

## DIALOGUES

[*Editor's Note:* This article is the first in a series of articles that we hope to publish in *JAF* in a new section we have entitled "Dialogues." We have initiated this section in order to publish articles and commentaries that are different from "Notes" and somewhat different from the regularly published articles. We will place essays here that we hope will invoke and provoke readers to write responses, to be published in the next issue. For this section, we invite serious rejoinders or extensions of thought on social, political, and disciplinary grounds.]

ROBERT CANTWELL

### Folklore's Pathetic Fallacy

RUSKIN ASKS, WHAT IS "THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN the ordinary, proper, and true appearances of things to us; and the extraordinary, or false appearances, when we are under the influence of an emotion, or contemplative fancy; false appearances, I say, as being entirely unconnected with any real power or character in the object, and only imputed to it by us[?]"

"For instance, in Alton Locke,—

"They rowed her in across the rolling foam—

"The cruel, crawling foam."

"The foam is not cruel, neither does it crawl," Ruskin writes. "The state of mind which attributes to it these characters of a living creature is one in which the reason is unhinged by grief. All violent feelings . . . produce in us a falseness in all our impressions of external things, which I would generally characterize as the 'pathetic fallacy.'"

The pathetic fallacy, Ruskin goes on, is "eminently characteristic of the modern mind. . . . For instance, Keats, describing a wave breaking out at sea, says of it—

"Down whose green back the short-lived foam, all hoar,

"Bursts gradual, with a wayward indolence."

". . . Homer would never have written, never have thought of, such words. He could not by any possibility have lost sight of the great fact that the wave, from the beginning to the end of it, do what it might, was still nothing else than salt water; and that salt water was neither wayward or indolent." But "Homer has some feeling about the

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sea; a faith in the animation of it much stronger than Keats's. But all this sense of something living in it, he separates in his mind into a great abstract image of a Sea Power. He never says the waves rage, or the waves are idle. But he says there is somewhat in, and greater than, the waves, which rages, and is idle, and that he calls a god.

"With us, observe, the idea of the Divinity is apt to get separated from the life of nature; and imagining our God upon a cloudy throne, far above the earth, and not in the flowers or the waters, we approach those visible things with a theory that they are . . . governed by physical laws. . . . But coming to them, we find the theory fails . . . that, say what we choose about them, the instinctive sense of their being alive is too strong for us; and in scorn of all physical law, the wilful fountain sings, and the kindly flowers rejoice . . . we fall necessarily into the curious web of hesitating sentiment, pathetic fallacy, and wandering fancy, which form a great part of our modern view of nature. But the Greek never removed his god out of nature at all; never attempted for a moment to contradict his instinctive sense that God was everywhere. . . . But in thus clearly defining his belief, observe, he threw it entirely into a human form, and gave his faith to nothing but the image of his own humanity" (Rosenberg 1963:64–79).

This curious snare of hesitating sentiment and "contemplative fancy," Ruskin's "pathetic fallacy," is precisely the epistemological predicament of the folklorist, who, more than either anthropologist or sociologist, finds herself caught in a participatory indeterminacy rooted in folklore's ontological relativity; neither objectively discoverable nor altogether "constituted," seldom present to investigation independent of any a priori representation, virtually impossible to perceive much less analyze absent a background radiation of anxiety, nostalgia, interest, advocacy, even personal identification, its derivative "theory" rarely more than an extrapolated and rationalized justification of "practice" (often itself an opportunistic adjustment to an ever-shifting configuration of political, economic, and historical contingencies), folklore is never anything other than, as Alan Dundes says, "what the folklorist says it is," and this in a nontrivial sense.

Folklore's pathetic fallacy is nowhere more radically challenged than in the field. It lies at the heart of what might be called the "ethnographic trauma." The irresistible social-psychological force of ethnomimesis (Cantwell 1993, 1999) shapes the fieldworker's adjustment to new and often strange social, political, and material conditions, and compels an imaginative shift in her social and ultimately her cognitive orientation that at some point in the process can no longer anchor itself securely in the tokens and remembrances of, or the symbolic and actual lifelines to, the familiar habitual culture. The old and complacent relation between theory and practice is profoundly, usually permanently, disrupted or destabilized; "theory" as such vanishes, not because it has been exposed as inadequate (often quite the contrary), but because it reveals itself as a pure product of the folklorist's own material and social immunity—what Bourdieu (1998) calls "distance from necessity"—and hence as a thing interesting or useful only in a setting of already achieved and transmuted ethnographic representations and discourses.

"Practice," in turn, is radically recontextualized, materially, socially, psychologically, and politically, paralyzed by the contrary impulses, on the one hand, of rejection or repulsion and, on the other, of sympathy, affinity, or identification, a kind of ethnographic transference. And the folk "arts," finally, in the broadest sense—artifacts,

performances, practices—reappear as complex intersections or nodes (“zones of the exchange of information,” to use Robert St. George’s phrase [1997:21]) in a vast web of relations that extends from minutely particularized local situations to unexpectedly remote influences and agents that is the salient characteristic of folk culture: a symbolic and actual cultural improvisation in an ever-shifting milieu of impinging necessities (i.e., “sites of resistance to concentrations of power”).

Hence “folk culture” as such simply disappears into the very system of class and other power relations that the idea of the folk occultizes and depoliticizes at the same time as it refreshes and rehabilitates. A worker community, an ethnic enclave, a life-cycle cohort, an institutionally grounded scene of reiterated social relations, a regulated pattern of occasional or variable momentary interactions: Folklore’s “constructedness,” its “constituted” character, manifests itself precisely as such at the same time as its real political relations—and with them, therefore, reveals the self-deceiving social-political sleight-of-hand that lies at the heart of the idea of the folk. A god, like Homer’s Neptune, has been revealed: the Culture God, her face visible behind the momentarily disenchanted phantasmagoria of her manifestations.

“Folklore” is a catalytic reaction of the political imagination to the conjunction of two affiliated but distinctive historical forces: the cultural process, on the one hand, and on the other the cultural product, the performance, text, or artifact, all that can be said to have been culturally “achieved.” The cultural process we typically identify by instinct, by experience, or by detection, having been somehow awakened from (to remain, usually, ambivalently set against) the “collective misrecognitions” that sustain the normal alignments of culture and power; hence we may identify it ideologically, out of our own social dislocation, displacement, or destabilization. Achieved culture we identify by tradition, training, and sometimes by inference or extrapolation from the cultural process . . . or with equally compelling effect, from the product, moving by inference from text or performance into what we suppose, believe, or can discover was the social process that produced it. It is this intellectual catalysis, perpetually rooted in the social distances, mostly but not exclusively of class, whose variations form the psychological climate of the discipline’s historical evolution, academic and applied, that in the epistemological sense produces folklore, in the Wildean sense that Turner’s paintings produce the fogs on the Thames.

That the cultural process and the cultural product, however conceived, can never be finally disentangled from one another—for surely the “cultural process” is ethnomimetic, involving in some form the communication of its achieved and accumulated products—I readily concede: hence the requirement, in Ruskin’s sense, for a conceptual third term, the emancipated God, the Culture Power itself, that permits us to distinguish what cannot actually be divided, and to address it as a Power that like a god among other gods is autonomous within its own sphere, however deeply implicated other gods may be in the conduct and constitution of its divinity.

That we have already implicitly affirmed the existence of this divinity, without, however, ever having named or acknowledged Her as a force independent either of the processes in which She is manifestly active or the products and practices in which She is immanent, is more than indicated by the varied roles of “interest”—aesthetic, social, political, and personal—that distinguish our discipline. No sociology is free, of

course, of “interest.” But we consistently highlight our interest, magnify and valorize it, thence to diffuse, memorialize, celebrate, and enshrine it as “culture,” “art,” “performance,” “memory,” and “knowledge.” Typically this “interest” is both our entrance into and our exit from the discipline, as well as its end and aim, whether academic or not, in more than an accidental sense. Under its influence we have already formed, whether as mediator, scholar, broker, advocate, or producer, a compelling idea of it, one that is never far from the powerful original impact of a work of material, musical, verbal, dramatic, or other embodiment of the folk imagination—its “folk” character already a function of the fact that we have mixed ourselves up in it, created an impure product so lovely in its impurities that we could never wish to purify it even if we could: notwithstanding the fact that the quest for purity, which is simply the quest to lodge our faith in “nothing but the image of our own humanity,” is just that motive that has both divided the academic and applied disciplines and intermittently allied them, depending, usually, on the state of the political atmosphere.

This is not a quibble or a mystification. My own experience with the word, the concept, and the quality or characteristic (I do not say the fact) of folklore, in academic, popular, and vernacular contexts, is not simply that people mean different things by it or that they evaluate it differently; it is that for better or worse, some think of folklore as in some fundamental ways directly or indirectly connected to their lives, however this is understood, and some do not. Where the connection is absent, folklore is something either archaic, fanciful (and therefore trivial), politically suspect, or contemptible; where it obtains, folklore is immediate, actual, intensely personal, inherently and powerfully oppositional or revolutionary, and passionately defended, protected, and loved. The same I suppose could be said in some sense about any category of learning, even as to the objective existence of the category itself. What is important is that those of us who have made, or have been influenced to make, a personal connection with folklore naturally want to act on it, to prove it out, in the most convincing and significant ways, and not be continually reduced to the condition of mere enthusiasts or cranks, “folkies,” a relatively tiny cult of scholars, collectors, curators, concert and festival promoters, and arts agents engaged in a lively conversation mainly with themselves and only politely tolerated, if they are noticed at all, by the rest of the academic world, much less of the public sector. And they are looked at with contempt by the capricious and powerful riverine gods (I mean, of course, the Corporations and the State) whose repeated inundations of the “cultural wetlands” (to use Steve Zeitlin’s [1997] provocative phrase) are precisely what, since the beginnings of industrial capitalism and earlier, have both exposed culture in the anthropological sense to view and have compelled over the last century the various salvage-and-rescue operations mounted in its behalf.

The office of the public folklorist is, first, to make for others the connection she has already made for herself; to demonstrate not only that it is tragic to lose a mountaintop (I am thinking of Mary Hufford’s [1999] disturbing paper on coal mining in West Virginia presented at our professional meeting) and all the knowledges, meanings, practices, rituals, and skills dependent on it, not to mention an entire historical and cultural community, and that it is imperative to take steps to mitigate or actually to prevent this from happening—but also that the loss is collective in more than a sentimental, pragmatic,

political, or even a moral sense (I hate arguments that ancient herbal lores may someday provide a cure for cancer, valid as they may be—they are like arguments that the space program exists to provide new kitchen conveniences). It is to demonstrate to the managers, administrators, and owners, and to their various political operatives and skills, that the loss is directly and immediately to them and to their clients, customers, and constituencies, whose very existence as such springs from the one resource in which all other resources have their value, and that is human membership or, more precisely, the enabling conditions of human membership from which humans manufacture their one species-specific product, culture, at every and all levels.

But to go further. Even should such a demonstration be made (and it can, and has been, but not necessarily by folklorists), it would leave us still where we are now, mere petitioners knocking at the gate. The interests and forces culture seeks to direct or disperse, of technology, capital, and the rest, are in a sense irresistible. Indeed, in some ways it is misleading to regard these forces as antagonists at all—they are simply the naked face of the capitalist Second Nature in which all of us have our economic, social, and cultural lives, including those lives that will be improvised where capital, symbolic or actual, is shallow, spurious, or scarce. The office of the folklorist, then, is to do (and I realize there is nothing new here—I am just crusading) what over the last two generations of biologists, ecologists, zoologists, climatologists, and finally environmental activists have done: to model, first, at the sociological level, what (to borrow from Mary Hufford again) “human ecology” is and how it works.<sup>1</sup> This will be a multidisciplinary project that should bring folklore’s existing but hitherto isolated insights together with the insights of a range of social sciences to define so far as possible what the enabling conditions of culture are. Second, it will be to show not simply that this or that species of culture is under threat—least of all by enshrining its archaic or ephemeral products—but that human ecology itself is sweepingly imperiled by what is called “postmodernity” or “globalization,” at the same time as these forces are creating environments for the growth of new human ecologies that it would be our business to identify. Third, it will be to create a human ecology movement whose ultimate aim will be to produce definitions, limits, and standards for human ecological “health.” Ideally, such a movement would develop a cultural reading of existing law that would prepare the way for litigation to protect the *enabling conditions* of culture and ultimately a body of case law as well as cultural policy legislation, not conservationist or preservationist but constitutional in character, on the model of the National Environmental Policy Act, capable of subjecting any technical, political, and commercial encroachment on human ecologies to legal scrutiny. The aim would not be a pre- or proscriptive cultural Bill of Rights, itself constrainedly “cultural,” but a body of opinion and precedent that would form the basis for legal challenges to such encroachments or violations, and finally soliciting (as the Environmental Protection Agency does with its public and private stakeholders) “creative solutions” to problems of sustaining and improving human ecology: and there is an occupation for folklorists!

“What may look like a simple catalogue of disparate measures,” writes Pierre Bourdieu about the apparently passive neoliberal acceptance of the inevitability of globalization and the obsolescence of the nation-state,

is in fact inspired by the will to break out of fatalism of neo-liberal thinking, to “defatalize” by politicizing, by replacing the naturalized economy of neo-liberalism with an economy of happiness, based on human initiatives and human will, making allowance in its calculations for the costs in suffering and the profits in fulfillment that are ignored by the strictly economic cult of productivity and profitability. [1998:68]

What am I dreaming of? First, of course, what we already have: a professional discipline of cultural scholars and practitioners in several affiliated fields. And the human ecology equivalent of environmental defense leagues, clubs, councils, federations, foundations, and funds; a legal subdiscipline with advocacy centers, service nonprofits (by analogy to the Legal Services Foundation) and think tanks; a human ecology lobby; and state and federal agencies or commissions, allied to Health and Human Services, dedicated, perhaps, to “Memory, Liveability, and Quality of Life.”

One does not need to be a folklorist, or even to know of the existence of folklore or folklorists, to feel the shock and the pain and the disorientation when a settled way of life is disrupted or undermined by corporate-driven development or by some State Department of Transportation, with its 30-year-old initiatives, or by industrial relocation or downsizing, much less the laws that favor and promote such initiatives that consistently fly in the face of the lived localities and habitable spaces that are utterly defenseless against them. Collectively speaking, we are no better off than Rip Van Winkle, zonked out on his mountaintop, sleeping through the various technical and commercial revolutions we scarcely know have occurred until we wake to our own unconscious complicity in them and return to the homeplace only to find ourselves strangers, the great spreading beech tree of custom cut down to make way for a flagpole, or, as the case may be, a cell phone tower.

These are not the kinds of problems with which folklorists officially engage, except in their off-hours; but they are directly pertinent to the work of folklore, not only because they structurally reduplicate the violent incursions of capital, at another economic level, into working-class, minority, poor, and outsider ways of life, but because they are the untapped reservoir of anger and frustration from which a new rill of cultural progressivism might conceivably spring, not simply as the idyll of a middle class urgently trying to reproduce itself in Disneyized pictures of life, but in a broader political campaign dedicated to protecting and constituting the conditions of cultural possibility for everyone.

Distasteful and even self-defeating as it will seem to any of us schooled in the humanities or the social sciences, the human ecology movement must learn what environmentalists, faced with increasing legislative pressure to subject environmental regulation to cost-benefit analysis, have learned to do—to speak to power in the language of money. Only in economic terms will any cultural counterforce ultimately prove effective against the narrowly economic reasoning that governs most political decision making. The profound social and psychological costs of cultural dislocation, disruption, and degradation will, I submit, admit of expression, albeit imaginatively, in economic terms; indeed, many such costs I suspect are directly and unequivocally economic. That workers, their families, and their communities all suffer grievously when a manufacturing plant shuts down is obvious enough; but *all* development involves hidden

subsidies and hidden costs paid to commerce and to the developer himself at the expense not only of people directly removed or displaced but also of those whom development is supposed to benefit. The same may be said of developments in transportation, education, health care, tax policy, and dozens of other areas in which the commonweal and the community intersect through constituted institutional power. And it happens that customary ways of life, embodying decades or centuries of economic as well as cultural evolution under particular conditions and circumstances, are often the cheapest, the most efficient, and the most rewarding ways of life for those who live it. Human ecologists must cast the widest possible economic net, one that will capture the microeconomic impacts upon individual mental health and well-being, family and community function and dysfunction, employment and employability, education and educability, and other dimensions of cultural life where the immense scales of capitalist investment and disinvestment, public and private, work like hurricanes and floods on evolved cultural landscapes.

We are, it seems to me, essentially in the situation of the Abolitionist movement before the annexation of the western territories made it imperative that the question of slavery be brought to the legislative table. Our “western territories”—by which I mean the new territory of global capitalism over which the issue of cultural ownership is currently raging—are in fact all around us, in our own communities and on our own streets, even in our parlors and bedrooms, subject to an incremental annexation by corporate power so subtle as to be virtually imperceptible except to historical memory: as if historical memory could be the sole preserve of history departments, elite preservation agencies and struggling local museums and libraries, and not a primary obligation of our own priests and praise singers. And it is not immaterial, I think, that disciplinarily speaking we are in many ways the heirs of the Abolitionists. They were radicals. They collected slave songs and established various missions and reliefs, but they left their most powerful and lasting legacy in an interpretation of the law: in this case of the Constitution itself. If nothing else, we must become champions of the real, as against the commercially mediated life, lest we find ourselves (if we have not already) in a refeudalized society, divided between those for whom the whole of cultural and economic existence is conducted through networks of privatized information and access, and others—not improbably including the selfsame people—for whom social life remains grounded in palpable human interactions: in a society, in other words, that divides both people and communities against themselves.

There is no need to argue again the point that Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett’s “Mistaken Dichotomies” (1992:44) are mistaken, even as they are palpably reflected in ideological, disciplinary, and institutional arrangements and hence quite real existentially and practically, even personally, if not theoretically or essentially. But in our lingering preoccupation with these acknowledged “mistaken dichotomies” we are, I think, willfully and I suspect deliberately—because the political challenge is so daunting—blinding ourselves to the deeper dichotomy in our outlook that I am calling folklore’s “pathetic fallacy,” between the Cultural Manifestation, through which, and on behalf of which, and in relation to which, we have mostly carried out our various analytic, custodial, and advocacy projects, and the Culture Power, the very recognition of

which is implicated in the “identification” or “discovery” or “invention” of the cultural manifestation to begin with.

Certainly, the prerogative of representation opens a social and political channel for a cultural voice and the cultural image, even if it is within the very institutional and material structures originally responsible for the silencing of that voice and the effacement of that image, and it is necessarily preliminary to any authentic political participation. One or another version of this argument is a continuing strain in the various uses of folklore in traditions of social ameliorization, extending from Jane Addams’s folk festivals and industrial crafts museum to Sarah Gertrude Knott’s National Folk Festival, to the Lomax song collections, radio programs, and folk concerts, to the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, to the National Heritage Awards and all the arts agencies, museums, schools, and other venues in which public folklorists work. This cultural situation is, I think, in many ways comparable to the ideological debate in prerevolutionary America, which was invisibly underwritten by uneven distributions of access to the capital and technical resources of opinion making, that is, the printing press, allowing a gentryocracy of prosperous tradesmen, merchants, and planters to redirect the mounting antagonism of the poor, the unskilled, deskilled, and disenfranchised against emergent native elites toward a demonized and distant king, when the real enemy, as would become evident a generation later, was the concentrations of wealth in whose interests the Revolution had actually been fought. It may be said at least, however, that in theory the constitutional government that ensued made a shift to guarantee the right of political expression, even if it could not guarantee access to the resources of it; and it is indicative of the precise reversal of our political orientation that the Supreme Court should strictly identify, in the media age, and under corporate influence, money with free speech, in effect revoking the former guarantee on behalf of the latter. As Hendrik Hertzberg opines in a 1999 *New Yorker*, our only credible popular voice, the garrulous and garish Reform Party, “is an expression of . . . disgust with a political system whose workings are obscure, whose mechanisms are subject to manipulation by unaccountable forces, and whose outcomes, seemingly, are more and more distantly related to any semblance of purposeful democratic choice” (Hertzberg 1999:82).

Substitute “cultural system” for “political system” in Hertzberg’s lament and one discovers the arena in which a politics of human ecology must be worked out. As the Revolution carried colonial America beyond ideological contestation and moved class warfare into an historical play-zone where for the first time in history a political philosophy was grounded, ironically enough, in the cultural innovation of the contract-bound mercantile trading company, it, nevertheless, found itself in the real world, enlisted in the genesis of the world’s first actual social contract. So are we called upon, as cultural scholars, theorists, advocates, and activists to frame a discourse of cultural rights, obligations, and principles of governance in the new postnational, even postcultural, milieu of instantaneous global communications, virtually unrestricted capital mobility, almost infinitely flexible protocols of production, and among other alarming developments, the rise of computer modeling, whose predictive power exponentially outstrips that of any ideologically grounded theory or policy necessarily derived from deliberative processes, essentially eviscerating the role of ideas.

Whether the new challenges to cultural life represent differences of degree or of kind I leave aside for the moment; suffice it to say, perhaps, that we seem to have moved even beyond that point described only a decade ago as one of cultural exhaustion or expiration, the simultaneous death both of the subject and of the metanarratives in which subjectivity had historically located itself, into one in which the formerly receding cultural horizon has begun to come again into view, and something like the shape of the human ecology to come may be visible on it. It is a kind of apotheosis—the Culture Power rising Triton-like in its own shape out of the very waves that have swallowed it up.

What is that shape, and what are the principles of the cultural processes whose guarantees we must learn to make explicit? I'm only guessing; but I suspect that interactive networks (to borrow an idea from sociologist Nicola Beisel) will (or have already) replace the idea of groups and communities as the principal model of human social organization; that claims of authenticity will no longer flow from anthropological schemes of embeddedness but from the nodal points, virtual and actual, at which the flows of cultural information are concentrated and redistributed (themselves constantly changing); and that actual social affiliation, already bewilderingly multiple, shifting, and often, in a field of infinitely dispersed identities, protean and symbolic, scarcely real at all except as a sign in a total field of commercially and technically mobilized signs, will (or has already) acquire a revolutionary complexion, perhaps providing an impetus in the struggle against the corporation and the state for control of those “zones of the exchange of information” at which in postmodernity we are compelled to stage our humanity.

And here, perhaps, lies a clue to where our own cultural commitments, and our agitation for redress, ought to lie. Called alienation, or atomization, or fragmentation—in our own day epitomized by proliferations of markets, channels, and the codes that identify them—the strategy of capital has always been to isolate; it is really the cellular structure of the prison, more than the power of surveillance (the data barn is the perfect figure for the corporate totality), or their conjunction, that makes it such a powerful metaphor for culture in modernity. Isolation extirpates the human being from her entanglement in history and society, time, place, and association, and hence from the shaping forces of practice, habit, and custom, and makes her available for an economic role as producer, consumer, or client. Thrusts against the social and cultural erosions of capital always begin, even before ideology, with affiliation; and it is on this fundamental level that we must begin to stake out the area of the cultural, and equip it for the genesis, and not merely the conservation of, fertile human ecologies.

There are at least three self-evident and inalienable cultural rights, it seems, upon which sociality, social affiliation, and its fruits in practical and imaginative life materially depend: continuity in time and in temporal structures; contiguity in space and in spatial arrangements, virtual or actual; and what for lack of a better word I'll call neither time or space but “breathing room”: that field of intellectual and personal freedom and privacy, as well as the imaginative, practical, and communal liberty that ought to follow from them, in which, out of the free play of imagination upon the surfaces of practical, social, and spiritual necessity, and in the interplay of social influence, human beings accumulate ethnomimetically—developmentally, socially, and, in the broadest sense,

artistically—that reservoir of structuring structures, habitus, the underwriting of which it should be the aim of any cultural policy to provide for and protect.

Just what “breathing room” might be, instrumentally speaking, is difficult to say: but among its clear enemies are corporate and political totalitarianism; “privatization” that, paradoxically, seems to accompany the eradication of the private sphere; and social-economic isolation, accomplished, for example, through such strategies as thematized (read: commodified) or socially stratified environments or technical extensions of the social such as the Internet, a radically new cultural field whose enormous potential gifts and equally grave liabilities must be understood entirely apart from the immense corporate and political initiatives that support and promote them. In any case, it is certain that our breathing room has been stolen from us when we haven’t a moment to think—because commercial communications (which is nearly all of the electronic field of communications) have accelerated (in whose interest?) the whole of life to an insupportable tempo, and saturated every public and private space with their message.

What the Interstate Highway Act of 1948 did not have—cultural consultants to try to project the coming world of an autodependent, deurbanized, socially, racially, and economically segregated society—the Information Superhighway conceivably could have, given the present state of our knowledge.

Let us then borrow a term from economist Amartya Sen, *capability*, by which he means, for individual men and women, “the substantive freedoms he or she enjoys to lead the kind of life he or she *has reason to value*” (1999:74, emphasis added)—a formulation in which a political concept of *cultural rights* is I think implicit.<sup>2</sup> Such freedoms in legal or political discourse might be regarded as rights—to secure our right to food, shelter, and clothing, for instance, is to guarantee our freedom from hunger and cold—since both rights and freedoms imply a context of superior power from which they derive, as immunities, exemptions, endowments, prerogatives, or privileges. But whereas “rights” describe relations of justice, fitness, appropriateness, and the like, with reference to some standard or norm, natural, moral, political, civil, legal, or otherwise, “freedoms” describe an original autonomy or agency, not derived from a superior power but distinct and independent of it, except insofar as that power may have limited, restrained, or controlled it. In this sense the Culture Power is a human productive power or “capability,” the natural right to determine “the kind of life we have reason to value,” whose exercise demands the imaginative and practical “breathing room” which such exercise necessarily opens and in which it occurs—freedom from corporeal, intellectual, or imaginative violence, for example, freedom from social isolation and exclusion, and freedom, perhaps, from freedom itself—freedom, that is, from the legal, illegal, and extralegal immunities that permit the caprice, the self-interest, or the mere expedients of private or public power not only to abridge “the substantive freedoms he or she enjoys to lead the kind of life he or she has reason to value” but arbitrarily to influence, shape, or even determine what will be “the kind of life he or she has reason to value.”

Continuity, contiguity, capability: I am not naive enough to suppose that the formulation of a workable cultural policy grounded in such principles can or even should arrest the forward advance of capital. But at the very least, perhaps, we should not have in today’s forms the catastrophic collapse of whole sectors of the economy, the sudden

disappearance of the workplace or the gross devaluation of the resources upon which it depends, the violent upheavals in settled landscapes, the physical bifurcation and dismantling of neighborhoods, or any of the other assaults of pure capitalism upon human ecology without laws to prevent or at least mitigate them and public resources to sustain or to create the social fields in which new ecologies may evolve.

As Homer at once acknowledges divine power and conceives of it independently of the matter in which it is immanent, so must we, having acknowledged the constituted or invented character of folklore, embrace its invented and collaborative character freely and openly, lending ourselves to it not only as brokers or agents but, in effect, as creators and shapers of a human manifestation in which we are already deeply implicated. Standards of scientific dispassion and objectivity, even insofar as they represent a methodological consensus that must underwrite any substantive one, and certainly belong to any purely scholarly or scientific discourse, have little place in the complex negotiations between folklorists and their various audiences and constituencies. Here the cultural message, and especially the truths we offer to embody in what we call “folklore”—truths that belong to, but are not identical with, their manifestations, from which indeed they must be continually disentangled lest our work only kill with kindness—is poetic and philosophical more than historical or scientific. Only in such a discourse can we move from a merely reactive ameliorist or preservationist to a genuinely constitutional stance in the struggle with capital for control over human desire.

As we become defenders of the Culture Power, so where culture itself is concerned must we move candidly beyond documentation, memorialization, and preservation towards active creation, forging a poetics of cultural transformation that frankly acknowledges and incorporates as an active element the migration we ourselves regularly facilitate, of vernacular expression into the public sphere: do, in effect, what our commercial culture already does so effectively (and has done even with folklore), not to reify or commodify—and I do not say these are always unmitigated evils—but to mobilize, reanimate, liberate. For beyond the cultural inventory lies the conditions that fostered it; beyond achieved culture in all its elements lies the range of capabilities of which it is the expression; beyond cultural rights lies the imaginative field in which it is possible to exercise those rights. The poetics of public folklore like any poetics should aspire to the condition of music, affirming its rootedness in time, place, people, and experience, but also capturing essences, inventing unrealized histories, redrawing boundaries, absorbing influences, playing with new possibilities. To put this all another way: It is important to preserve a tradition, with apprenticeship programs, museum exhibits, recordings, and the like, and to protect it if possible from harm by political and legal means. But, emancipated from folklore’s pathetic fallacy, we are free to protect, too, the conditions of its possibility, in whatever direction it may take and in whatever form; and free ourselves to participate, collaborate in, even initiate and originate its making new.

### *Notes*

<sup>1</sup>“I think of cultural conservation as a reform ecology approach, not a ‘deep’ one,” Mary Hufford writes in an e-mail to me on 16 August 2000, “which is I think where a cultural bill of rights would take us.”

Please see Mary Hufford's *Conserving Culture: A New Discourse on Heritage* (1994), especially Laurie Kay Sommers, Yvonne R. Lockwood, Marsha MacDowell, and Richard W. Stoffle's "Folklife Assessment in the Michigan Low-Level Radioactive Waste Siting Process" (1994:198–214). I am indebted to Mary for this reference, for a number of specific ideas in this essay, and in a more general way to her for the inspiration, the impetus, and the occasion for it.

<sup>2</sup>See also Sen's *Commodities and Capabilities* (1987), *Resources, Values and Human Development* (1984), and *Inequality Reexamined* (1992) as well as Martha Nussbaum's *Sex and Social Justice* (1999) and *Women and Human Development* (2000).

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