tradition are so often seen as threatening to overwhelm and alter basic elements of our humanity, and our connection to the past. This perception goes back at least as far as Plato’s *Phaedrus*, in which Socrates tells how the

King of Egypt once warned that the technology of writing would make people forgetful insofar as they would become dependent on “external marks that are *alien* to themselves” (graphēs exōthen hup’ allotriōn tupōn), rather than relying on their own powers of memory (Plato 274e).<sup>13</sup> Walter Ong has pointed out that concerns over computer technology mirror the concerns over writing expressed in the *Phaedrus*, in that both technologies are seen to “provide an external resource for what ought to be [an] internal resource,” and in both cases “give-and-take between real persons” is replaced with something “unreal” and “unnatural” (Ong [1982], 78-9). The alienness of the UFO and its pilots stands for the perceived unnaturalness of the latest technologies of tradition, and their power to alienate by to some extent replacing face-to-face oral interaction as a means for transmitting information. In this respect, UFO-abduction narratives serve as commentaries on the circumstances of their own transmission, for these narratives are transmitted mainly through mass media.

### UFOs and Mass Media

Torunn Selberg has observed that in a number of narratives relating UFO sightings in 1991 near Bergen, Norway, references to the mass media provided the specific orientation in space and time characteristic of the legend genre (Selberg 1993, 114). Selberg cites several instances where the narrator sets the scene with reference to a particular television or radio program to which he or she was paying attention just before sighting the UFO, as in the following:

And when I was sitting here and was about to start following the program "Window on the World"...And I was sitting here and watching the start of that program. Then I saw, out of the corner of my eye, a cluster of white blinking lights... (Selberg 1993, 110)<sup>14</sup>

Sometimes, as in the case of online-discussion-forum contributor All-Natural, mass media transmissions alert abductees to the fact that they have had a "missing time" experience:

I was watching the History Channel, a two-hour biography of the life of Nero. After a few minutes of watching it I got bored because I'd already seen that the day before. So I went outside in their backyard to enjoy the view of the city [...] I sat on one of the lawn chairs for about 30 minutes [...] Then suddenly the wind stopped and I had an annoying ringing noise in my head. Also I had a headache. I just felt weird. It's kind of like the feeling you get when you realize you're on the floor after you fainted [...] When I looked at the TV the biography of Nero already passed! It's impossible after sitting for 20-30 minutes a two-hour biography ended. (All-Natural 2008A)

Another kind of mass-media referencing is found in the UFO-abduction narrative of online-discussion-forum contributor Kayla, who, in another move characteristic of the legend genre, reassures her readers of her story's veracity with the following analogy: "I will tell you right now that the experience and the 'aliens' were as realistic as I'm seeing the computer screen right now" (Kayla 2001). In a similar vein, Gabblebee describes her alien abductors as being "as pale as the textbox I'm typing in" (Gabblebee 2009).

On the one hand, the fact that people use references to mass media to verify and to locate the events of UFO narratives spatially and temporally reflects the amount of time people spend engaging with these media, especially at night when most UFO phenomena occur. On the other hand, as is especially evident in the last two examples, the proximity of mass media experiences to UFO experiences in narrative reflects the ways in which this lore is transmitted. Selberg reports that in the case of the Bergen UFO sightings the mass media served to transmit people's experience stories and, by so doing, provided the reference points for many more people to interpret their anomalous experiences as UFO sightings (Selberg 1993, 114). With respect to UFO-abduction narratives, Thomas Bullard notes that "dispersal of this folklore by electronic and printed means has become so important that oral transmission plays only a minor role" (Bullard 1989, 166). Indeed, most abductees first become aware that they have been abducted after encountering an abduction account in the mass media and then beginning to question "missing time" in their own experience; once they are convinced of their own abduction, abductees then typically become avid consumers and producers of abduction narratives in the mass media, increasingly on the Internet (Brown 2007, 178-9, 182). The UFO phenomenon is thus part of a relatively new development in the transmission of folk narrative, one that only becomes possible in the latter twentieth century, whereby the mass media become the primary conduit for some narratives which would have previously been spread mainly through the oral tradition. There are ways in which UFO narratives thematize this development.



C.G. Jung described accounts of UFOs as constituting a “visionary rumour,” that is, “a story that is told all over the world, but differs from an ordinary rumour in that it is expressed in the form of visions, or perhaps owed its existence to them in the first place and is now kept alive by them” (Jung 1959: 19). With this definition, it would seem that any widespread traditional narrative relating a type of anomalous experience that entails a visual component could likewise be termed a “visionary rumour”—but Jung’s emphasis on the visual aspect of UFO phenomena (an aspect which is also brought out in the term “sighting” commonly used to refer to UFO encounters) is peculiarly fitting, for UFO narratives may be regarded as “visionary” in ways that other anomalous experience stories are not. Whereas the anthropomorphic supernatural beings of tradition tend to dwell in the hidden nooks and crannies of the world (in the woods, underwater, beneath the mound, inside the crag), UFOs are on display in the sky, at least potentially visible to many people at once.<sup>15</sup> Jung emphasized the “collective” nature of UFO visions, which frequently involve waves of sightings (Jung 1959: 19-20). This collectivity features prominently in the UFO-dream narrative posted online by Dreamforaday:

I walked over to a large field with a crowd of people standing and looking up at the sky [...] I looked up and saw a bunch of star-like shiny dots [...] I remember feeling a surge of excitement and unusual connection hard to put into words. I kept looking up at the shiny metallic objects gently hovering in the sky [...] I ran home to see what the TV networks say. And indeed, every channel was covering the event.

They were visible to everyone everywhere in the world. There was no panic, no fear, no incidents, no warnings. Just pure awe and excitement. (Dreamforaday 2009)

The sense of “unusual connection” Dreamforaday feels sharing this experience with the crowd in the field deepens into “pure awe and excitement” at the prospect of sharing it with “everyone everywhere in the world.” It is unclear from the narrative whether the UFOs are visible to everyone in their skies or on their television screens, suggesting an equivalence between the two modes of viewing. The UFO in flight, visible by many people and from many perspectives at once, symbolizes the accessibility of information, and the “unusual connection” between people that can result, when the mode of transmission is through mass media.

The history of mass media arguably begins with the printing press, but the range of media transmission does not reach a truly massive scale until the twentieth century with the broadcasting of radio and television, and, most recently, the advent of the World Wide Web. Since the Web went online in 1991, the Internet has become a major mode of transmission for UFO and UFO-abduction narratives. Numerous websites, chatrooms, and discussion fora are devoted to UFO phenomena, and this is part of a larger trend in the transmission of traditional narrative. The mass readability of information posted to the Web, styled “electronic skywriting” by cognitive scientist Stevan Harnad (Harnad 1991), is akin to the mass viewability of the UFO as object in the sky. The proliferation and simultaneous existence of UFO and UFO-abduc-

tion stories on the Web, each providing a unique perspective on the phenomenon, often through the firsthand narration of an individual experience, is akin to the multiple perspectives possible simultaneously of the aerial UFO. But although Internet technology lends itself to such visual analogies, and although the transmission of folk narrative via the Internet is still largely accomplished through the medium of writing, Internet technology may be understood as sharing in some of the characteristics more normally associated with orality/aurality, and these characteristics may be part of what makes this medium so appealing as a mode of transmission for legend.

### **Secondary Orality:**

#### **Community vs. Alienation**

Walter Ong coined the term “secondary orality” in 1982 to refer to that orality “sustained by telephone, radio, television, and other electronic devices that depend for their existence and functioning on writing and print” (Ong [1982], 11). Secondary orality is like the orality of face-to-face communication not only in its use of the spoken word, Ong maintains, but also in “its participatory mystique, its fostering of a communal sense, its concentration on the present moment, and even its use of formulas” (Ibid., 134). Each of these characteristics distinguishes orality, secondary or otherwise, from written modes of communication, according to Ong, as writing presupposes the separation of message-sender from message-receiver in both time and space, making it less present- and less presence-oriented than spoken communication, which is rooted in the temporal and spatial togetherness of face-to-face interac-

tion. Also, the written word is mostly delivered in a form geared toward individual reading, while the spoken word is at least potentially audible to many people at once, especially if it is broadcast through the mass media of radio or television. Thus for Ong, “listening to spoken words forms hearers into a group, a true audience,” whereas “reading written or printed texts turns individuals in on themselves” (Ibid., 134).

Writing in 1982, Ong did not address computer-mediated-communication technologies (CMC)—such as email, texting, and online chatrooms—in his discussion of the differences between orality and literacy, but others have pointed out the ways in which these technologies share in some of the characteristics of orality that Ong identifies, despite their being written modes of communication (Harnad 1991; Langham 1994; Fernback 2003). The speed of CMC approaches that of oral conversation, creating a sense of co-presence in time, while the interface of the screen, with messages co-present in visual space suggests a shared place. The potential for fostering the sense of participation in a temporally and spatially co-present group that characterizes face-to-face orality is thus arguably greater with CMC than with the forms of secondary orality that Ong described in 1982, with the possible exception of telephony. In the age of YouTube, DVRs, and podcasting, as well as the personal viewing/listening device, radio and television audience members may not be listening to a particular program at the same time or place as anyone else. Radio and television, moreover, mostly provide one-way transmissions in contrast to the multi-user communication technology

of CMC, which better approximates the give and take of face-to-face oral conversation. Orality and CMC are also to some extent comparable in terms of their greater accessibility compared to such forms of transmission as literary publishing or television broadcasting, to which contributing access is severely restricted. In these ways CMC brings us back together again from the relative isolation of earlier modes of writing and earlier forms of mass media. The acts of mass-media transmission by which UFO-abduction narratives are spread, especially via the Internet where technology reproduces some of the qualities of face-to-face communication, likewise reunite abductees with their fellow human beings, overcoming to an extent the potential for these technologies to alienate us from one another. The “secondary” sense of togetherness fostered through these technologies thus constitutes a way in which humanity resists being overwhelmed by technology.

Many abductees seem to regard the Internet in this light, as a way to overcome isolation. Abductees often report feeling cut off from their fellow human beings insofar as they cannot talk about their experiences with non-abductees without the fear of ridicule, as in the case of John\_Doe:

Now it's like I want to talk to friends about it, but then again I don't want to be labeled as that crazy guy. So here I am searching for answers on an Internet forum. (John\_Doe 2009B)

Even if non-abductees are willing to offer a sympathetic and non-judgmental ear, they cannot be relied upon to give advice in matters so far beyond the aver-

age person's range of experience. This is why, after abduction, All-Natural turns to the Internet:

I have no idea what happened. The next day I was kind of depressed thinking how my goals in life are so stupid and pointless. I stayed indoors for a few days looking up all over the Internet to find people who I can talk and relate to. Nobody I interact with in my daily life seems to have any answers. (All-Natural 2008B)

The Internet is regarded by abductees as an improvement upon earlier forms of mass media in this regard, because it makes possible interactions among people who, though separated by geography and other circumstances, are united by abduction. Another way in which the Internet constitutes an improvement on previous technologies of tradition is indicated in an online post by Howoulduno:

Technology has changed so much in the last few years that a truer picture of the number of encounters is emerging via the INTERNET [...] My first experience was in 1969, then I read all the UFO books that I could on the matter. I found USA authors very unreliable in their reporting, whereas the INTERNET has many witnesses to these UFOs from their own experiences [...] All the books that I read didn't fit with my encounter, but the INTERNET has shown me that many people have had similar experiences. (Howoulduno 2009)

By creating a vast database of personal accounts, the Internet provides a better idea of abduction's extent, allowing abductees to feel themselves part of a widespread phenomenon rather than isolated

in the singularity of their experiences. Also, the Internet grants a “truer picture” of the nature of abduction, directly from abductees rather than filtered through the writings of abduction investigators. If, as in the case of Howoulduno, this picture better comports with an abductee’s own experience than the picture given elsewhere, the sense of singularity is reduced even further. Abductees use Internet technology to connect with one another and thus overcome feelings of isolation, but is this techno-togetherness really sufficient to counteract the alienating effects of the technology through which it is accomplished? It is important not to paint too bright a picture, for UFO-abduction narratives thematize the circumstances of their own transmission, and these narratives tend to be dark tales. The role of isolation in UFO-abduction narratives indicates that there is no simple resolution to the problem of technological alienation.

The transmission of UFO-abduction narratives through mass media tends to happen when one is physically alone or *as if* alone, increasingly when one is in front of the computer screen interfacing with the online digital database. Likewise, abduction tends to happen when people are alone or as if alone (in group situations, everyone else is “switched off”), confronted by the screen-like eyes of the alien abductor. Of course, anomalous-experience stories in general tend to begin with the isolation of the protagonist. The person traveling alone at night through the forest is far more likely to meet up with the anthropomorphic supernaturals than is the person who remains among her fellow humans, indicating that isolation may signal or constitute a norm vio-

lation that makes one liable to encounter an anomalous being. In UFO-abduction narratives, however, isolation is often achieved not through norm violation but through a kind of norm adherence, when an abductee follows the cultural norm of retreating into solitude to utilize technology. In many UFO-abduction narratives, abduction happens when people are interfacing with electronic media, or immediately thereafter:<sup>16</sup>

I was staring at the TV screen when all of a sudden I looked at the doorway and an un-worldly-looking figure was there. (MagicWords55 2009)

I went to my room to play video games to take my mind off of things, and fell asleep in my bed with controller in hand. LOL! Anyway, I woke up again to see a blue-purple face that was in the shape of what a Gray face would look like. (Lionbear 2009)

After about an hour of messing around on the computer, I decided it was time to go to sleep. I shut my computer down [...] then I looked up. I was completely thrown off guard. I was staring at a being. (John-Doe 2009)

It may be that people do feel a certain guilt or uneasiness engaging in what could be construed as anti-social behavior when they isolate themselves physically to interface with technology, and these feelings may play a role in actualizing what is usually a negative abduction experience that in some ways mimics the experience of engaging with technology. Like the use of electronic media, abduction is typically an act of physical



isolation during which abductees are transported away from their fellow human beings and into the alien realm. Even when people are abducted together, like Betty and Barney Hill, the aliens separate them aboard the UFO, placing them in individual rooms to undergo individual procedures and returning them separately to the original point of abduction (Fuller 1966). Sometimes abductees report seeing other unknown abductees aboard the craft, but separation usually obtains among them, as in the narrative of Roberto21:

I woke up and instead of being in my bedroom, I found myself inside a clear glass cylinder [...] I remember desperately trying to get out of the container but I could not move a muscle except for my eyelids. Finally, and all at once by sheer force of will, I was able to regain movement of my limbs. I jumped out of the glass container faster than a spring [...] To my horror, I saw a row of glass containers [...] In each of these clear glass cylinders there was either a man or a woman, lying nude under this dense glowing greenish solution. I panicked and, yelling and screaming like a madman, I began to run towards a window of light I saw at the end of a corridor. It was not easy to get to the light. This place was huge [...] I passed many other containers, all identical to the one I have been in. [...] Just a few steps before I reached the lighted area, still screaming at the top of my voice, two humanoids came to me from the opposite direction. One of them touched me on the shoulder and I passed out immediately. (Roberto21 2009: Post 1)

Like the participants in an online discussion forum, these abductees are united

by abduction, but their union leaves something to be desired. The passive and isolated state the aliens inflict on their human victims mimics the state of sleep, which is fitting given that so many abductees are taken from their beds, but it also evokes engagement with electronic media, during which one tends to be physically (and sometimes mentally) passive, and, increasingly, alone. In Roberto21's narrative, the isolation that the aliens are able to inflict is what saves them, for their human captives outnumber them and would easily overpower them if only they could act in unison. This happens in the home as well as aboard the ship, for abductees commonly cry out during abduction to other people sleeping nearby, who strangely fail to awaken. In these scenarios, abductees feel that if they could only communicate they would not be abducted. This motif is echoed on another level of UFO-abduction discourse, in the opinion expressed by many participants in online discussion fora that if enough abductees will share their stories, abductions can be brought to an end.

The desire to gather as much information as possible about the phenomenon of abduction in one place, so that ultimately an answer can be found as to what is really going on and abduction can be ended, is expressed again and again on these fora. In a forum on UFOSeek.com, a participant named Jeff refers to his attempts to compile a comprehensive record of his own in a "big book":

The big book is actually everything I have experienced personally over the past 37 years. I wrote it because I was forgetting too many important answers, and when I come across people

like you and the rest on this forum, it allows me to open up and give you everything I've experienced in hope that this information would be of great value to everyone here. (Jeff 2009)

The idea behind the book is appreciated, but the technology of the book is considered outmoded by another participant, Miro, who replies:

Hey Jeff, try to imagine the BIG BOOK is here and it is live and it is called the UFOSeek forum. To be helpful we have to come together in one place and work side by side. We should not pull the information away in pieces. All the info needs to stay here to help anyone who will freely enter our forum [...] I just think that this kind of research can never be finished by one person. (Miro 2009A and 2009B)

Community is seen here not as an end in itself, but as a means to understanding and ultimately overcoming abduction. The technology of the Internet is regarded as instrumental in providing an arena where this community can coalesce. Insofar as this community is established online, however, it partakes of the technology that, like abduction, induces isolation, resulting in a circular movement with an uncertain outcome. This tension between isolation and community, with both states linked to technology, runs through UFO-abduction narratives and indicates these stories' significance as meditations on the complex problems of communication in the Information Age. This tension, and its implications for our relationship with the latest technologies of tradition, will be explored in the remainder of this essay through the analysis of one individual's abduction saga.

### **The Case of Raptor\_Evolved**

The complex interplay among themes of isolation, community, and technology is evident in the narrative of abductee Raptor\_Evolved. Raptor identifies himself as "Mexican-American," and states that he was "born and raised in Chicago" (Raptor\_Evolved 2006: Post 1). His earliest abduction experience happens when he is a child visiting relatives in Mexico:

I believe I was about ten in the summer of 1992. It was either a Saturday or a Sunday, but twice every month the entire village has a get-together in the front of the patio of the old Catholic church where we have pozole. You know, a great kind of get-together of sorts where all the adult people dance, laugh, and drink to all hours of the morning, while the kids run around chasing each other. At around 12 AM I remember looking for my dad and telling him I was tired, I wanted to go to sleep. I thought my dad ignored me. He came back a couple seconds later and told me my uncle would take me to their house to go to rest. My uncle also took one of the other villager's kids to drop off at their house which is further down from the road. (Raptor\_Evolved 2006: Post 1)

The celebration Raptor describes at the beginning of his narrative—set as it is in a "village," in front of "the old Catholic church," where the entire community, young and old, gathers to share the traditional pre-Columbian stew known as "pozole"—evokes an earlier era more characterized by face-to-face *communitas* than the Information Age. The sense of community that is established so effectively here is contrasted sharply by the isolation of the following scene:

So my uncle's house is at the end of the village. He has a mezcal field which is the plant that is used to make tequila. He dropped me off at his house and went about his business. I remember resting on the couch reading a book before I went to sleep. It was a book on the history of the Pemex Corp (really boring) when one of the cats started getting really annoyed. It puffed up and ran at one of the doors and started hissing through the glass. I put my book down, went to see what all the fuss was about and saw nothing. I immediately felt strange. I could not describe it back then but I know now it was as if someone was watching me outside. When you look outside through the glass doors you see the mezcal field. Out of curiosity I opened the door and nothing was there. It did seem perhaps strange that the mezcal was waving in the air back and forth even though there was no wind. I was very scared at that moment so I raced back inside and locked all the doors and secured all the windows and turned all the lights on in the house. (Ibid.)

The eerie solitude of the uncle's house, at the edge of the village and bounded by a field, frightens Raptor, oddly, by inducing the sense of his not being alone. His isolation from other human beings exposes Raptor to the sense of a mysterious presence. He seeks solace in a technology that is often used to combat feelings of loneliness, the television:

I then went into my uncle's bedroom and turned the TV on with the lights on. I found all three cats scared underneath the bed. I locked the door to the bedroom. I sat on the bed watching the TV. In my left hand I had a black plastic watch. In my right hand I had the

book. I still had my shoes on. I woke up to the sound of a pickup truck in the driveway. I got up and realized that I had none of the items I mentioned before me, nor did I have my shoes or socks on. The door was open to the bedroom. The cats were nowhere to be found. As I walked down the hallway I looked to the right and on the counter were my items, perfectly lined next to each other. I found my socks, shoes, book, and my watch right next to each other perfectly placed next to each other! (Ibid.)

The television serves to simulate human companionship, but it is sometimes just when people turn to this medium to overcome feelings of loneliness that abduction occurs, bringing them together not with their fellow human beings, but with an uncanny alien presence (Crazyflanger 2007; Jtobias69 2009; Lionbear 2009; Magicwords55 2009). Media scholar Jeffrey Sconce has observed that from their inception electronic media have inspired a sense of mysterious presence or "liveness" that belies their mechanical reality (Sconce 2000). Radio and television in particular, in that they broadcast disembodied voices and images without substance, give the impression that they serve as "gateways to electronic other-worlds" (Ibid., 4). In Raptor's story, his sense of mysterious presence in his uncle's house is followed by an experience with television, which is in turn followed by what he interprets as an abduction. Although Raptor does not seem to purposefully forsake the old-fashioned human togetherness of the village feast in favor of the simulated togetherness of TV, this is the substitution in which he engages. The sense of simulated togetherness the TV provides not only falls short of the to-

getherness achieved through real face-to-face interaction; it brings Raptor together with an alien presence.

The next experience Raptor narrates happens when he is in his twenties and living in the United States. This time, it is when he is trying to move in the opposite direction, from simulated to face-to-face companionship, that abduction occurs:

I was playing some Killzone online on the PS2 when Isaiah called me at around 11:45 PM and asked me to pick him up because he was bored. I decided I was going to pick him up. So after about fifteen minutes or so I suited up and headed outside through my basement apartment. I took a right up the cement stairs then a left down the sidewalk towards the garage. Halfway there I remember looking at the compost heap and deciding that I wasn't going to pick Isaiah up. I turned around and backtracked to the basement. As I approached the staircase I reached to turn the light on which was now on my right. Then I woke up in my car in the garage with all the lights turned off. A split second later I was overcome by the same presence I felt while I was younger, that someone was watching me. (Raptor\_Evolved 2006: Post 10)

Again, Raptor is engaging in the simulated companionship of electronic media, and, again, he experiences a mysterious presence. The automotive motif, evident in his previous abduction story as the means by which he is transported into isolation, makes another appearance. Like the Hill couple whose highly publicized 1961 abduction was among the first to be reported, many abductees are abducted while driving their cars. In

their stories these abductees lose control of their cars, which may slow to a halt or speed off in a different direction, before being forcibly removed from them by aliens.

The automobile is a technology whose power is palpable in its use. Unlike the radio, the television, or the computer, the power of which is more intellectually understood than physically felt, the car grants its user a visceral feeling of the harnessing of technological power. To lose control over this device is immediately and physically dangerous, whereas other technologies present subtler dangers if one's control of them is curtailed. The out-of-control car presents an especially profound and frightening experience, therefore, which may serve to represent other kinds of dangerous impotence with respect to technology. The car may also represent isolation, despite its potential for bringing people together. Although cars may be used to transport people across the distances that separate them, cars isolate their users during travel, keeping people in their own individual containers rather than participating in the communal experience of, say, public transportation. As a mode of transportation, the car may further be understood to represent the isolation of liminality, the space one occupies that is no place, when one is betwixt and between one's point of departure and one's destination. This liminality echoes the placeless space of electronic otherworlds, like that of the online game Raptor plays prior to this abduction experience.

At the beginning of his narrative, Raptor intends to use the car to achieve face-to-face interaction with his friend. It is unclear whether the decision not to



pick up his friend immediately precedes the abduction experience or is part of it, perhaps as an alien-induced course of action, for the vision of the compost heap bears no logical connection to the “decision” although the two events are juxtaposed in the narrative. In any case, a failure to connect ends in abduction, and Raptor awakens in the liminal space of his car, which is not used as a means to achieve connection, as previously intended, but merely as a place to be alone. This automotive motif recurs in a subsequent abduction, the narrative of which begins with Raptor’s decision to leave a friend’s house and drive home:

I was at my friend Marco’s House on a Wednesday sometime in March. After some talk about some ideas for a comic story I decided to head out to my house at around 3:00 A.M. I was kind of hungry so I stopped by Burger King and ordered three Whoppers with cheese. I headed back to my house.

As I turned on the left corner of the alley to park my car in the garage I got to maybe the fifth garage before my garage. And my car stopped completely. I started it again and nothing. I was then again overcome by the same sensation I had before of being watched. My vision turned white and I woke up in my backyard on the bench next to the tree at around 5 A.M. Strange thing is I didn’t wake up. I just came into being.

You know when you wake up you feel groggy. I didn’t. It felt like someone threw me onto the bench or something when I came to. My dad had just opened the back door and was headed

to work in his red van and asked me what I was doing there. I had no answer so he shook his head and ignored me and went to work.

I told Marco what happened after I left his house. He was a little shaken. (Raptor\_Evolved 2006B)

Raptor loses control over his car, but this time, instead of preventing him from seeing a friend, loss of control prevents him from reaching home. It becomes evident here that Raptor lives with his family, so home represents another opportunity for human connection, but Raptor is prevented for a time from making that connection and is again trapped in the liminal space of his car. When he finally does reach home, rather than waking up Raptor “just comes into being”—it is as if he were “switched on” right at that moment. The aliens thus impose a confusing experience on Raptor which is difficult to articulate because it is more mechanical than human. Because he is unable to communicate this experience to his father, and thus provide a suitable response to his father’s inquiry, Raptor’s father “ignores” him, recalling Raptor’s first abduction experience when he thought his father “ignored” him at the community gathering in Mexico. Here as there, an opportunity to connect with another human being is missed. After this experience, however, Raptor does connect with his friend Marco, telling someone for the first time about his strange experiences. As a result of his abduction experiences Raptor decides to spend more time with Marco and thereby avoid being alone. Eventually, alas, Raptor must leave Marco’s company and is again abducted, but

this time his car carries him all the way home:

I arrived at home, parked my Honda Civic in the garage and went inside my house without incident. My pad is in the basement. Turned on the TV, couldn't find anything interesting except infomercials, so I went to my bed to sleep [...] I don't know if I was dreaming or not. I'll explain. I found myself outside of my car. I have a green Civic. I was outside of the driver's-side door. And I didn't have a perception of where I was. To describe it I would have to say emptiness, because there was nothing but me and my car in a black emptiness. (Raptor\_Evolved 2007)

As was the case with his first abduction, Raptor is watching television immediately before his abduction experience. The black void in which Raptor finds himself corresponds to the placelessness of electronic media, and the isolation that typifies the experience of those using them. Raptor finds himself in the void, but he is not exactly alone—his car is there with him, suggesting the “companionship” of technology, and the loneliness of that companionship. In contrast to his previous experiences, this time Raptor does not find himself in his car, but outside it. The car, it turns out, has carried him to a destination of sorts, which is an encounter with aliens:

I looked up at eye level and a mist formed all around me. It formed all around leaving only I would say a foot or so of clearance between me and the mist. I turned to my car. I thought I heard a noise. At that instant I felt the presence I had before of being watched. I rolled my head back around in front

of me. I could tell that there were three figures off in the mist. I could tell they were humanoids but right away I knew they weren't human.

The one on the left moved slightly encircling me to my left. Then the one on the right moved to my extreme right. To describe their movement I would have to say that they seemed to float. Then both the ones on my right and my left stopped and looked at the one in the middle, as if gesturing [to] him to proceed. He moved forward in my direction. Little by little as he moved through the mist I could make out more details. I wasn't afraid at first but I found myself unable to move and I couldn't move, I could only think. The fact that I couldn't move gave a kind of inner panic and I found myself afraid and scared.

Their eyes, their eyes are the most frightening things I have ever seen. They penetrate you as if looking through your very soul. Their skin is rough like a mixture of elephant skin and a reptile's. The one in the middle stopped about a meter away from me and held out his hand close in front of his chest. He was staring at me and cocked his head to the right a little. I could tell he was talking to me.

He asked me why I was afraid. I didn't respond. I tried to think of someplace to put my mind in. I thought of a fireplace and concentrated on thinking about it. I tried to glaze my eyes over to avoid staring into his. He repeated the same thought to me and that I should not act the way I was behaving. I kept thinking about the fireplace and didn't say anything. I could tell they

were trying to get me to go with them. I tried to think of anything, math problems, something to keep my brain active.

The one in front of me I could tell was very disturbed by my behavior. I could tell by the expressions in his face. He rolled his hand back, removing it from my front; his expression changed. He looked slowly to his left and his right, and backed away from me a bit. He cocked his head slightly to the right and said to me why I did not want to go. I replied and said that I didn't want to go with them, I was not interested. He stared at me more intently. I could tell the other two were moving away from me back to the mist. I communicated to him and said no, I was not going to go. I could tell he stopped because I was able to move. His face became expressionless and he slowly faded back into the mist.

I found myself in my garage with car gate still opened, car door still opened, and the car itself was on. (Ibid.)

In this scenario, Raptor cannot move—he can only think. He is no longer a physical presence but only a mental presence, like the alien presence of the electronic otherworld, or like the presence Raptor possesses in the online discussion forum where he tells his narrative. The aliens communicate to Raptor without speaking, as is their wont. Their power, as Raptor acknowledges, is in their eyes. Raptor describes the screen-like eyes of the aliens as “the most frightening things I have ever seen,” and feels he must avoid staring into them lest he fall under their control, evoking the power of the televi-

sion he watched immediately before this abduction experience. The aliens want to take Raptor with them into the misty void, but by keeping his mind “active” Raptor is able to resist abduction and the enforced passivity and isolation it entails. The forces of technology cannot take us out of this world through their powers to divert our attention to an “electronic otherworld” if we won't pay attention to that realm. At the end of this abduction experience, Raptor finds himself isolated, once more, in his car. Raptor's abduction saga began at the community celebration in Mexico and ends here, in the car which is as liminal a “location” as the alien blackness. There is no final return to community within Raptor's narrative; rather, the return to community occurs outside the narrative, in the forum wherein the narrative unfolds.

In the analysis above, I have “isolated” Raptor's narrative from its original context, where it is embedded in an open-ended discussion with many participants. In the forum where Raptor tells his tale, many posters praise Raptor's story for being “realistic,” “authentic,” and “believable,” while others mock his gullibility for believing that certain experiences constitute evidence of abduction. Several participants share their own UFO-sighting and UFO-abduction experiences in response to Raptor's, and one poster offers various theories as to the reasons for abduction. This exchange of praise and criticism, experience and explanation, is characteristic of the online discussion forum, which overcomes to some extent the isolation of the Information Age by bringing people together to engage in the traditional interaction of legend telling. But the question remains, is it enough?

## Conclusion

Although nothing new, fear of technology has intensified as the pace and scope of technological development have increased, especially since the mid-twentieth century, leading to the sense that we are in a time of profound transition, when tradition comes to seem especially problematic. It is feared that what has been brought forward out of the past and into the present will be lost in a future where advancements in technology will overwhelm humanity, changing it into something unrecognizable as human, into something alien. This essay has examined how certain motifs in UFO-abduction narratives present the disturbing prospect of an unnatural humanity manipulated, altered, and isolated by alien technologies in a hyper-technological future. The latest technologies of tradition give human beings unprecedented powers to transmit and receive information, but to the extent that they replace face-to-face interaction these technologies are feared to be alienating, and the sense of connection they do provide through “secondary orality” or “online community” is feared to be insufficient to sustain humanity as we currently understand it. The UFO-abduction narrative and the websites where it takes shape provide a forum for exploring these fears, as well as the hope that they may not be realized.<sup>17</sup>

## Notes

1 This essay is based on a chapter from my dissertation (Ball 2009). A version was presented at the 2009 conference of the American Folklore Society in Boise, Idaho.

2 I therefore agree with Jodi Dean in seeing a special connection between UFO-abduction narratives and Internet technology, though our reasons differ. For Dean, the “multiple layerings and linkages” made by abductees and abduction investigators to account for seemingly unconnected occurrences as abduction phenomena mirror the links made possible through Internet technology (Dean 1998: 131).

3 A few examples: [abduct.com](http://abduct.com), [abovetopsecret.com](http://abovetopsecret.com), [alien-abduction.com](http://alien-abduction.com), [aliencases.conforums.com](http://aliencases.conforums.com), [alien-ufos.com](http://alien-ufos.com), [book-of-thoth.com](http://book-of-thoth.com), [curezone.com](http://curezone.com), [irishufology.net](http://irishufology.net), [iwasabducted.com](http://iwasabducted.com), [theblackvault.com](http://theblackvault.com), [ufo-casebook.com](http://ufo-casebook.com), [ufos-alien.com](http://ufos-alien.com), [ufoseek.com](http://ufoseek.com), [unexplained-mysteries.com](http://unexplained-mysteries.com).

4 The Hills’ story was made into a book in 1966 and a TV movie in 1975 (Fuller 1966; Colla 1975).

5 The most famous UFO abductions of the 1970s were the “Pascagoula incident” involving Charles Hickson and Calvin Parker in 1973, the Travis Walton case in 1975, and the Betty Andreasson case, experienced in 1967 but not reported until 1975 (Walton 1978; Fowler 1979; Hickson and Mendez 1983). The best-known UFO-abduction investigators are Budd Hopkins, David M. Jacobs, and John E. Mack (Hopkins 1981, 1987, 1996; Jacobs 1992, 1998; Mack 1994, 1999).

6 Here and throughout, I have standardized spelling, and have made some minor changes in punctuation and grammar to increase the readability of online posts.

7 The theory that the aliens’ purpose for visiting our planet is an alien/human hybrid breeding program undertaken to save the alien race from extinction is associated especially with the work of UFO-abduction



investigator Budd Hopkins, who recorded many narratives of this type from his informants (see especially Hopkins 1987).

8 Barbeito, Kelley-Romano, and Brown each interpret “hybridization” narratives as expressing anxieties over developments in reproductive technologies (Barbeito 2005, 206-10; Kelley-Romano 2006, 394; Brown 2007, 70-82, 85-99).

9 Here and throughout, I refer to discussion-forum participants according to the gender they profess online.

10 Patricia Barbeito likens the alien eye to a movie screen (Barbeito 2005, 209).

11 David Hufford has pointed out how the paralysis commonly described by UFO abductees is similar to aspects of the “Old Hag Experience” (Hufford 1982, 233-4).

12 ARPA’s name was changed to DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency) in 1971, then back to ARPA in 1993, and back to DARPA again in 1996.

13 The English is from Barbara Johnson’s translation of Jacques Derrida’s *La Dissémination* (Derrida 1981, 104-5). The italics are mine.

14 “...Og da sitt’ eg her og skal begynne å følgja programmet ‘Vindu mot verden’... Også sitte eg her og ser på starten på dette programmet. So ser eg ifrå øyekroken, ein klase med kvita blinkande lys...”

15 Bengt af Klintberg makes the point that whereas in earlier times the realms where one could encounter “the other folk”—the forests and seas, or inside the mountains—were mysterious places, they are less mysterious today, so that the “others” have become aliens, for “space is now the only unknown territory that remains for our fantasy” (Klintberg 1986, 259).

16 In addition to the examples given, see the following: Raptor\_Evolved 2006: Post 1; HiddenUFO 2008; GenericallyMajestic 2009; Abudctee 2009; Raziell 2009; Crazyflanger 2009; Jtobias69 2009.

17 I would like to thank everyone who has graciously read or listened to a prior version of this essay, and especially those who have generously offered their comments and advice regarding its revision at various stages, in particular: Carol Burke, Scott Forbes, J. Hillis Miller, Joseph Falaky Nagy, Laura O’Connor, and Timothy R. Tangherlini.

## Works Cited

### Discussion Forum Posts

- Abudctee. 2009. Help! Post 1. August 18, 2009. Alien-UFOs.com. <http://www.alien-ufos.com/personal-ufo-alien-experiences-alien-dreams/20969-help.html>. (November 9, 2009).
- Advancer. 2009. Alien Abduction or Crazy Talk? Post 18. October 31, 2009. AlienHub.com. <http://www.alienhub.com/alien-abductions-close-encounters/4147-alien-abduction-crazy-talk-2.html>. (April 1, 2010).
- Alexis\_Amy. 2009. Alien Abductions. Post 27. May 31, 2009. Alien-UFOs.com. <http://www.alien-ufos.com/personal-ufo-alien-experiences-alien-dreams/20123-alien-abductions-3.html>. (November 24, 2009).
- All-Natural. 2008A. I Think I’ve Been Abducted... May 11, 2008. AboveTopSecret.com. <http://www.abovetopsecret.com/forum/thread354652/pg1>. (February 4, 2010).

- All-Natural. 2008B. I Think I've Been Abducted... May 14, 2008. AboveTopSecret.com. <http://www.abovetopsecret.com/forum/thread354652/pg2>. (February 4, 2010).
- AmentiHall. 2009. Visitations. Post 12. May 9, 2009. Alien-UFOs.com. <http://www.alien-ufos.com/personal-ufo-alien-experiences-alien-dreams/20067-visitations.html>. (December 1, 2009).
- Angel. 2006. Why Would I Have Been Abducted. Post 21. March 20, 2006. Alien-UFOs.com. <http://www.alien-ufos.com/personal-ufo-alien-experiences-alien-dreams/10256-why-would-i-have-been-abducted-3.html>. (November 15, 2009).
- Bart5050. 2009. Possible Abduction Attempt. Posts 3 and 9. April 10, 2009. Alien-UFOs.com. <http://www.alien-ufos.com/personal-ufo-alien-experiences-alien-dreams/19782-possible-abduction-attempt.html>. (February 25, 2010).
- Cravemor. 2009. Possible Abduction Attempt. Post 26. April 24, 2009. Alien-UFOs.com. <http://www.alien-ufos.com/personal-ufo-alien-experiences-alien-dreams/19782-possible-abduction-attempt-3.html>. (February 25, 2010).
- Crazyflanger. 2007. I've Been Contacted. Post 12. August 22, 2007. AlienHub.com. <http://www.alienhub.com/alien-abductions-close-encounters/852-ive-been-contacted-2.html>. (December 28, 2009).
- Dark Knight. 2008. Neg Greys and Psychic Attack. Post 1. January 2, 2008. UfoSeek.com. <http://www.UFOSeek.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=20&t=1336&sid=b3c5d2b4cb7253e05e6f7348978b-bb3c>. (February 18, 2010).
- Dess, Cliff. 2007. Cliff Dess's Story. Post 1. August 17, 2007. HyperspaceCafé.com. <http://www.hyperspacecafe.com/forum55/2807.html>. (March 3, 2010).
- Dreamforaday. 2009. Can Anyone Relate to My Experiences? Post 42. May 1, 2009. Alien-UFOs.com. <http://www.alien-ufos.com/personal-ufo-alien-experiences-alien-dreams/19670-can-anyone-relate-my-experiences-5.html>. (December 1, 2009).
- Funky-Zoo. 2009. Blue Old Alien Thing. Post 1. August 1, 2009. Alien-UFOs.com. <http://www.alien-ufos.com/personal-ufo-alien-experiences-alien-dreams/20818-blue-old-alien-thing.html>. (November 10, 2009).
- Gabblebee. 2009. My Alien Experience. Post 1. October 9, 2009. Alien-UFOs.com. <http://www.alien-ufos.com/personal-ufo-alien-experiences-alien-dreams/21545-my-alien-experience.html>. (November 5, 2009).
- GenericallyMajestic. 2009. Where Do I Begin? Post 1. October 19, 2009. Alien-UFOs.com. <http://www.alien-ufos.com/personal-ufo-alien-experiences-alien-dreams/21546-where-do-i-begin.html>. (November 5, 2009).

- HiddenUFO. 2008. Yellow Light Shines through Window at Night. Post 1. August 4, 2008. Alien-UFOs.com. <http://www.alien-ufos.com/personal-ufo-alien-experiences-alien-dreams/17960-yellow-light-shines-through-window-night.html>. (December 1, 2009).
- HighlanderConspirator. 2005. I Was "Abducted" on 21.06.1985. Post 5. November 21, 2005. AlienHub.com. <http://www.alienhub.com/alien-abductions-close-encounters/31-i-abducted-21-06-1985-a.html>. (January 14, 2010).
- Howoulduno. 2009. I Was Abducted and Taken Onboard the Ship. Post 63. September 17, 2009. <http://www.alien-ufos.com/personal-ufo-alien-experiences-alien-dreams/15131-i-abducted-taken-onboard-ship-7.html>. (November 6, 2009).
- Ibelieve. 2009. Alien Abduction. Post 11. June 6, 2009. Alien-UFOs.com. <http://www.alien-ufos.com/personal-ufo-alien-experiences-alien-dreams/20253-alien-abduction-2.html>. (November 5, 2009).
- Jeff. 2009. Re: Signs of Alien Abduction and Classification of Experience. July 14, 2009. UFOSeek.com. <http://www.ufoseek.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=20&t=2291&start=100>. (February 11, 2010).
- John\_Doe. 2009A. Possible Abduction Attempt. Post 1. April 9, 2009. Alien-UFOs.com <http://www.alien-ufos.com/personal-ufo-alien-experiences-alien-dreams/19782-possible-abduction-attempt.html>. (February 25, 2010).
- John\_Doe. 2009B. Possible Abduction Attempt. Post 6. April 10, 2009. Alien-UFOs.com <http://www.alien-ufos.com/personal-ufo-alien-experiences-alien-dreams/19782-possible-abduction-attempt.html>. (February 25, 2010).
- Jtobias69. 2009. Something Went Down Last Night. Post 1. October 30, 2009. Alien-UFOs.com. <http://www.alien-ufos.com/personal-ufo-alien-experiences-alien-dreams/21648-something-went-down-last-night.html>. (November 2, 2009).
- Kayla. 2001. Re: Alien Abduction Experiences. November 27, 2001. *BISLEEP Discussion Forum: Basic Sleep Research*. [http://www.sleephomepages.org/discussions/basic/messages/msgs\\_11515.html](http://www.sleephomepages.org/discussions/basic/messages/msgs_11515.html). (February 23, 2009).
- Koval321. 2009. Re: Signs of Alien Abduction and Classification of Experience. July 26, 2009. UFOSeek.com. <http://www.ufoseek.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=20&t=2291&start=110>. (February 11, 2010).
- Larson, Mark. 2007. I Was Abducted and Taken Onboard the Ship. Post 3. August 3, 2007. Alien-UFOs.com. <http://www.alien-ufos.com/personal-ufo-alien-experiences-alien-dreams/15131-i-abducted-taken-onboard-ship.html>. (November 6, 2009).

- Lionbear 2009. Through the Wall? Post 1. October 9, 2009. Alien-UFOs.com. <http://www.alien-ufos.com/personal-ufo-alien-experiences-alien-dreams/21450-through-wall.html>. (April 1, 2010).
- LooseLipsSinkShips. 2007. Real Abduction Experience. Post 2. July 23, 2007. AboveTopSecret.com. <http://www.abovetopsecret.com/forum/thread293104/pg1>. (January 28, 2010).
- Magicwords55. 2009. If It Happended Once Will It Again? Post 1. May 5, 2009. Alien-UFOs.com. <http://www.alien-ufos.com/personal-ufo-alien-experiences-alien-dreams/20023-if-happended-once-will-again.html>. (December 1, 2009).
- Mamasong. 2009. Encounter and Illness. Post 1. November 3, 2009. Alien-UFOs.com. <http://www.alien-ufos.com/personal-ufo-alien-experiences-alien-dreams/21699-encounter-illness.html>. (November 5, 2009).
- Miro. 2009A. Re: Signs of Alien Abduction and Classification of Experience. July 14, 2009. UFOSeek.com. <http://www.ufoseek.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=20&t=2291&start=90>. (February 11, 2010).
- Miro. 2009B. Re: Signs of Alien Abduction and Classification of Experience. July 14, 2009. UFOSeek.com. <http://www.ufoseek.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=20&t=2291&start=100>. (February 11, 2010).
- NCDreamer38. 2009. So Real, My Dream Last Night! Post 1. October 26, 2009. Alien-UFOs.com. <http://www.alien-ufos.com/personal-ufo-alien-experiences-alien-dreams/21610-so-real-my-dream-last-night.html>. (November 5, 2009).
- OmegaLogos. 2009. Alien Fetous Abduction. October 31, 2009. AboveTopSecret.com. <http://www.abovetopsecret.com/forum/thread515422/pg1>. (January 28, 2010).
- Phil. 2009. Cosmic Energy Abduction I Have No Idea. Post 4. April 14, 2009. IwasAbducted.com. <http://www.iwasabducted.com/discussion/forums/viewtopic-cosmic-energy-abduction-i-have-no-idea.html>. (January 26, 2010).
- Proustwouldlikesumtea. 2009. Abduction Encounters in Suburban Areas. Post 3. October 22, 2009. Alien-UFOs.com. <http://www.alien-ufos.com/personal-ufo-alien-experiences-alien-dreams/21572-abduction-encounters-suburban-areas.html>. (November 5, 2009).
- Raptor\_Evolved. 2006. Abduction? Post 1. December 2, 2006. Post 10. December 6, 2006. AlienHub.com. <http://www.alienhub.com/alien-abductions-close-encounters/453-abduction.html>. (January 7, 2010).
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2006B. Abduction? Post 20. December 15, 2006. AlienHub.com. <http://www.alienhub.com/alien-abductions-close-encounters/453-abduction-2.html>. (January 7, 2010).



- \_\_\_\_\_. 2007. Abduction? Post 29. January 19, 2007. AlienHub.com. <http://www.alienhub.com/alien-abductions-close-encounters/453-abduction-3.html>. (January 7, 2010).
- Raziell. 2009. Yellow Light Shines through Window at Night. Post 7. April 7, 2009. Alien-UFOs.com. <http://www.alien-ufos.com/personal-ufo-alien-experiences-alien-dreams/17960-yellow-light-shines-through-window-night.html>. (December 1, 2009).
- Red. 2007. New Here. Post 21. December 7, 2007. AlienHub.com. <http://www.alienhub.com/alien-abductions-close-encounters/1062-new-here-3.html>. (January 9, 2010).
- Roberto21. 2009. Alien Abduction. May 27, 2009. Posts 1 and 32. Alien-UFOs.com. <http://www.alien-ufos.com/personal-ufo-alien-experiences-alien-dreams/20253-alien-abduction.html>. (November 5, 2009).
- Rz Blade. 2007. Abductee Tells All. Post 1. October 7, 2007. IWasAbducted.com. <http://www.iwasabducted.com>. (January 21, 2010).
- Smersh. 2008. Abduction Experience by Anonymous. Post 1. April 20, 2008. UFOCasebook.com. <http://ufocasebook.com/conforums.com/index.cgi?board=alienabduction&num=1208736984&action=display&start=15>. (March 10, 2010).
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2009. Abduction Experience by Anonymous. Reply 18. January 20, 2009. UFOCasebook.com. <http://ufocasebook.com/conforums.com/index.cgi?board=alienabduction&num=1208736984&action=display&start=15>. (March 10, 2010).
- Spacemushrooms. 2009. Alien Abduction. Post 21. June 13, 2009. Alien-UFOs.com. <http://www.alien-ufos.com/personal-ufo-alien-experiences-alien-dreams/20253-alien-abduction-3.html>. (November 5, 2009).
- WorldShadow. 2007. My 1988 Abduction Experience with Detailed Images. Post 1. November 30, 2007. AboveTopSecret.com. <http://www.abovetopsecret.com/forum/thread318428/pg1>. (January 28, 2010).

## References

- Angelluci, Orfeo M. 1955. *The Secret of the Saucers: How UFOs Work*. Amherst, WI: Amherst Press.
- Arnold, Kenneth, and Ray Palmer. 1952. *The Coming of the Saucers: A Documentary Report on Sky Objects that Have Mystified the World*. Boise, Idaho: Privately published.
- Barbeito, Patricia Felisa. 2005. "He's Making Me Feel Things in My Body That I Don't Feel": The Body as Battleground in Accounts of Alien Abduction. *Journal of American Culture* 28: 201-215.
- Blank, Trevor J. 2007. Examining the Transmission of Urban Legends: Making the Case for Folklore Fieldwork on the Internet. *Folklore Forum* 37.1: 15-26.

- Brown, Bridget. 1997. Alien Fashion: Inside the Alien Jumpsuit. *Verbivore* 3: 4-7.
- \_\_\_\_\_.2007. *They Know Us Better than We Know Ourselves: The History and Politics of Alien Abduction*. New York: New York University Press.
- Bullard, Thomas E. 1987. *UFO Abductions: The Measure of a Mystery*. 2 vols. Bloomington, IN: The Fund for UFO Research.
- \_\_\_\_\_.1989. UFO Abduction Reports: The Supernatural Kidnap Narrative in Technological Guise. *Journal of American Folklore* 102: 147-70.
- \_\_\_\_\_.2000. UFOs: Lost in the Myths. In *UFOs and Abductions: Challenging the Borders of Knowledge*, ed. David M. Jacobs, 141-91. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.
- Christiansen, Reidar Th. 1958. *The Migratory Legends: A Proposed List of Types with a Systematic Catalogue of the Norwegian Variants*. FFC 175. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia.
- Coates, Tim, ed. 2001. *UFOs in America, 1947: FBI Files Related to the Sighting of Unidentified Flying Objects During 1947*. London: The Stationery Office.
- Colla, Richard A., Dir. 1975. *The UFO Incident*. Universal Studios. 120 minutes.
- Dean, Jodi. 1998. *Aliens in America: Conspiracy Cultures from Outerspace to Cyberspace*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Dégh, Linda. 1977. UFO's and How Folklorists Should Look at Them. *Fabula* 18: 242-8.
- Denzler, Brenda. 2001. *The Lure of the Edge: Scientific Passions, Religious Beliefs, and the Pursuit of UFOs*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1981. *Dissemination*. Trans. Barbara Johnson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Fernback, Jan. 2003. Legends on the Net: An Examination of Computer-Mediated Communication as a Locus of Oral Culture. *New Media and Society* 5.1: 29-45.
- Fowler, Raymond E. 1979. *The Andreasson Affair*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Fuller, John G. 1966. *The Interrupted Journey: Two Lost Hours "Aboard a Flying Saucer."* New York: Dial Press.
- Haddad, Sandro A.P., Richard P.M. Houben, and Wouter A. Serdijn. 2006. The Evolution of Pacemakers. *IEEE Engineering in Medicine and Biology Magazine* 25.3: 38-48.
- Harnad, Stevan. 1991. Post-Gutenberg Galaxy: The Fourth Revolution in the Means of Production of Knowledge. *Public-Access Computer Systems Review* 2.1: 39-53.
- Hickson, Charles, and William Mendez. 1983. *UFO Contact At Pascagoula*. Tucson, AZ: W.C. Stevens.
- Hopkins, Budd. 1981. *Missing Time: A Documented Study of UFO Abductions*. New York: Richard Marek Publishers.

- \_\_\_\_\_. 1987. *Intruders: The Incredible Visitations at Copley Woods*. New York: Random House.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1996. *Witnessed: The True Story of the Brooklyn Bridge UFO Abductions*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Horsey, Kirsty. 2006. Three Million IVF Babies Born Worldwide. IVF.net. [http://www.ivf.net/ivf/three\\_million\\_ivf\\_babies\\_born\\_worldwide-o2105.html](http://www.ivf.net/ivf/three_million_ivf_babies_born_worldwide-o2105.html). (June 28, 2006).
- Hufford, David. 1982. *The Terror that Comes in the Night: An Experience-Centered Study of Supernatural Assault Traditions*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Jacobs, David. 1992. *Secret Life: Firsthand Documented Accounts of UFO Abductions*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1998. *The Threat – The Secret Agenda: What the Aliens Really Want...and How They Plan to Get It*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Jung, C.G. 1959. *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies*. Trans. R.F.C. Hull. New York: The New American Library.
- Kelley-Romano, Stephanie. 2006. Mythmaking in Alien Abduction Narratives. *Communication Quarterly* 54: 383-406.
- Klintberg, Bengt af. 1986. *Råttan i pizzen: Folksägner i vår tid*. Stockholm: Norstedts.
- Langham, Don. 1994. The Commonplace MOO: Orality and Literacy in Virtual Reality. *Computer-Mediated Communication Magazine* 1.3: 7.
- Leiner, Barry M., et al. 2003. A Brief History of the Internet. <http://www.isoc.org/internet/history/brief.shtml>. (February 4, 2009).
- Leslie, Desmond, and George Adamski. 1953. *Flying Saucers Have Landed*. London: Werner Laurie.
- Luckhurst, Roger. 1998. The Science-Fictionalization of Trauma: Remarks on Narratives of Alien Abduction. *Science-Fiction Studies* 25: 29-52.
- Mack, John E. 1994. *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens*. New York: Scribner's.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1999. *Passport to the Cosmos: Human Transformation and Alien Encounters*. New York: Crown Publishers.
- Ong, Walter. [1982] 2002. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. London: Routledge.
- Pew Research Center. 2007. World Publics Welcome Global Trade – But Not Immigration. The Pew Global Attitudes Project. Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center.
- Rojcewicz, Peter M. 1991. Between One Eye Blink and the Next: Fairies, UFOs, and Problems of Knowledge. In *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays*. Edited by Peter Narváez. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.: 479-514.
- Sanarov, Valerii I. 1981. On the Nature and Origin of Flying Saucers and Little Green Men. *Current Anthropology* 22: 163-7.
- Sconce, Jeffrey. 2000. *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

- Selberg, Torunn. 1993. UFO 339 på vei fra Oslo? Rykter og nyheter om UFO'er i en norsk bygd. *Tradisjon* 23: 107-19.
- Steinberg, Stephen Cobbett. 1980. *T.V. Facts*. New York: Facts on File.
- U.S. Census Bureau. 1988. Who Uses Computers? Census Statistical Brief. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau.
- . 2008. Utilization of Selected Media: 1980 to 2005. Table 1099. Statistical Abstract of the United States. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau.
- Vallee, Jacques. 1969. *Passport to Magonia: From Folklore to Flying Saucers*. Chicago: Henry Regnery Co.
- Walton, Travis. 1978. *The Walton Experience*. New York: Berkley Publishing Corp.



### Sensationalist Scholarship: A Putative “New” History of Fairy Tales

Jack Zipes

University of Minnesota

*In early modern Europe, then, what was a mixed-media environment characterized by talking and manuscripts became even more mixed by the addition of mass print. Again, we need to stress that mass print did not replace talking or manuscripts. Major media generally accumulate; they do not supplant one another. We also should emphasize that mass print did not at any point or in any place become the predominant mode of communications. For several centuries after the introduction of mass print, literacy rates remained low. People who can't read—and that was the majority of the European population until the late nineteenth century—do not read manuscripts or printed texts. They talk. Orality, though not primary orality, survived well into the modern era even where print and literacy spread fastest and penetrated most deeply. And even among people who were literate, talking and manuscripts hardly disappeared once printing and printed matter became widely available. For many—and perhaps even most—purposes it remained easier to talk to someone than to write a note to them, and easier to write a note to them than to print one. (Poe 2011, 115)*

For years now I have refrained from writing about Ruth Bottigheimer's speculative notions concerned with the so-called “new history” of the fairy tale because I believed a strong wind of sensible, well-grounded, judicious scholarship would blow them away. But I was wrong. I underestimated Bottigheimer's ambition. Somehow she has managed to make herself into a cause célèbre and to draw the attention of well-meaning scholars, who mistakenly think they might be able to have a dialogue with her. Yet it seems that she mainly wants to ride her own hobby horse with blinders and to astonish academia with her notions of what constitutes cultural evolution. Her “novel ideas” are part of the sensationalist vogues that haunt all cultures. Dressed in flashy colors, they can easily become attractive commodities. Sensationalism sells well, even sensationalist claims of publicity-seeking academics. Here a little history about Bottigheimer's “rise to fame” and details about her mission to define the fairy tale in absolute terms is necessary before I deal with her most recent book, *Fairy Tales: A New History*.

#### The Incident

On July 30, 2005, Bottigheimer, evidently anxious to publicize her theses in *Fairy Godfather: Straparola, Venice, and the Fairy Tale* (2002) and to cause a sensation, drew the ire of many of the folklorists attending the Fourteenth Congress of the International Society for Folk Narrative Theory in Tartu, Estonia, by delivering a paper, “Fairy Tale Origins, Fairy Tale Dissemination, and Folk Narrative Theory,” which dismissed the oral tradition as providing the source of literary fairy tales and

proclaimed Giovan Francesco Straparola as the original inventor of the fairy-tale genre. Until Bottigheimer had promoted Straparola to the position of “god” of fairy tales, very few scholars had paid much attention to Straparola, whose collection of stories, *Le piacevoli notti* (*The Pleasant Nights*, 1550-1553), published in two volumes, contain about fourteen eclectic fairy tales and fifty-nine stories with riddles.<sup>2</sup> A “bestseller” in its time, its allure can be attributed to several factors, which I have pointed out in *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*: “His use of erotic and obscene riddles, his mastery of polite Italian used by narrators in the frame narrative, his introduction of plain earthly language into the stories, the critical view of the power struggles in Italian society and lack of moralistic preaching, his introduction of fourteen unusual fairy tales into the collection, and his interest in magic, unpredictable events, duplicity, and the supernatural. Similar to Boccaccio, Straparola exhibited an irreverence for authorities, and the frame narrative reveals a political tension and somewhat ironic if not pessimistic outlook on the possibilities of living a harmonious happy ever after life.”<sup>3</sup>

It must be said, however, that Straparola was not a great stylist; he plagiarized many Latin tales, translating them into the vernacular Italian, and imitated contemporary writers. The foremost Straparola scholar in Italy, Donato Pirovano, who edited the definitive contemporary edition of *Le piacevoli notti*, has written some very interesting remarks about Straparola’s patchwork linguistics. “In this general average tone, where there are no centrifugal impulses and extremes (it has already been pointed out how

Straparola tended to tone down the lexical expressionism of Morlini), the dialect expression and the Latin cast, together with the phonetic variants and frequent hyper-corrections, reveal the strong linguistic accomplishment of the author in the direction of the models of the novella tradition and are the tell-tale of a more general narrative project directed at bringing about a literary consecration of the fairy tale of the oral tradition.”<sup>4</sup> Now, if an expert in Italian linguistics and Renaissance culture can indicate that Straparola was the mouthpiece of an Italian literary and oral tradition and wanted to consecrate the oral fairy tale, it is certainly questionable to crown Straparola as some sort of fairy godfather of a new genre. It might be best to dismiss Bottigheimer’s pretensions with a shrug of the shoulder and explore the remarkable oral/literary aspects of Straparola’s tales to understand how and why he replicated oral and literary tales in innovative ways.

Yet, instead of ignoring and/or critically reviewing Bottigheimer’s theses, Dan Ben Amos, one of the foremost and most reasonable folklorists in the world, decided to give her book, *Fairy Godfather*, a fair hearing and to organize a roundtable titled “The European Fairy Tale Tradition: Between Orality and Literacy” for the 2006 fall meeting of the American Folklore Society in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Ben-Amos invited two highly qualified scholars, renowned medievalist Jan Ziolkowski and noted European anthropologist Francisco Vaz da Silva, to comment on Bottigheimer’s book, which Ben-Amos also criticized at the roundtable. Bottigheimer was allowed time to respond to their papers, but the session

was a fiasco because she refused to take their criticisms seriously and vaguely defended her ideas with unfounded rationalizations. All the papers of the AFS session were revised and expanded into articles published in the *Journal of American Folklore* in the summer of 2010.<sup>5</sup> The major points of contention were Bottigheimer's claims that Straparola was the founder of the fairy-tale narrative, described as a "rise tale," which reflected the rise of the mercantile and bourgeois classes; that Straparola's tales set a model for other writers, especially the French; that it was through print literature that tales were disseminated and reached the peasantry, who had not been intelligent enough to create their own wonder tales; and that Straparola lived and worked in Venice and catered to a wide circle of artisans who were literate. Though nothing is known about Straparola, where he was born, where he lived, or what his profession was, Bottigheimer wrote an imaginary biography that was also questioned by the participants at the roundtable.

### The Book that Set the Folklorists on Fire

As Ziolkowski, Vaz da Silva, and Ben-Amos thoroughly and politely demonstrate in their lengthy essays, Bottigheimer's *Fairy Godfather: Straparola, Venice, and the Fairy Tale*, is one of the most narrow positivist studies of folklore and fairy tales that has ever been produced. Ziolkowski begins his essay by stating, "the book will not become a landmark in folkloristics in general, and only time will tell if it has a lasting impact even within fairy-tale studies."<sup>6</sup> Ziolkowski, who has published an exhaustive pioneer and comprehensive study, *Fairy Tales from*

*Before Fairy Tales: The Medieval Latin Past of Wonderful Lies* (2007), chastises Bottigheimer for ignoring numerous Latin texts that have their origins in an oral tradition and were fairy tales before tales were given labels. According to him, Bottigheimer has simply ignored striking evidence that the Greeks and Romans and other European, Asian, and African people were telling tales during the pre-Christian era and early antiquity that laid the foundation for a literary genre which gradually flowered in Paris, not in Italy, during the 1690s when the socio-cultural conditions were riper in Paris than in Italy for designating certain tale types as belonging to the genre of the fairy tale. The narrative sequence of Bottigheimer's "rise tales," which she attributes to Straparola, can easily be read differently and expanded to comprehend many other tale types and narrative patterns. But by limiting just fourteen of Straparola's tales to a tight girdle-like definition, what Ziolkowski calls a "perverse agenda,"<sup>7</sup> she does Straparola an injustice because she ignores the wide range of different kinds of oral wonder tales that he drew upon to write his tales. Aside from his own significant work, Ziolkowski cites other studies, such as *Formes médiévales du conte merveilleux* (1989) edited by Jacques Berlioz, Claude Bremond, and Catherine Velay-Vallantin and *Märchen und die mittelalterliche Tradition* (1995) by Maren Clausen-Stolzenberg, which provide indisputable evidence that oral tales existed and at times informed numerous literary romances, *lais*, poems, and exempla. Yet, as Ziolkowski notes, "Tradition of the oral sort turns out to be a phenomenon Bottigheimer presents as being hopelessly elusive before the intro-

duction of phonographic recording in the 1870s. A slogan, probably around fifty years old and quaint in ways that would have disconcerted its original exponents, advocates that we 'Question Authority,' but Bottigheimer follows a simpler (and possibly simplistic) principle of 'Question Orality.' In her view, not only is it pointless to conjecture about oral traditional literature before unambiguous records of it survive, but in addition it is wrongheaded to suppose that oral tale-telling ever made a creative contribution to the fairy-tale tradition as she defines it in the subtitle of her book."<sup>8</sup> In general, Ziolkowski does not argue for privileging the oral over literature. Rather, he argues against positivist approaches such as that used by Bottigheimer, who relies on strict dichotomies, absolutes, and twisted speculative history. Moreover, he pleads the case for the discreet investigation of folklore and medieval texts: "We have an obligation to approach each and every story with an open eye to possible orality lurking behind literature as well as to possible literature behind orality. Old dichotomies have broken down over the past decades in the understanding of medieval literature: it has been recognized that Latin texts from the Middle Ages could have features indebted to orality, popular culture, and secular tastes, while the literary products of medieval vernaculars could be literate, learned, and Christian."<sup>9</sup>

While Ziolkowski focuses on Bottigheimer's rejection of oral wonder tales that stem from antiquity, the middle ages, and Eastern traditions, Francisco Vaz da Silva questions the accuracy and authenticity of Bottigheimer's biographical depiction of Straparola and then shows

how she not only created a fictitious biography which depicts the unknown Italian author as a fairy-tale hero inventing fairy tales, but she also invented her own history of storytelling that excludes 95% of the European population from creating and disseminating tales in an oral tradition. It should be noted here that Pirovano has written: "The biography of Giovan Francesco Straparola still remains an unfathomable mystery. The almost absolute absence—at least in the present state of research—of documents that concern him is aggravated by the impossibility of extracting definite facts about his life from his works. There are only vague hints that give access to conjectural hypotheses in which various scholars of the past centuries have exerted themselves, certainly in a noble but fruitless way. Frequently they managed to reconstruct Straparola's life, but these reconstructions were rarely persuasive if not groundless."<sup>10</sup>

Vaz da Silva not only shows clearly that Bottigheimer's biography of Straparola is groundless and misleading, he also points out the contradictions in her thesis wherein she claims that his tales appealed to an urban and artisan readership, but ultimately nourished Europe's hungry folk imagination even though they were filled with reference to upper social classes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He then asks: "If there is a congruence between plot success and the preoccupations of the audience, then why would tales crafted for the specific situation of an urban Venetian readership become the characteristic lore of illiterate rustics across Europe and beyond? And why would tales offering imaginary escape from all-too-real pov-



erty register success among the upper classes? Clearly, the principle of reference to social reality, which Bottigheimer uses to explain why a rise plot should have been successful in sixteenth-century Venice, fails to explain the reception of urban rags-to-riches plots among illiterate rustics as well as among aristocrats. In other words, the principle that is used to account for the invention of the genre fails to account for its diffusion."<sup>11</sup> In addition to showing how contradictory many of Bottigheimer's assertions are, Vaz da Silva offers numerous examples of how folk and literary tales meshed. Moreover, he proves conclusively that the French writers of the 1690s were not primarily influenced by Straparola, as Bottigheimer claims, but that there were numerous French oral tales and literary romances that circulated and influenced writers such as d'Aulnoy, Lhéritier, and Perrault.

Vaz da Silva's critique of Bottigheimer's fabrications is further reinforced by Ben-Amos's essay in which he demonstrates that Straparola's plagiarizing and patchwork style followed the fashion of his age and also the tradition of oral storytelling: "In borrowing tales and passing them on to new audiences, Straparola acted as an oral storyteller in the garb of a writer. Using the relatively new media of print, he continued a behavior common and appropriate to oral culture. Within this new era, his work became a reservoir of tales culled from diverse sources, a reservoir that, as John Colin Dunlop long ago pointed out, was very popular in France. *Le piacevoli notti* thus became a source for literary fairy-tale writers who did not have direct access to oral tradition."<sup>12</sup>

More than the clear references to orality within Straparola's two-volume collection concern Ben-Amos. Like Ziolkowski, he provides strong evidence that there were numerous oral tales in ancient Egypt and Asia that became well known in Europe long before Straparola put pen to paper. Europeans, despite the rise of Christianity and witch hunts, continued to spread tales that involved pagan beliefs and rituals. As Ben-Amos remarks, "Tales about supernatural miracles, holy men, fairies, and animals that enriched mortals were told in legends and fairy tales both before and after the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the time when Richard Whittington lived and then became the subject of a legend about a cat-less land, and both before and after the sixteenth century when Straparola incorporated into his anthology a version of 'Puss in Boots.'"<sup>13</sup>

One of Bottigheimer's major arguments throughout her essays and books is that absence of documentation of fairy tales (as she defines them) is clear evidence of absence of fairy tales in the lives of the peasantry until Straparola and others began writing and publishing their tales. However, as Ziolkowski, Vaz da Silva, and Ben-Amos reveal, there is more than sufficient documentation about storytelling and texts that indicates a long tradition of oral wonder tales that incorporated fairy-tale motifs, topoi, characters, and patterns. In pre-modern Europe before and after Christianity took hold, people both learned and non-literate believed strongly in witches, fairies, life after death, walking ghosts, vampires, devils, miraculous intervention, and so on. During the European witch hunts from approximately 1480-1700, that took

many different forms; the very testimonies of suspected witches, declared witches, witnesses, and prosecutors read like bizarre fairy-tales and certainly were part of the stuff that storytellers used to entertain or inform their audiences. The evening gatherings, in which all kinds of tales were told but never recorded, must have been filled with tales replete with fairies, witches, mermaids, dwarfs, ogres, dragons, devils, angels, saints, magical objects, potions, herbs, kings, queens, peasants, flying and talking horses, talking cats, dogs, and foxes, and so on. These tales were never recorded because the very few learned people who could write had no interest in collecting them and writing them down, and if they did, they stylized them for a different audience. Besides, these tales were told in dialect, and there were no orthographic standards that facilitated the recording of tales told by peasants, laborers, and artisans. Almost every person in pre-modern Europe breathed the stuff of wonder tales and other types of tales that contained a mixture of pagan beliefs and early Christian religious stories. In his thought-provoking book, *Strange Histories*, Darren Oldridge remarks; "In the period covered by this book—from the late Middle Ages to the beginnings of modern science at the end of the seventeenth century—the prevailing system of belief permitted many ideas that now seem unfamiliar or ridiculous. Can the dead walk? Most people in medieval Europe believed they could, and orthodox Christians assumed this would happen en masse at the time of the Last Judgment. Can witches fly? Even the most trenchant opponents of the persecution of witchcraft in sixteenth century-Europe believed this was possible. Just like us, the people who accepted

these things relied on a body of knowledge to help them evaluate the facts of the world, and just like us, they inherited this knowledge from the culture in which they were born."<sup>14</sup>

Belief in fairies, witches, devils, and ogres became dangerous in European societies that punished people for heretical expression and behavior, and the peasantry, always suspicious of their learned superiors, were not about to tell them tales that were part of their intimate culture. Certainly women were most reluctant to tell their tales to male interlocutors of the educated class. As Ben-Amos succinctly argues: "The slim documentary evidence of fairies in the belief systems of medieval European societies is not a testimony for their absence, and ignoring their documented presence creates a blind spot in the practice of literary empiricism. After all, ephemeral beliefs and communication occur regardless of their documentation. The meager references to fairies in contemporaneous writings are a function of the nature of medieval documents and of the attitude toward fairies rather than a testimony to their true prevalence in belief systems. With no church and no cult to support them, the fairies were relegated to the cultural periphery. Consequently, the evidence of their significance can be inferred most readily from the testimony about their vanishing: comments about their disappearance attest to their earlier presence. In the words of Chaucer's "Wife of Bath":

In the Old days of King Arthur, today  
Still praised by Britons in a special  
way,  
This land was filled with fairies all  
about.<sup>15</sup>

Yet belief in fairies has never vanished and fairy tales as part of oral and literary culture can be considered a minor subversive genre that infiltrates major dominant culture whenever it can. When J. M. Barrie had Peter Pan cry out to the largely adult audience of his 1904 play in London and ask them whether they all believed in fairies, the answer was a resounding YES! Whenever and wherever the play is produced in the twenty-first century, the answer remains the same.

### **Bottigheimer's Rebuttal**

There is no need to summarize Bottigheimer's evasive reply to her critics published in *The Journal of American Folklore* because she has developed her "radical" ideas in *Fairy Tales: A New History*, to which I shall now turn. This book is slim in size and thought. Bottigheimer essentially rehashes her nomination of Straparola as the inventor of literary fairy tales and adds Giambattista Basile as co-inventor. She sets herself up as the main authority of defining fairy tales. She re-writes the history of the fairy tale by focusing on book commerce and contends that only the publication of books enables us to understand how writers created their fairy tales and how the tales were transmitted. She treats common people with great disdain and makes no effort to understand how language and communication have evolved and how tales were disseminated orally before printing machines were invented. She focuses only on the publication records of three countries, Italy, France, and Germany, and excludes the rest of the world from her analysis, as though only Europe gave birth to fairy tales. She concocts generic categories to stereotype the fairy

tale that do not enrich our understanding of why writers composed their fairy tales and how they created them. There is not a shred of sophisticated theoretical thinking in what she purports to be a "new" history of fairy tales.

In chapter one, "Why a New History of Fairy Tales?", Bottigheimer sets the tone of her book by declaring: "It has been said so often that the folk invented and disseminated fairy tales that this assumption has become an unquestioned proposition. It may therefore surprise readers that folk invention and transmission of fairy tales has no basis in verifiable fact. Literary analysis undermines it, literary history rejects it, social history repudiates it, and publishing history (whether of manuscripts or of books) contradicts it."<sup>16</sup> Bottigheimer enjoys using declarations rather than thoughtful explanations to develop her theses and arguments and very rarely cites sources other than herself as an authority. For instance, she does not tell us who it is who has said so often that the folk invented and disseminated fairy tales. There are no references. Is she talking about oral folk tales or literary fairy tales? Who are the historians who have claimed that only the folk invented fairy tales? Where are her citations? She does not mention that in the last forty or fifty years, folklorists, literary critics, historians, and scholars of folklore and fairy tales from many different countries have been more interested in the intersections between the oral and literary traditions than in attempts to privilege one over the other. It is Bottigheimer who wants to establish a paper tiger, the dichotomy of oral and literary traditions and the privileging of oral tales. What does she mean by the abstract conglomerations of

literary analysis, literary history, social history, and publishing history that refute oral transmission of tales? Are these groups of people, institutions, or methods that she will use to prove that only she knows who the true inventors of the fairy tale are?

Indeed, this is what this chapter simplistically sets out to do. Bottigheimer begins with one of the most ignorant and false definitions of folk tales that I have ever read: "Folk tales differ from fairy tales in their structure, their cast of characters, their plot trajectories, and their age. Brief, and with linear plots, folk tales reflect the world and the belief systems of their audiences. . . . Folk tales are easy to follow and easy to remember, in part because they deal with familiar aspects of the human condition like the propensity to build castles in the air."<sup>17</sup> In fact, folk tales, especially oral wonder tales, are much more diverse than Bottigheimer suggests. They have so many remarkable similarities with literary fairy tales and other genres such as myths, legends, anecdotes, etc. that it is very difficult to define a typical "authentic" fairy tale. Nevertheless, the omniscient Bottigheimer provides us with strict demarcations that, for once and for all, will enable us to know what a fairy tale really is. Actually, according to Bottigheimer, there are two types of fairy tales, both invented by Straparola: restoration fairy tales and rise fairy tales. "Restoration fairy tales are firmly based in the world of human beings,"<sup>18</sup> Bottigheimer states, and I have no idea what she means. She outlines a plot in which a member of the nobility (king or queen) is banished or driven from his realm and regains it through enduring tests and trials. "Rise fairy tales

begin with a dirt poor girl or boy who suffers the effects of grinding poverty and whose story continues with tests, tasks, and trials until magic brings about a marriage to royalty and a happy accession to great wealth."<sup>19</sup> These descriptive definitions are so vague, flat, and simplistic that they could fit thousands if not hundreds of thousands of narrative types and schemes. Moreover, Bottigheimer does not consider many other theories developed by Vladimir Propp, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Claude Brémont, Louis Marin, or Steven Swann Jones,<sup>20</sup> just to name a few, who have endeavored to explicate the patterns in folk and fairy tales in great detail. She does, however, discuss why tales about fairyland are different from fairy tales and declares that "the distinguishing characteristics of tales about fairyland—two parallel universes and sometimes unhappy endings—make their differences from fairy tales obvious. Despite these fundamental differences in location and outcome, tales about fairyland are often, and confusingly, lumped together with human-centered and real-world-based fairy tales."<sup>21</sup> Yet, Bottigheimer does not attempt to understand the social history of fairies that can be traced to Greek and Roman antiquity and the worship of certain goddesses.<sup>22</sup> Nor does she consider that fairies (and related creatures such as nixies, sirens, mermaids, and sylphs) were part of the real human word and belief systems of humans. What concerns her most is to establish her own categorical definition of two types of literary fairy tales and to demonstrate that the "unfettered country folk" could never have told tales that engendered what Straparola and Basile supposedly engendered—the genre of the fairy tale.



In her next chapter, "Two Accounts of the Grimms' Tales: The Folk as Creator, the Book as Source," she again rehashes what folklorists and literary critics have been discussing and have known for the past forty years. There's nothing new in this chapter except a vitriolic attack on the poor Brothers Grimm, or should I say, Wilhelm, for he was the brother most responsible for editing the Grimms' *Children's and Household Tales*, from 1819 onward. Bottigheimer makes a great deal out of the fact that many of the Grimms' informants were from the middle class or could read and that the Brothers somewhat idealized the German folk, a view that was carried on and maintained by German folklorists in the twentieth century and scholars from other countries. However, this does not discount the fact that most if not all of the Grimms' tales have oral sources and most can be traced to other countries and other collections of folklorists in other countries. Whether the Grimms' conception of the folk was right or wrong, they were responsible for the significant collecting of oral tales in Europe throughout the nineteenth century, and Bottigheimer does not give them credit for their endeavors to encourage learned people to pay more attention to non-literate people and their beliefs, rituals, and customs. Instead, she makes such demeaning remarks as: "The Grimms themselves were poor judges of the folk that they claimed to be the pure creators of and the uncontaminated disseminators of oral narrative. In the years of their collecting for the first volume of the First Edition, Wilhelm and Jacob must have been remarkably ignorant about Germany's folk. Despite the personal poverty of their adolescent years in Cassel, they had

passed their childhood among Hesse-Cassel's privileged and had spent their early manhood in libraries and archives, and, when ill health forced it, in spas. Unworldly, inexperienced, and like the tales they recorded, generally innocent of sexual knowledge, they were personally naive about the peasantry's earthly world. Thus it is not surprising that they projected the simplicity with which they were personally familiar onto the tales they were collecting, and beyond them, to the folk they believed in."<sup>23</sup>

Bottigheimer assumes that she knows more about the German people than the Grimms did, and this puts her in the authoritative position to judge them and their relationship to the people. Perhaps she should read the letters that the Brothers exchanged between themselves and the recent biography by Stefan Martus to obtain a better understanding of the Grimms.<sup>24</sup> The Brothers were not the total bookworms and naive dreamers that she makes them out to be. They were not interested in mixing with and catering to the upper classes and always had contact with people both from the lower and upper classes. It is true that they were very diligent students, but they also were down-to-earth and knew that they had to work hard to support their family after their father's early death. Only one brother, Wilhelm, went to a health spa in Halle, not a luxurious spa attended by both Brothers as Bottigheimer suggests. Jacob travelled to Vienna and then to Paris and saw the ravages of war and its effect on the common people and wrote about them. The Brothers knew more about sex and bawdy jokes than Bottigheimer pretends, and the tales—among them many tales about soldiers—they collected do

in part reflect the “earthly world” about which Bottigheimer seems to know very little.

Throughout her book Bottigheimer works with assumptions, declarations, and questionable evidence as if only she knew the truth about history. She is, however, a most unreliable historian. In chapter three, “The Late Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Layers,” she wants to prove that the talented French writers of the 1690s all knew Straparola’s and Basile’s works and could not have been influenced by a French oral tradition that, according to Bottigheimer, did not even exist. Yet, many of the women writers, d’Aulnoy, Lhéritier, De La Force, Murat, and even Charles Perrault, make reference to nannies and servants who told them tales. Some of the best scholars in France have documented the influence of French folklore and orality in the writing of the tales.<sup>25</sup> Often the women writers performed their tales orally in salons. With the exception of Murat, none of the writers ever mentioned Straparola in their letters or memoirs. As for Basile, none of the French writers could read Italian much less the Neapolitan dialect in which Basile wrote his tales. Yet, Bottigheimer once again declares: “I’ve examined Lhéritier’s and Perrault’s tales of the good and bad sisters and their respective magical rewards and curses. I’ve compared them with each other and with the two Basile tales that preceded them. And I’ve concluded that Perrault may well have had his niece’s tales as well as Basile’s two tales in front of him when he composed ‘The Fairies.’”<sup>26</sup>

Once again Bottigheimer lets her imagination carry her away to invent scenes so that she can justify the magic powers of

the book. We have no knowledge whatsoever about Perrault’s practice of writing. We do not know whether he copied or worked with Basile’s and Lhéritier’s texts. It is most unlikely that he could decipher Basile’s unusual Neapolitan dialect and Baroque stories. It is more likely that Perrault may have known some oral tale related to the cycle of “the good and bad girls” that circulated not only in France but also in Germany, the Slavonic countries, and Italy. This is not to say that we must privilege the oral over print, but as various French scholars have endeavored to explain, we should be aware of oral influences in printed tales that can be traced linguistically, philologically, stylistically, and historically to all kinds of oral tales.

The oral components in Straparola’s and Basile’s tales are striking, but in chapter four, “The Two Inventors of Fairy Tale Tradition; Giambattista Basile (1634-1636) and Giovan Francesco Straparola (1551, 1553),” Bottigheimer uses her narrow definitions of the fairy tale as restoration and rise tale to eliminate any possibility that either Basile or Straparola might have based their tales on oral sources or tried to imitate oral performances that might have influenced their writing.<sup>27</sup> Once again, Bottigheimer makes all sorts of allusions to Straparola’s and Basile’s lives that make it seem as if their tales were formed either by their own imaginations or through reading books. It is important, however, to stress again that we know absolutely nothing about Straparola, and that he might not have even lived in Venice or addressed his tales to the urban artisans who supposedly devoured his books. We could even, like Bottigheimer, create a

Straparola who listened to tales by gifted Venetians and who might have known tales from *The Arabian Nights*, because of the trade with Turks, Arabs, and Persians in Venice. The truth is that we must rely on slight textual evidence in the case of Straparola and on historical records and texts in the case of Basile, two very different writers. Since I have already dealt with Straparola earlier in this essay, I will add here only that the author himself reveals his debt to the oral storytelling tradition in the book, frame narrative, and some of the tales. Straparola admits that the tales are not his; his narrative is based on a gathering of people from the upper classes who tell tales that they have heard before, a couple of them in dialect. All of them bear witness to an oral influence, including the telling of riddles. In the case of Basile, who chose to invent ten bizarre peasant women to tell the tales in his collection *The Tale of Tales* (*Lo Cunto de li cunti*), it is clear from the dialect, the hybrid plots, and his known performances at courts that he was thoroughly conversant with a lower-class tradition of storytelling. Naples, the south of Italy, and Sicily were treasure chests of oral storytelling, and Basile, who travelled throughout Italy and was not from the aristocracy, was clearly familiar with oral tales and literary works. His brilliance—the use of folk dialect to mock Baroque mannerist conventions—seems to have avoided Bottigheimer's gaze.

In her final chapter, "A New History," she begins with another one of her infamous declarations that are based on nothing but disdain for common people and oral traditions: "If we look forward from Straparola toward the fairy tale future, we see a publishing phenomenon with

printed texts carrying fairy tales from one place to another. The ubiquitous and mysterious folk and nursemaids remain, but as consumers of fairy tales rather than as producers."<sup>28</sup> Given the fact that anywhere from 70% to 90% of the population in Europe was non-literate, that Latin dominated the books published in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, that books were often purchased by collectors, placed in libraries, and not read, that there are few records of people reading print fairy tales, that people from all classes read aloud in an oral tradition, that books were expensive, that most people spoke and communicated in some kind of dialect, we must ask what the common people were doing to amuse themselves in the medieval and Renaissance periods. We must ask why the learned people ignored the writing down of the tales of the common people. We know, however, that once learned people actually began to investigate in the nineteenth century what tales common people were telling, they found hundreds if not thousands that were not influenced by books; many were oral wonder tales. Bottigheimer forgets to add that books circulated mainly among the aristocracy and upper middle classes, and many of the French and German writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries wrote extraordinary literary fairy tales that show no connection to so-called restoration and rise tales. As to her derogatory remarks about common people, whom she turns into passive consumers unable to create their own wonder or magic tales, they are lamentable. Perhaps if she studied how peasants and laborers developed certain rituals, how tales and songs were performed in their homes and at work, how they con-

fessed their beliefs about elves, fairies, and witches in fabricated stories to their persecutors, how town criers might have circulated tales, and so on, she might have granted them some brains and creativity. Bottigheimer, however, goes even further than denying the majority of European people any power of original storytelling; she means to diminish the tales of all other peoples in the world with her “new” history when she writes: “In a large sense the international spread of fairy tales can be explained within a history of a predominantly Italian creation, French editing, and German re-editing that took place in a context of commercial mechanisms within book distribution networks.”<sup>29</sup> This statement—unless you subscribe to Bottigheimer’s prescriptive definition of a fairy tale—explains nothing and is an outright lie. Fairy tales, even the kind Bottigheimer celebrates, were told, copied, and disseminated by word of mouth and manuscript in many other parts of the world long before Straparola was born. Her “new” history of the fairy tale is nothing but an embarrassment to literary analysis, literary history, social history, and publishing history.

### **Ideological Simplifications and Implications**

What is perhaps most disturbing about Bottigheimer’s *Fairy Tales: A New History* is her seemingly objective use of terms and methods to conceal a perverse ideological agenda. Perhaps she is unaware of her own ideological prejudices and the negative effects they might have for students and scholars of folklore and fairy tales, but they clearly color her views and reveal the defects and contradictions of her faux history.

In a superb talk, “Authorizing Fairy-Tale History? Disciplinary Debates and the Politics of Inequality,” held by Cristina Bacchilega at the recent 2010 meeting of the American Folklore Society, she comments: “When Bottigheimer writes, ‘Rise fairy tales are a product of that quintessential engine of modernity, the printing press,’ this seemingly matter-of-fact statement, which is more a declaration than a historical truth, participates in a larger and powerful discourse that has represented modernity as strictly literate as well as simply European, and has configured the difference between oral and print traditions into a strategy of control and domination. Why does this matter? Whether the fairy-tale genre is considered exclusively within European and literary history, or as a genre whose ties to expressive cultures and comparative literatures are inflected by global dynamics, has significant implications for ascribing a place for lay and subaltern knowledges in history.”<sup>30</sup>

If Bottigheimer had been serious about writing a new, more balanced interdisciplinary history of the fairy tale, she might have begun with a discussion about the evolution of human communication throughout the world and how humans exchanged information and developed narratives based on daily experience, work, rituals, and beliefs. Though there is no exact date as to when human language and cognition developed, most historians agree that it was at least 100,000 to 200,000 years ago, long before alphabets, script, and printing presses. That is, all people on the earth lived and communicated by gestures and word of mouth thousands of years before such a thing as a fairy tale as we know it today came into



being. Yet, tales of various kinds were invented and cultivated, and as Michael Tomasello points out in *The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition*: “Natural languages also contain cognitive resources for construing whole events or situations in terms of one another, that is, for creating the various kinds of analogies and metaphors that are so important in adult cognition—such as seeing the atom as a solar system, love as a journey, or anger as heat. Also, children’s growing skills of linguistic communication enable them to participate in complex discourse interactions in which the explicitly symbolized perspectives of interactions clash and so must be negotiated and resolved. These kinds of interactions may lead children to begin to construct something like a theory of mind of their communicative partners, and, in some special cases of pedagogical discourse, to internalize adult instructions and so begin to self-regulate and to reflect on their own thinking—perhaps leading to some types of metacognition and representational redescription. The internalization of discourse interactions containing multiple, conflicting perspectives may even be identified with certain types of uniquely human, dialogical thinking processes.”<sup>31</sup>

The primary learning processes of language and cultural communication were and are based on imitation, instruction, and communication. What is important for the study of fairy tales and any other narrative form is a comprehension of its evolutionary tendencies. Tomasello writes: “Cumulative cultural evolution depends on imitative learning, and perhaps active instruction on the part of adults and cannot be brought about by means of ‘weaker’ forms of social learn-

ing such as local enhancement, emulation learning, ontogenetic ritualization, or any form of individual learning. The argument is that cumulative cultural evolution depends on two processes, innovation and imitation (possibly supplemented by instruction), that must take place in a dialectical process over time such that one step in the process enables the next.”<sup>32</sup>

As metaphorical tales were told and circulated thousands of years before print, they served social functions, were retained through memory, and were passed on from generation to generation. When oral wonder tales originated, it is difficult to say, but there are traces, signs, patterns, and plots in early ancient manuscripts that reveal how all people came to know the world through metaphor, ritual, custom, and transformation. Tales were not named or categorized according to genre, but it is clear that most of the fairy-tale motifs, topoi, characters, plots, and conventions existed in oral traditions (and some continue to do so) long before learned people learned how to write and categorize narratives.

An interesting case in point is *The Thousand and One Nights* (*Alf Laila wa Laila*) which is purposely omitted from discussion in Bottigheimer’s essays and books. The tales in this collection were originally Persian and stemmed from oral storytelling traditions of the eighth and ninth centuries. As Paul McMichael Nurse points out in *Eastern Dreams: How the Arabian Nights Came to the World*, “Travel and trade mean exchanges not only of goods but also of ideas and information. Although their exact provenance is unknown, based on such internal evidence as cultural references and

terminology it is believed that many of the stories in the *Nights* originated with Indian, Arab, Persian, Greek, Roman and possibly Chinese travelers, merchants, and soldiers plying travel routes from the Balkans to the China Sea. Rest stops were spent around campfires or in the occasional caravanserai—walled hostels catering to travelers—dotting the roads. At these times, it was customary to swap stories to while away the restful hours before setting out again. The more popular tales were thus transferred from place to place while being continually modified according to regional customs and circumstances, much as a joke will assume local colour and familiar allusions for better comprehension."<sup>33</sup>

The development of the *Nights* tales from the Oriental oral and literary traditions of the Middle Ages into a classical work for Western readers is a fascinating one. The tales in the collection can be traced to three ancient oral cultures — Indian, Persian, and Arab —and they probably circulated in the vernacular hundreds of years before they were written down some time between the ninth and fourteenth centuries. The apparent model for the literary versions of the tales was a Persian book entitled *Hezâr afsân* (A Thousand Stories), translated into Arabic in the ninth century as *Alf laylah wa-laylah* (A Thousand and One Nights), for it provided the framework story of a caliph who kills his wife because she betrays him. Then, for the next three years, he takes a new wife every day and slays her each night after taking her maidenhead to avenge himself on women. He is finally diverted from this cruel custom by a vizier's daughter, assisted by her slave-girl. During the next seven centuries,

various storytellers, scribes, and scholars began to record the tales from this collection and others and to shape them either independently or within the framework of the Sheherezade/Shahriyâr narrative frame. The tellers and authors of the tales were anonymous and their styles and language differed greatly; the only common distinguishing feature was the fact that they were written in a colloquial language called Middle Arabic that had its own peculiar grammar and syntax. By the fifteenth century, three distinct layers could be detected in the collection of those tales that formed the nucleus of what became known as *The Thousand and One Nights*: (1) Persian tales that had some Indian elements and had been adapted into Arabic by the tenth century; (2) tales recorded in Baghdad between the tenth and twelfth centuries; (3) stories written down in Egypt between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries.

Nurse emphasizes the important role played by the *rawi*, professional storytellers or reciting storytellers, in the dissemination of the tales that were addressed mainly to people of the lower classes, disdained by the educated classes. The *rawi* still exercise their profession in Morocco today. Nurse also notes that many of the tales come from written compilations and literary antecedents and were constantly being changed when told and written down. In the process they became truly international, and Nurse notes, "it is known that stories from the *Nights* were circulating in 'westernized' versions in Europe many centuries before their printed appearance, cropping up in oral form in Germany, France, Italy and Spain, although it is unclear whether manuscript versions of sundry *Nights*

tales were in circulation. All the same, it is likely some *Nights* stories were present in Europe from around the twelfth century, arriving through Arabized Sicily or Moorish Spain to be absorbed into the European folklore tradition."<sup>34</sup>

Among the hundreds of tales that were recorded by scribes were stories that followed Bottigheimer's plots of rise and restoration tales such as "The Fisherman and the Genie," "The Tale of the Three Apples," "Aladdin and the Magic Lamp," and "The Ebony Horse." In addition, there were fairy tales of initiation and marriage rituals, tales with fairies, flying horses, and wizards, and tales dealing with incest, child abuse and abandonment, rape, slavery, exploitation, deceit, miraculous intervention, and so on. Were these tales told in Venice during Straparola's time? We don't know for certain, but we do know something that Bottigheimer never discusses: Venice was the most important trade center with the Byzantine Empire and the Muslim world, and it is quite possible that not only goods but tales were exchanged in this port city that was also known for the performing arts and the publishing of books. Though there was a higher rate of literacy in Venice than in most Italian cities, more than 70% of the people in the city could not read adequately, and even those who could read did not necessarily understand what they read. As Brian Richardson points out in *Printing, Writers and Readers in Renaissance Italy*, "What is striking from a modern point of view is that children could learn to read without necessarily understanding fully what they read: because of the force of tradition and the lack of prestige of the vernacular as a written language

among teachers, reading in one's native language did not play a part in the traditional curriculum."<sup>35</sup> Girls were rarely taught to read. Many people could only write their names and yet were considered literate.

In *Literacy in Early Modern Europe: Culture and Education 1500-1800*, R. A. Houston points out, "The imperfect nature of early modern sources generally makes it necessary to categorise people as literate or illiterate. However these are at best seen not as discrete categories, but as steps in a hierarchy of skills. At the same time, seeing and listening could bridge the gap between literate and illiterate. What is more, literacy can be used for different purposes: to serve some practical or *functional* end such as economic need among tradesmen, in which case reading and writing would be advantageous; or to fulfill a religious need, where reading alone is all that is commonly required."<sup>36</sup>

Literacy was also used by the church and by governments constituted by the upper classes to subject the lower classes to authoritative regulations, social codes, laws, and manners. Very few books in the sixteenth century were secular and fiction. Even when they were read, they were frequently read aloud and in groups. For the most part and in most of Europe, orality of different kinds was the dominant mode of cultural communication in all social classes. Cultural conditions and languages were very diverse throughout Europe, and the stories and social practices of the lower classes were not considered worthy of attention. They were very rarely recorded just as Bottigheimer never bothers to explore oral mediation in all the classes and the possible connections between the classes in

regard to storytelling. If she had done this and had understood the complex nature of history, we might have a different picture of Straparola and Basile. We certainly would have a different view of the *Le piacevoli notti* and *Lo Cunto de li cunti* and the significant roles they played in mediating oral and literary stories that helped foster the genre of the literary fairy tale. As it stands, Bottigheimer's "new" history of the fairy tale can only be considered self-serving sensationalist "scholarship."

### Notes

- 1 Marshall Poe. 2011. *A History of Communications: Media and Society from the Evolution of Speech to the Internet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 115.
- 2 See Giovan Francesco Straparola. 2000. *Le piacevoli notti*. Edited by Donato Pirovano. Rome: Salerno: xlvii
- 3 Jack Zipes. 2006. *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization*, 2nd ed. New York: Routledge: 14.
- 4 Straparola, *Le piacevoli notti*: xlvii
- 5 See Jan Ziolkowski. 2010. Straparola and the Fairy Tale: Between Literary and Oral Traditions. *Journal of American Folklore* 123:377-397; Francisco Vaz da Silva. 2010. The Invention of Fairy Tales," *Journal of American Folklore* 123: 398-425; Dan Ben-Amos. 2010. Straparola: The Revolution That Was Not, *Journal of American Folklore* 123: 426-446; Ruth Bottigheimer. 2010. Fairy Godfather, Fairy-Tale History, and Fairy-Tale Scholarship: A Response to Dan Ben-Amos, Jan M. Ziolkowski, and Francisco Vaz da Silva. *Journal of American Folklore* 123.
- 6 Ziolkowski, 377.
- 7 Ziolkowski, 380.
- 8 Ziolkowski, 385.
- 9 Ziolkowski, 395.
- 10 Straparola, *Le piacevoli notti*, li.
- 11 Vaz da Silva, 404.
- 12 Ben-Amos, 430.
- 13 Ben-Amos, 434.
- 14 Darren Oldridge. 2005. *Strange Histories: The Trial of the Pig, the Walking Dead, and Other Matters of Fact from the Medieval and Renaissance Worlds*. London: Routledge, 4.
- 15 Ben-Amos, 435.
- 16 Ruth Bottigheimer 2009 *Fairy Tales: A New History*. Albany: State University of New York, 1.
- 17 Bottigheimer, 4.
- 18 Bottigheimer, 10.
- 19 Bottigheimer, 11-12.
- 20 See Vladimir Propp 1968. *Morphology of the Folktale*. Edited by Louis Wagner and Alan Dundes. 2nd rev. ed. Austin: University of Texas Press; Claude Lévi-Strauss. 1963. *Structural Anthropology* trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf. New York: Doubleday; Claude Brémont. 1997. *L'Analyse structurale du récit*. Paris: Seuil; Louis Marin. 1989. *Food for Thought*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press; Steven Swann Jones, 1995. *The Fairy Tale: The Magic Mirror of Imagination*. New York: Twayne.
- 21 Bottigheimer, 16-17.
- 22 See Lauence Harf-Lancner. 1984. *Les Fées au Moyen Âge: Morgane et Mélusine. La naissance des fées*. Paris: Honoré Champion.
- 23 Bottigheimer, 45.
- 24 See Steffen Martus. 2009. *Die Brüder Grimm: Eine Biographie*. Berlin: Rowohlt.
- 25 See Robert, Raymonde Robert 2002. *Le conte de fées littéraire en France de la fin du XVII à la fin du XVIII siècle. Supplement bibliographique 19800-2000 établi par Nadine Jasmin avec la collaboration de Claire Debru*. Paris: Champion; Anne Defrance and Jean-François Perrin, eds. 2007. *Le conte en ses paroles. La figuration de l'oralité dans le conte merveilleux du Classicisme aux Lumières*. Paris: Éditions Desjonquères.
- 26 Bottigheimer, 73.



27 For two important essays concerned with the oral components of Italian fairy tales, see Cristina Lavinio, "La fiaba tra oralità e scrittura: aspetti linguistici and stilistici" and Giovanna Cerina, "La fiaba tra oralità e scrittura: aspetti semiotici," 1982, in *Oralità e Scrittura nel Sistema Letterario*, ed. Giovanna Cerina, Cristina Lavinio, and Luisa Mulas. Rome: Bulzoni: 91-114 and 115-132. See also Luciano Morbiato, ed. 2006. *La Fiaba e altri Frammenti di Narrazione popolare*. Florence: Olschki.

28 Bottigheimer, 103.

29 Bottigheimer, 107.

30 Cristina Bacchilega, "Authorizing Fairy-Tale History? Disciplinary Debates and the Politics of Inequality," manuscript of talk held on October 16, 2010 at the American Folklore Association Meeting in Nashville, Tennessee. Donald Haase, who responded to Bacchilega's paper, also made some very perceptive remarks about Bottigheimer's rhetoric of assertion at this session. See also Cristina Bacchilega's 2010 review of Ruth Bottigheimer's *Fairy Tales: a New History* in *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 35: 468-71.

31 Michael Tomasello. 2008. *The Origins of Communication*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press: 9-10.

32 *Ibid.*, 39.

33 Paul McMichael Nurse. 2010. *Eastern Dreams: How the Arabian Nights Came to the World*. Toronto: Viking Canada: 23.

34 *Ibid.*, 46.

35 Brian Richardson. 1999. *Printing, Writers and Readers in Renaissance Italy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 108.

36 R. A. Houston. 2002. *Literacy in Early Modern Europe: Culture and Education 1500-1800* London: Longman: 4.

## Contesting the Spectacle: Global Lives as Counterpublic in the Context of Celebrity Activism<sup>1</sup>

Rebecca Elliott

*University of California-Berkeley*

The Global Lives Forum convened on February 27, 2010, to provide a space for critical discussion of the mission and products of the Global Lives Project. The Forum brought together the Project's staff of producers and filmmakers with scholars, students, and members of the public to engage in conversation about the potentials and limitations of the Project, what it had accomplished, and what work was left to be done.

Left implicit but yet perhaps the motivating force behind the entire day's discussions was the question of what makes the Global Lives Project worth doing. Why do we experience a need for something like the Global Lives Project; to what are we reacting? In the various panels and discussions, the participants at the Forum described dissatisfaction with the products of commercial media: radically simplified sound bites increasingly packaged and filtered by appealing personalities. What we know is what is spectacular and this seems insufficient for understanding the world and our places in it.

The current supremacy of the spectacle and its dangers is illustrated forcefully by the contemporary phenomenon of celebrity activism on behalf of Africa. The value of the Global Lives Project as a source of information about the world can

be appreciated if we consider the kinds of media background among which it exists and thus effectively defies.

Bono, Madonna, Angelina Jolie, George Clooney, Oprah Winfrey, and other megastars have chosen to lend some of their limelight to African disease, poverty, and conflict, which become their causes *célèbres*. Bono takes meetings with world leaders to discuss debt relief. Jolie promotes economist Jeffrey Sachs' Millennium Villages Project in Kenya. Winfrey had a school for girls built in Johannesburg. This explosion of interest in Africa among American celebrities is perhaps best confirmed in a 2006 article in the Style Section of the *New York Times* which remarked on Madonna's use of images of AIDS-stricken Malawian children as the backdrop during her concerts, and concluded: "That Madonna should suddenly be casting an ice-blue eye toward Africa should hardly be surprising. After all, she has always known how to spot a trend. And much as it may strain the limits of good taste to say it, Africa—rife with disease, famine, poverty, and civil war—is suddenly 'hot'" (Williams 2006).

A net result of this swell of this high-profile activism, however, is that celebrities have now become a predominant and ubiquitous source of information about Africa. In a 2007 report, media watchdog group Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) assessed the current state of Africa-related television network news coverage and concluded that African countries and issues are increasingly seen "through the prism of celebrity." A full quarter of Africa-related stories on the *NBC Nightly News* over 2005-2007 had a celebrity angle, most commonly focusing on Bono, with whom anchor

Brian Williams traveled to sub-Saharan Africa in the spring of 2006. Across the major networks, FAIR found that Africa-related stories were largely about either celebrity involvement at the G8 summit in Scotland, Bono's activism in general, the movie *Blood Diamond* (about Sierra Leone's civil war, starring Leonardo DiCaprio), Madonna's adoption of a Malawian boy, or George Clooney's activism in Darfur (Hollar 2007).

Celebrities exert immense influence in the public sphere. They attract attention not only from television news, but from every popular medium. The FAIR report captures how celebrities can and do define which issues are *the* issues when they talk about "Africa." They can and do set agenda that empower some actors and disempower others. They offer solutions and celebrate heroes. Because celebrities are regarded as trendsetters, they create, reinforce, and promulgate our popular "truth" about Africans: who they are, what their problems are, how those problems can be solved, and who can and should come to their aid.

Celebrities create this truth largely without the voices of actual Africans. For instance, many African activists complained that 2005's Live 8, the worldwide day of concerts to "raise awareness" in advance of the G8 summit, featured Africans in video montages about HIV / AIDS, but not as speakers or activists (Monbiot 2005). The 2007 "Africa Issue" of *Vanity Fair*, edited by Bono, featured only one African author (Beckerman 2007). *Marie Claire* magazine lionizes female celebrities who go to Africa and diarize about the resilient hope of desperate female victims of poverty, hunger, disease, sexual exploitation, and conflict (Stoevers

2006). In most instances of celebrity activism, Africans are present as subjects but absent as voices, and the "truth" or "common sense" about who they are and what they need goes untested by their own diverse experiences.

Yet while Africans are silent in celebrity activism, they are far from invisible. Celebrities make strategic use of intensely emotional images of suffering—children with distended bellies, skeletal AIDS patients, weary and overburdened women, and so forth. Many of these images feature the celebrity activists themselves, looking distraught. These images tend to recycle inaccurate and degrading stereotypes. "Africans," understood monolithically, are portrayed as passive and helpless, as perpetually beleaguered and in need, or as victims of misery largely of their own making. While the celebrity is recognizable, usually the Africans remain unidentified—as consumers of these images, we typically do not know their names, where they are from, or anything else about them. In this way, the images also act as a communicative medium that silences African voices. The celebrities—and the relatively affluent audiences for whom they proxy—are positioned in these images as the rescuers of the masses of anonymous Africans.

The marginalization of African voices in discourses about them seems intuitively rather unfair. Since celebrities, however, are ultimately so good at generating interest in and support for causes in Africa, we are compelled to ask *why* we should be so worried about such marginalization. Indeed, celebrities have a great capacity to effect the changes they seek: their wealth and public profile enable them to donate money and raise more;

they get the ear of politicians and policymakers; they inspire others to service. Celebrity visibility can be a huge asset to organizations and causes that might otherwise go unnoticed. Americans arguably “care” more about Africa now because celebrities have made it so glamorous (Alleyne 2005; Marshall 1997; Meyer and Gamson 1995; Street 2004; Traub 2008).

The reason to be critically thoughtful about celebrity activism is that it informs how various publics think about these issues, and hence how and to what extent they lean on their own governments and international organizations to intervene. Put simply, and in the words of the Global Lives Project, “what we see informs how we act.” A discourse that orients people towards charity for silent, passive victims does not lead to the informed or sustainable redress of some of the most difficult political and economic challenges. Celebrity activism might alert an otherwise apathetic public to the existence of suffering far away. But by portraying Africans as “unfortunate inferiors,” rather than as “outraged and insulted equals,” celebrities obscure (if not deny) the perspectives and the agency of actual Africans (Spelman 1997, 60). In the words of South African sociologist Zine Magubane (2007): “there is no room in this worldview for the possibility that Africans themselves might be the ones to create the political and economic conditions such that intense poverty might not be the *sine qua non* of African life” (391). The seemingly obvious solution to the marginalization of actual Africans in these discourses about them is to “get them in”—find a way to include African voices. Once there, those voices can contest stereotypes and reassert

political questions that get sidelined to charitable impulses. The difficulty with simple inclusion is that the current structures of our various, transnational public spheres, in which these problematic discourses circulate, are strongly biased against the meaningful participation of subordinated groups. The FAIR report highlights as much: the cameras follow the celebrities. Rather than focus on “getting them in” to a rather hegemonic set of discourses, then, it is perhaps more strategic to subvert these discourses, to widen the discursive space and amplify the counterdiscourses already forming in African and global counterpublics.

Counterpublics, as defined by critical theorist Nancy Fraser (1992, 2007), provide discursive arenas for the formulation of identity and discussion of common concerns. These forums include magazines and newspapers, films, popular music, avant-garde scholarly or artistic institutions, academic journals and, increasingly, online communities and their products. Participants, engaging as peers, articulate their desires, needs, and wants, outside of the supervision of the dominant groups in more mainstream public spheres. Through the processes of debate internal to them, counterpublics create counterdiscourses and counternarratives, which can then be used to lodge a collective, coherent, and sustained discursive attack on what is commonly asserted and understood as “true.” This structural change creates a space and a means for subordinated groups to exercise voice, to challenge assumptions, and to contest the *status quo*.

The Global Lives Project acts as a type of counterpublic insofar as it defies the logics of commercial media. It produces



films that stay close and true to the experiences of the subjects themselves, such that the materiality of their lives can be expressed faithfully, without regard for the right “angle” or emotionally compelling “hook.” The videos do not position an interlocutor between the subject and the viewer; no one is named the authoritative interpreter of the subject’s experience. There is no Bono or Jolie to describe how whole categories of people experience their circumstances. The videos are particular to an extreme: about specific individuals, over the course of one day of their lives. They thereby resist the tendency to generalize across complex diversity, while allowing the possibility that viewers might notice similarities to their own lives and forge meaningful connections.

In Fraser’s rendering, however, counterpublics are strategically oriented. They are political in their objectives, deliberate in their contestation. The Global Lives videos do not make claims or formulate concerns, needs, and wants in the way that Fraser imagines. But what *use* can then be made of them? Do they represent an arena in which the claims of celebrity activists, and other popular “experts”, can be meaningfully contested? If the videos are used as such, are they being co-opted in a way that transgresses the Global Lives Project’s purposeful neglect of narrative?

These questions came up multiple times over the course of the day’s presentations and discussions. Ultimately, they remain open ones. What makes Global Lives strategic and potentially emancipatory is that it offers a source of information about marginalized people that

is focused only on those voices and experiences. The construction and communication of knowledge about ourselves and others are always political acts; the videos provide the data with which viewers can assess just how general the “truths” they take for granted are. The Global Lives Forum provided an opportunity for those involved and interested in the Project to affirm a certain political commitment—not to paternalistically “shine a light” on the “darkest” corners of the globe, but rather to actively seek out and amplifies the diverse voices that have been talking about their experiences all along but have been drowned out by much more powerful and spectacular public figures.

### Notes

In these two event reviews, authors Rebecca Elliot and Stina Marie Hasse Jørgensen have adapted their presentations from a forum organized by Cultural Analysis and the Global Lives Project at the Doreen B. Townsend Center for the Humanities at UC Berkeley in February 2010. The forum, “Representing/ Experiencing Everyday Life in the Global Media: Commentary on the Global Lives Project”, asked a group of scholars and new media artists to reflect on the Global Lives Project itself (<http://globallives.org>), as well as on the value of new media for the understanding of everyday experience globally. The editors are grateful to Elliot and Hasse Jørgensen for their willingness to distill their longer works into our shorter review format. [Eds.]

**Works Cited**

- Alleyne, Mark D. 2005. The United Nations' Celebrity Diplomacy. *SAIS Review* 25.1: 175-185.
- Beckerman, Gal. 2007. The Obscured Continent. *Columbia Journalism Review* (online), [http://www.cjr.org/behind\\_the\\_news/the\\_obscure\\_continent.php](http://www.cjr.org/behind_the_news/the_obscure_continent.php), accessed January 21, 2008.
- Fraser, Nancy. 1992. Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy. In *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press: 109-142.
- Fraser, Nancy. 2007. Transnationalizing the Public Sphere. *Theory, Culture & Society* 24: 7-30.
- Hollar, Julie. 2007. Bono, I Presume?: Covering Africa Through Celebrities. *Extra!* <http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=3119>, accessed 30 May 2010.
- Magubane, Zine. 2007. Oprah in South Africa: The Politics of Coevalness and the Creation of a Black Public Sphere. *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies* 8.4: 373-393.
- Marshall, P. David. 1997. *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Meyer, David S. and Joshua Gamson. 1995. The Challenge of Cultural Elites: Celebrities and Social Movements. *Sociological Inquiry* 65.2: 181-206.
- Monbiot, George. 2005. And still he stays silent: By hailing the failure of this summer's G8 summit as a success, Bob Geldof has betrayed the poor of Africa. *The Guardian* (London), September 6.
- Spelman, Elizabeth V. 1997. *Fruits of Sorrow: Framing Our Attention to Suffering*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Stoeber, Jennifer Lynn. 2006. 'Haute Culture' for Mail Order Missionaries: Representing the Third World Woman in the American Fashion Magazine. *Social Identities* 12: 591-627.
- Street, John. 2004. Celebrity Politicians: Popular Culture and Political Representation. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 6: 435-452.
- Traub, James. 2008. The Celebrity Solution. *The New York Times Magazine* (New York), March 9.
- Williams, Alex. 2006. Into Africa. *The New York Times*, August 13.

## The Global Lives Project: Making New Media Matter in a Global World

Stina Marie Hasse Jørgensen  
*University of Copenhagen*

### The Participatory Culture of Prosuming

Computing has infiltrated the everyday life of people all over the world. It is no longer merely a tool for communication and interaction, but also something-to-think-with, a medium that can give us new dimensions in the way we experience and engage with the world.

The digital media theorist D. Fox Harrell describes how digital media, or *phantasmal media*, affects our way of thinking and acting. He defines three different ways of computing: social, cultural, and critical computing. Harrell defines the aims of critical computing as to:

...challenge and provoke users' idealized cognitive models through enabling active participation imbued with culture and critical awareness. (Harrell 2009, 4)

Critical computing evokes in the user new ways of thinking and interacting with a globalized world. The Global Lives Project is a compelling example of this usage of computing technology. The GLP archive, which contains visual documentation of the lives of different people from around the world on a digital platform on the Internet, enables users to actively engage with global cultures.

Users can watch many different stories of everyday life, and can collect and upload their own documentation of the everyday life experiences of people in their locale<sup>1</sup>. Thereby, GLP participants can add to the creation of a new online collective memory, made with other people through the digital interaction of sharing and distributing information. As a critical computing project, the Global Lives Project hopes to bring a critical awareness of how culture is categorized and transformed by engaging users in a collaborative new media project.

In the field of new media, the concept of participation is a notion of process-oriented production that is constantly changing, interacting, and mutating. Technology has enabled new ways of accessing, manipulating, and remixing already-accumulated media into new forms of expression. In general, new media allows a continuous stream of virtual collaboration; users can build on the works of others to share, edit, and/or sample as both a mode of production and a way of perceiving and engaging in the world. One could say that the process of editing has become a form of art, a mode of interaction, and a way of experiencing the world. In the book *Postproduction* the art critic Nicolas Bourriaud describes this new cultural form:

It is no longer a matter of elaborating a form on the basis of a raw material but working with objects that are already in circulation on the cultural market, which is to say, objects already informed by other objects. (Bourriaud 2002, 22)

By searching, selecting, and swapping from one video documentary to another,

as most of us do in digital archives, we can not only consume the GLP's stories of everyday life around the world, but we can also become remixers, making our own stories of life in a global world. By sampling or editing the Global Lives stories we can create new versions and new narratives from the existing stories. Thus, following Bourriaud, we might see the Global Lives Project as part of a culture of activity, enabling the reinterpretation of the digital archive through user-participation.

In this new form of culture, which one might call a culture of use or a culture of activity, the artwork functions as the temporary terminal of a network of interconnected elements, like a narrative that extends and reinterprets preceding narratives. (Bourriaud 2002, 19)

In this way, our process of selection, swapping, and viewing Global Lives stories, creates a way to build our own personal narratives by building upon the stories of others. These personal narratives are a new form of adaptations, showing our path or activity of selecting and watching these videos online. The recorded and expressed narratives can be seen as a kind of strategic consumption, a tactic to navigate the system. The philosopher Michel De Certeau explains this in the book, *The Practice of Everyday Life*:

A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. (De Certeau 1984, 7)

This can also be thought of as a culture of *prosumerism*. Art scholar Lev Manovich created the term "prosumer" as a com-

bination of the words "producer" and "consumer". Thus, Manovich defines prosuming as a process in which the roles of producer and consumer merge. The Global Lives Project, I would argue, is a social platform that enables this culture of prosumerism. The retelling and reproduction of the narratives captured by the Global Lives Project is part of a new culture of participation enabled by the structure of the digital archive, which creates a place for interaction with the globalized world. As the mission statement of the Global Lives Project explains:

Our mission is to collaboratively build a video library of human life experience that reshapes how we as both producers and viewers conceive of cultures, nations and people outside of our own communities. (The Global Lives Project. 2010b)

The stated purpose of the Global Lives Project is to provide its users with new insights into the similarities and differences among diverse cultures and ways of living in the world; thus, the Global Lives project can be seen as giving everyday people a voice and a place to communicate, based on an ideal of participatory democracy. As the above statement shows, the aim of the Global Lives Project is to change the way people experience and think about the world. It trades on the fact that we are different enough that transcultural interactions are interesting, but similar enough that we can meet in a common interactive space. As the call for papers for the Global Lives Forum argues:

By freely distributing a stream of pixels from unexpected and *underexperienced*



human realities to screens around the planet, the hope of this global band of filmmakers is to rebuild a more holistic and humanist ethos for the upcoming generations of globally connected life. (The Global Lives Project, 2010a)

The Global Lives Project seeks to create room for free and open exchange of culture through dialogue and collaboration that can enable people to critically engage with the world.

### The Culture of Technological Experience

One could argue that the Global Lives Project is not only a project that enables the prosuming culture of participation but also a technological experiment that investigates how we perceive and represent the world. The Global Lives Project addresses the tension between the way we *see* a person in another country and the *experience of being* a person in another country. Emerging technology offers us new modes of bodily perception, without any movement through physical space. In the Global Lives archive, we can not only see how people live their everyday lives, but we can toggle between these lives, moving from Kazakhstan to San Francisco in a split second.

New media technology, however, is something we experience *through*, so it is easy to forget that we are witnessing representations. We must pause to consider how these representations take place, because technology not only mediates the corporal world, it creates and changes our thinking. (Ihde 2003)

In *Technoscience and Postphenomenology*, Don Ihde describes how we are bodily engaged with technology. We embody

the technology used in our interactions with the world. Through this embodiment, technology gets under our skin. In other words, over time the *use* of technology can be transformed into a *being* of technology. Either one as a subject interactively engages with the world by the use of technology, i.e. by using glasses in order to interact with the surrounding environment, or one can engage with technology as a subject that perceives the world through *hermeneutical relations*. The hermeneutical relation is the way we interpret or read the world through technology and can best be compared to the relation between a *trompe l'oeil* painting and its viewer. First the *trompe l'oeil* technique deceives the eye of the viewer to believe that the painting is real, and then it reveals its identity as a painting to the viewer. This makes the viewer aware of the difference between the corporeal reality and the representation of the painting. The revelation of the deceptive quality of the painting – its *difference* – is done in order to make the viewer reflect on the painting as something in itself and not just mere representation. Further, it prompts us to reflect on the world in which the painting and the viewer are both present. In the case of the Global Lives Project, it is the computing technology that makes the transformation and creates the *difference*. Ihde explains the technological transformation:

Technologies transform our experience of the world and our perceptions and interpretations of our world, and we in turn become transformed in this process. Transformations are non-neutral. (Ihde 2009, 44)

The corporeal experience of culture is based on smell, taste, sound, sight, touch, and bodily perceptions. These sensations cannot be communicated entirely through technology. The bodily experience of culture is different from the experience of cultures mediated through technology.

That is the whole point. The space presented by the Global Lives Project is impossible to experience in the corporeal world alone. It is exactly because of the technological nature of the work that it enables us to perceive the impossible as possible: to create a participatory culture of prosuming. The space created in the new media work does not represent an actual physical space; rather, it refers to it in its presentation of itself. In other words, the experience of a new media work is brought about by the *difference* between the corporeal reality of the space and the technologically-developed *metamorphosis* of the space. The Global Lives Project could not exist without the technology. This is why the experience of the technology and the possibilities of selecting, sampling, and remixing personal narratives are an essential part of the project. One could say that it is a matter of enabling the technology to amplify the inaudible by exhibiting the technological attributes within the new media work.

### **Making New Media Matter in a Global World.**

When critical computing projects use the new media technology as a medium that is something-to-think-with, it can open up questions that could not otherwise have been asked. The Global Lives Project opens our eyes to questions about what culture is and how it can inform hu-

man experience in a global world. This is partly due to the rise of the participatory culture of prosuming, whose prominent features are the development of technology as a mediator of experience and the recognition of the crucial *difference* between the corporeal world and the virtual world. However, all of these would not have made the Global Lives Project so successful without its ideal and realization of free culture. The project would simply not have existed without the motivation and belief in free sharing, collaboration, contribution, and communication. Yet, while the Global Lives can be said to realize this ideal of free culture, with their successful and constantly expanding digital archive of documentation on global lives, it is the technology of new media that makes the ideal of free culture possible to pursue. Because the technology enables us to do things that are impossible to do in the corporeal world, the digital archive of the Global Lives Project becomes both a tool for people to use and interact with, but also a way of being. There is a long way to go before the corporeal world can become as open and engaging as the GLP archive; however, the Global Lives Project is creating a digital path that shows us other possible worlds and cultures and enables us to use technology as something-to-think-with.

### **Notes**

See more on how to participate on: [www.globallives.org](http://www.globallives.org)

### **Works Cited**

- Bourriaud, Nicolas. 2002. *Postproduction – Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World*. New York: Has & Sternberg.
- De Certeau, Michel. 1984. The Practice of Everyday Life. [http://www.ubu.com/papers/de\\_certeau.html](http://www.ubu.com/papers/de_certeau.html) Accessed on January 4, 2011.
- Free Culture Forum Charter. 2009, <http://fcforum.net>. Accessed on May 5, 2010.
- The Global Lives Project. 2010a. Call for Papers: Representing / Experiencing Everyday Life in the Global Media: Commentary on the Global Lives Project. <http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~caforum/glpconference.html> Accessed on January 4, 2011.
- The Global Lives Project. 2010b. Mission Statement and 2010 Artist's Statement: <http://globallives.org/about>. Accessed on May 5, 2010.
- Harrell, D. Fox. 2009. Toward a Theory of Phantasmal Media: An Imaginative Cognition and Computation-based Approach to Digital Media. [www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=610](http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=610) Accessed on December 20, 2010
- Ihde, Don. 2009. *Postphenomenology and Technoscience: The Peking University Lectures*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 25-44.
- Manovich, Lev. 2002. The Language of New Media. <http://andreknoerig.de/portfolio/03/bin/.../manovich-langofnewmedia.pdf> Accessed on April 5, 2010.





## Reviews

---

*Cinderella in America: A Book of Folk and Fairy Tales*. Compiled and edited by William Bernard McCarthy. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007. xiv + 514 pp., appendix, bibliography, 4 indexes, 18 photographs.

*Cinderella in America: A Book of Folk and Fairy Tales* is a highly readable and unique addition to the project of documenting the development of European *märchen* as transplanted to American soil. While *Cinderella in America* represents the widest range of American folk tales available in one volume, William Bernard McCarthy limits his scope solely to tales of European origin, choosing to exclude American tales with origins in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, or Native American cultures. However, he includes European tales retold in African American and Native American communities. He further restricts this collection to include only wonder tales/*märchen* rather than the joke narratives and tall tales popular among American narrators. These limitations are necessarily somewhat arbitrary, but they also inform the specific polemical function of this volume: to prove that, far from withering in the New World, the European wonder tale has had a vibrant and persistent life of its own in the United States.

The collection is separated into five parts organized by both historical period and ethnic group, then sub-divided into seventeen chapters on specific regions. A sixth part and eighteenth chapter offer a case study of not simply a tale, but the tale-teller herself, including personal background and photos of her in performance as a final illustration of the pro-

cess by which European *märchen* were adapted as an integral part of an American repertoire. An introduction prefaces each section, providing cultural and historical background on the group. It also describes the material available and provides a narrative of the collection process for each region.

The explanatory notes at the end of each tale are informative and often appealing in their own right. Details included are that of tale-type classification, transcription and translation information, and description of story elements, in addition to anecdotal descriptions of collector and performer. McCarthy also uses the endnotes as an opportunity to point out unusual features of the tale that mark it as distinctly "American" in its retelling. The endnotes often reference other works with slightly different transcriptions of similar tales, in addition to offering parallels to other tales within the volume itself. This results in a degree of comprehensiveness; while obviously unable to include more than a sampling of the rich variety of tales that are available, the endnotes provide a sense of the holistic panorama of American tale telling and collecting. These background notes legitimize the collection as a production for the serious scholar, while moving this information out of the main body of the text allows McCarthy to retain the interest of a more casual reader.

Despite the interesting and informative editorial notes, the tales themselves are what make this volume worth reading. Drawing from archives, regional collections, unpublished notes of fellow folklorists, and his personal work, McCarthy presents a range of tales that represents

a wide swath of the Euro-American tale telling experience. Thus many of the tale texts are either unique to this volume or found only rarely in other publications. McCarthy has taken care to ensure as much accuracy in the reproduction of the original voice of the performer as possible (while eschewing “eye-spelling” or dialect exaggeration) by returning to the original recording or transcription when available and personally re-transcribing the material. This results in an easily readable yet powerful presentation of these expressive tales in their rich variety of contexts and idioms.

The engaging style in which both tales and background are presented suggests that McCarthy writes with a popular audience in mind. However, he also offers an unobtrusive but thorough academic background for his work through the editorial notes described above, an extensive list of references and credits, and multiple indexes including tale types, motifs, collectors, and storytellers. As one of the few scholarly collections of American *märchen*, *Cinderella in America* would serve as a convenient and reliable initial reference point for those interested in pursuing research on Euro-American folk tales.

McCarthy sets out prove that, contrary to conventional assumptions, the Old World tradition of tale telling did indeed travel with European immigrants to the United States, becoming as much a part of American social fabric as the people who retold them. This large and varied collection of evocative wonder tales serves not only as a valuable resource and a pleasant read, but as an array of highly persuasive evidence for this argument.

Jessica Erberich

*University of Southern California*

*Everyday Life in Central Asia: Past and Present*. Edited by Jeff Sahadeo and Russell Zanca. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007. Pp. ix + 401, introduction, selected bibliography, index.

One cannot read much of the scholarly literature on modern Central Asia (the countries of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan) without encountering scholars’ perennial laments about the relative lack of substantive, non-politicized analyses of life in the post-Soviet era. Indeed, rarely do academic treatments of the region come down from the macro level to consider how Central Asians live their everyday lives. Jeff Sahadeo and Russell Zanca’s edited volume admirably fills this lacuna in present scholarship and will likely become a standard text for Humanities courses on the region.

The book is comprised of contributions from a mixture of well-known and newer voices in the field of Central Asian studies, spanning the disciplines of anthropology, political science, sociology, history, and religious studies. After an introduction and a short opening essay that historically positions the two major ethno-linguistic groups of the region, the editors divide the remaining chapters among categories such as “communities,” “gender,” “performance and encounters,” “nation, state, and society in the everyday,” and “religion.”

Scott Levi’s concise but conceptually broad introductory essay rightly problematizes essentialist scholarship which has often perpetuated the idea of the bifurcated nature of Central Asian ethnicity. In a crude distinction, some scholars continue to maintain that a static histori-

cal dichotomy exists between the nomadic and settled population of the region, one which manifests itself even in present conflict as exemplified by the violent events in Kyrgyzstan during 2010. In contrast, while recognizing the historical importance of this division, Levi paints a more complex picture of symbiosis, adaptation, and syncretism.

Under the heading of “communities,” the second section of the volume is perhaps the most temporally and geographically diverse of the entire book. Indeed, it is only here that the book’s contributors stray outside the bounds of the post-Soviet Central Asian republics. Contributions include Adrienne Edgar’s chapter on nomadic life among the Turkmens in the pre-Soviet period, Robert Canfield’s analysis of a wedding narrative highlighting the uncertainties of rural life and the “hidden transcripts” of Central Asian subalterns in the context of a village conflict in Afghanistan, and Morgan Liu’s discussion of contrasting visions of post-Soviet modernity in both the Uzbek neighborhoods and the Soviet-constructed environs of the Kyrgyz city of Osh.

In part three of the volume, under the heading of “gender,” Douglas Northrop questions the pre-war efficacy of the Soviet *hujum* or attack on female veiling in Uzbekistan and argues that the ultimate legacy of such Soviet campaigns during the 1920s and 1930s was to mark female dress as emblematic of political and national identity. During the 1930s, most Uzbek women embraced the de-veiling campaigns only when expedient and when beyond the purview of Soviet authorities largely remained behind their horsehair *chachvon*. Marianne Kamp also details how the women who comprised

the early ranks of Soviet cadres in Central Asia negotiated Soviet and pre-Soviet ideals, creating novel wedding and marriage traditions that were held up as models for the new Uzbek-Soviet woman. Elizabeth Constantine argues that during the Soviet period gender roles were significantly transformed as women internalized Soviet notions of gender. Complimenting Constantine’s case that the ideas of gender changed during the Soviet period, Greta Uehling illustrates how they remain in flux after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The editors classify the chapters concerning facets of cultural life such as foodways, festival, and music under the heading “performance and encounters.” It is here that Central Asian “tradition” comes to the fore in an examination of the everyday practices associated with globalized Kazakh music performance, a chapter on how the Uzbek predilection for fatty foods reflects and indexes conceptions of Uzbek identity and present economic reality, a cogent examination of the dialectic between private and public meanings associated with Uzbek holidays and celebrations, several reflexive ethnographic vignettes on the meanings of Kazakh hospitality practices, and a piece discussing the nature of post-Soviet gender relations in rural Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan that highlights the adaptive nature of the everyday and the social disruptiveness of the Soviet period.

To this point, the majority of the volume focuses on the quotidian as a lens with which to view Central Asia’s post-Soviet reality, but institutions also play a part in the construction of the Central Asian “everyday.” Perhaps one of the most invasive ways that Central Asians

have experienced the imposition of state structures (and strictures) was in the arbitrary mapping of the republics' borders and the difficulties these presented for travel in places like the historically-interdependent Ferghana valley. Similarly, many Central Asians continue to suffer the ill effects of the collapse of the Soviet economic system. In that vein, Kelly McMann shows how nostalgia for the command economy remains strong even as many Central Asians now enjoy liberties denied under the Soviet regime. The efficiency of the education system in many Central Asian states also lags behind that of the USSR. In another essay Shoshana Keller illustrates how Uzbeks work to negotiate the endemic corruption miring down Uzbek schools.

Generally, whenever scholarly literature has considered religious life in Central Asia, the discussion is framed in terms of broader struggles against "political" Islam. As the editors note, their purpose is to interrogate such simplistic renderings of the alleged renewal of religious fervor in Central Asia. Secondly, the contributions all, to some extent, weigh in on the success or failure of Soviet militant atheism and its rhetorical foil, "underground" Islam. To those ends, the contributors discuss issues such as the relationship of local congregations to state directives in Uzbekistan, shrine visitation practices and the nature of Islamic authority, varied conceptions of proper Islamic behavior, and the challenges faced by Christian minorities in the religious landscape of post-Soviet Central Asia.

The various chapters in this volume all work to deconstruct the dominant and almost hegemonic force of policy-

centered work in the region by arguing that Central Asians are not inextricably tied to a static "tradition" which survived intact after decades of Soviet control, nor are they are inherently susceptible to "fundamentalist" ideologies. Rather, Central Asian modernity is multifarious, shifting, and ever ready to adapt to political, economic, and social circumstances. As folklorists have long known, the "everyday" is, as shown in this volume, a site of ongoing negotiation and active social construction. In light of its accessible prose and ground-level analysis of life in the republics of Central Asia, engaged general readers and undergraduate students will find this work a helpful introduction to the region.

**Benjamin Gatling**

*The Ohio State University*



*Imperial Masochism: British Fiction, Fantasy, and Social Class.* By John Kucich. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007. Pp.

In this study of colonial fiction, John Kucich moves away from psychoanalytic theories of masochism anchored in oedipal drama. Generally speaking, such theories feature either a male masochist who valiantly flouts the oedipal rulebook or one of a less noble variety who takes the part of the charlatan and, by some sleight of hand, converts his suffering into moral clout. Recent relational psychoanalysis, however, supplies what Kucich is convinced is a more useful grammar of preoedipal masochism: masochism that is chiefly of a narcissistic rather than sexual character and thus linked to fantasies of omnipotence. Kucich's appeal to relational psychoanalysis as a principal but not exclusive or intractable interpretive method bears fruit. Moreover, his findings are a welcome alternative to the now-conventional discovery that writers such as Rudyard Kipling and Joseph Conrad were casualties of ambivalence, authors whose approbation of imperial tactics is at least as demonstrable as their frustration with it. Rather than hedging his bets, the literary critic might discover a method to colonial fiction's mixed messages in structures of preoedipal masochism. In *Imperial Masochism*, Kucich contends that these structures provided a "psycho-social language" that fashioned imperial and class subjectivities both abroad and domestically (2).

In the introduction to his book, Kucich scrupulously delineates non-identical but often overlapping varieties

of preoedipal masochistic fantasy. For instance, "fantasies of total control over others" might take the form of "magical reinterpretation of events", or bestowing upon oneself the power to "lie, cheat, or use guile" with impunity, while exaggerated suffering that props up the parental figure is aligned with "fantasies that maintain the omnipotence of others" (23-24). Schlepping through this painstaking (but far from tedious) catalog is essential. The trouble with late-Victorian masochistic fantasy, Kucich explains, is that it "exploits a disarticulated middle-class social consciousness" and gives it new form; it is not a fixed expression of social relations so much as equipment designed to generate social discourse (84). Consequently, masochistic fantasy as a literary device is available to the champions of British Imperialism, among them Kipling and Conrad, as well as its critics, such as Robert Louis Stevenson and Olive Schreiner. In identifying the shifting configurations of masochistic fantasy in the work of each of these authors and by sifting through race and gender ideologies to distinguish the class values embedded in these fantasies, Kucich offers new and sometimes startlingly fresh evaluations of their work.

The "logic of masochistic fantasy" is slippery stuff, and Kucich proceeds with caution. Chapter 1, "Melancholy Magic: Robert Louis Stevenson's Evangelical Anti-Imperialism" is an impressive, thorough piece of criticism, and the highlight of the book. In this chapter, Kucich traces Stevenson's literary masochism to an increasingly fragmented evangelical psychological ideology that symbolized the decline of the middle

class. Whereas Stevenson's early Scottish novels mobilize masochistic splitting to capture irreconcilable bohemian and bourgeois impulses, Kucich explains that, in his late nineteenth-century South Sea tales of imperial entrepreneurialism Stevenson finally invents middle-class characters whose patterns of "masochistic self-invention appear to constitute a grammar of moral legitimacy", and censure "interlopers" of the upper and lower classes (72).

In the next chapter, however, Kucich's insistence that Olive Schreiner "submerged oedipal within preoedipal masochism" leaves the reader in much murkier territory (92). His intricate readings of the interplay between "Freudian" and relational paradigms in the South African author's work are difficult to follow, though Kucich intriguingly speculates that the evolving play of oedipal and preoedipal masochisms in her writing enabled Schreiner to move beyond the chauvinisms of early texts like *The Story of an African Farm* and toward solidarity with Boer and African women by the early twentieth century (134). By comparison, Kucich's last two chapters on pro-imperialist discourses in the novels of Kipling and Conrad are relatively straightforward. In Chapter 3, "Sadomasochism and the Magical Group: Kipling's Middle-Class Imperialism", Kucich argues that Kipling skillfully merged evangelicalism and professionalism to formulate a middle-class ideology, while Chapter 4 contends that Conrad integrated chivalric and professional discourses to harmonize "gentrified imperial detachment" with "middle-class ethics" (29).

Chapter 3 is Kucich's most lucid chapter, possibly because he discovers sado-

masochism in its most familiar form, from the irresolute browbeating typical of Kipling's "magical groups", from early works like *Stulky & Co.* to that jewel and sometime *bête noire* of colonial fiction, *Kim*. Kucich's claim that Kipling repeatedly employs "a narcissistically omnipotent bullying group that recognizes itself both as the legitimately despotic center of social order and as its permanently alienated victim" is not entirely novel (156). Even here, though, Kucich has something new to offer. He proposes that, given our fixation on representations of imperialism and race in Kipling's texts, we have yet to sufficiently acknowledge the "remarkably unilateral class politics" the author asserted, primarily through a discourse of professional expertise, which, when infused with self-denying and even messianic evangelical values, generated a vigorous middle-class ideology (138).

Kucich has his hands full, juggling race and gender matters while maintaining sharp focus on class issues, and he is, at least for the moment, swimming against a current crude vogue of literary psychoanalysis. Nevertheless, he compels us to acknowledge that masochistic fantasies play a role "at the intersections of imperial and class discourse", and that they have "social and political instrumentality" (27, 30). Kucich argues the parameters posed by relational masochism make one "an enemy of simplicity", and encourage the critic to "resist interpretive pluralism" (250). This seems true of *Imperial Masochism*, and yet his constructive use of psychoanalytic theory would not seem quite so constructive were it not bolstered by meticulous close readings of British

colonial fiction and a deft historicism. By the same token, his laborious but rewarding study of colonial fiction is equally valuable as an experiment about how one might formulate psychoanalytic literary criticism capacious enough to accommodate historical nuance. This is an intelligent book, and well worth our attention.

**Michelle Robinson**

*University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill*

Cultural Analysis  
An Interdisciplinary Forum on Folklore and Popular Culture

<http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~caforum>  
[caforum@socrates.berkeley.edu](mailto:caforum@socrates.berkeley.edu)

232 Kroeber Hall  
University of California, Berkeley  
Berkeley, CA 94720  
USA

Call for Papers

*Cultural Analysis* encourages submissions from a variety of theoretical standpoints and from different disciplines, including (but not limited to) anthropology, cultural studies, folklore, geography, media studies, popular culture, psychology, and sociology. We seek submissions for the following sections: research articles and reviews of works (books, films, exhibitions, websites, lecture series, etc.). All submissions should follow the *Chicago Manual of Style, 15th edition*. Please check our website or email us for complete submission information.

*Cultural Analysis* is made possible by generous contributions from:  
The Doreen B. Townsend Center for the Humanities  
The Associated Students of the University of California, Berkeley  
The University of California, Berkeley Graduate Assembly

*Cultural Analysis* is not an official publication of the Associated Students of California. The views expressed herein are the views of the writers and not necessarily the views of the ASUC or the views of the University of California, Berkeley

ISSN 1537-7873