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From the Editor

This issue of *FOAFtale News* includes the program and abstracts of ISCLR's twenty-seventh annual meeting, which will take place in Baddeck, Nova Scotia from June 3 to June 7, 2009. As the abstracts show, this will be an extremely interesting meeting. Ian Brodie and the other organizers have been doing a splendid job. I look forward to seeing many of you at the meeting.

This spring, in the midst of a global economic crisis, reports of murders have made headlines around the world. On April 3, the American Civic Association in my own hometown of Binghamton, New York became the site of a mass murder. Jiverly Wong, an immigrant from Vietnam who had recently lost his job, shot thirteen people, most of whom were students in an advanced English class, and then killed himself. In the aftermath of this heartbreaking tragedy, people have struggled to understand what happened.

Talking with friends and colleagues often helps us to get through difficult times. Last week I had a good talk with my friend Janet Langlois, who suggested that the concept of criminal ostension applies to the recent mass murder. She was absolutely right. Folklorists have tracked rumor-panics about residence hall massacres from the late 1960s to the late 1990s and beyond. Hatchet men, "Little

Bo Peep" costumes, and "Scream" masks have figured prominently in such rumor-panics, which have scared many students. As a sophomore at Mount Holyoke in 1968, I pedaled my bike more quickly after hearing that a hatchet man might be coming to our campus sometime soon. More than thirty years later, on April 20, 1999, two students at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado translated their awareness of criminal behavior into violent action, wounding and killing fellow students and teachers.

Since the murder of thirty people by student Cho Seung-Hui at Virginia Tech on April 16, 2007, many college campuses have improved their security systems. Cho Seung-Hui had mailed photographs and videotapes of himself to NBC before committing the Virginia Tech murders. Before he began shooting in Norris Hall, he blocked all of the building's main entrances. As details about the massacre in Binghamton emerged last week, we learned that Jiverly Wong had blocked the American Civic Association's back entrance with his car. Before coming to the building, he had mailed a letter and several photographs of himself and his guns to a television station in Syracuse. Clearly, the narrative description of Cho Seung-Hui's murders had set a pattern for Wong's ostensive rampage.

Rumor-panics and mass-media reports have influenced the current situation, in which anti-heroes wielding guns exert a terrible fascination. As legend scholars, how can we contribute to the dialogue on this subject? It seems important to ask what we can do.

Elizabeth (Libby) Tucker

PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND

International Society for Contemporary Legend Research
Twenty-seventh International Conference
Baddeck, Nova Scotia, Canada
June 3-7, 2009

The International Society for Contemporary Legend Research is pleased to announce that the 2009 Perspectives on Contemporary Legend Twenty-seventh International Conference is to be held at the Inverary Resort in Baddeck, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, summer home of Alexander Graham Bell and site of the first powered flight in the Commonwealth.
For further information or travel advice, contact:

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Travel: Baddeck is approximately one hour away from Sydney Airport (YQY), which is served principally by Air Canada, with connector flights from Halifax and Montreal. For those not choosing to rent a car, transport to and from Baddeck can be arranged.

Halifax International Airport (YHZ) is approximately three and a half hours away from Baddeck, and is served by Air Canada, American Airlines, Continental, Delta, Northwest, United, and WestJet Airlines, with connector flights to most major transit hubs, including Heathrow. Daily shuttle service is available, but for attendees wishing to take advantage of Cape Breton's natural beauty, a rental car is recommended.

PROGRAM

Wednesday, June 3:

6pm Evening Welcome

Thursday, June 4:

9-10:30 You Are What You Eat

Kirsten Hardie
Food Packaging Telling Tales?- Real or Fictitious?

Robert MacGregor
Chinese Culinary/Restaurant Contemporary Legends and Rumours: The Historical Intertextuality of Multiple Origins

Ian Brodie and Shera-Lea Crichton
Welcome to the World of Mad Cow

10:30-11 Break

11:00-12:30 Legends Across Time

Gail de Vos
A Tragic Love Story: The Tale of the Ballad of "The Gypsy Laddie"/"Gypsy Davy"

Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby
The Devil and the Ark: Russian Legends on Noah and the Flood

12:30-2:30 Lunch

2:30-5:00 Cyberlegendry

Lisa Machin
Forwarding an "Assemblage of War": Chain Emails as Contemporary Legends?

Elizabeth Tucker
"LMAO - That Wasnt Even Scary": Comments on Legend-Related Performances on Youtube

(½ hour break)

Stephen E. Wall
Ominous Links: A Journey through the Hypertext of African-American Conspiracy Theorists

Virginia Fugarino
I (Don't) Like Ike: Post-Hurricane Legends in Electronic Discussion

Friday, June 5:

9-10:30 Roundtable: Contemporary Legend in the Classroom

10:30-11 Break

11:00-12:30 New Directions 1

Filip Gralinski
Grepping the Net for Urban Legends

Diane E. Goldstein
Something's Afoot: Transvaluation, Retruthing and Repurposing - Is There a Contemporary, Contemporary Legend Process?

Mikel J. Koven
Towards a Folklore Praxis of Popular Cinema: A Case Study of Dirty Pretty Things

12:30-2:30 Lunch

2:30-3:30 New Directions 2

Bodil Nildin-Wall
It is True - It was Written by a Journalist

Jon D. Lee
Full Circle: The Recycling of Disease Narratives

(½ hour break)

4:00-5:00 Houses, Heroes and Holiness: Legends of Newfoundland

Janice E. Tulk
With a Potbelly Stove on His Back: Local Character Anecdotes about Mi'kmaw Matthew 'Mattie' Mitchell

Jodi McDavid
Cure and Curse: The Priest's Supernatural Abilities as Depicted in Newfoundland Folklore

ABSTRACTS

Welcome to the World of Mad Cow

Shera-Lea Crichton and Ian Brodie
Cape Breton University

In May of 2003, one case of Mad Cow Disease (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy) was reported in Northern Alberta. Within days beef and cattle exporters found themselves barred from South Korea, Japan, Australia and, most importantly, the United States. Soon thereafter a legend cycle emerged: the cow was a victim of a deliberate infector from south of the border. This paper began as a student assignment by Crichton for Brodie's undergraduate Urban Legends class: with her permission Brodie has expanded upon some of the ideas presented therein to explore ideas about the nature of 'disease' and legend. At the same time, it is a heuristic reading of a young Albertan's efforts to present aspects of her province's identity to an Atlantic Canadian audience which in recent years has seen much of its own youth move to Alberta for employment in the oil industry.

A Tragic Love Story: The Tale of the Ballad of "The Gypsy Laddie"/"Gypsy Davy"

Gail de Vos

Traditional ballads, songs that tell a story that has been distilled to its essence and set to music, have been passed down through the centuries, changing to suit the tastes of singers, borrowing from the music of the day, and borrowing from each other. When traditional ballads crossed the ocean to the New World, their shape and meaning was altered through rationalization by singers and publishers of songsters and the elements of time. And, while many of these ballads are still being sung, an even more recent trend has been to take the stories, or particular elements from the stories sung in the ballads, and to rework them in different formats: as novels, short stories, poetry, film and comic books.

Based on research for my recent book, *Stories from Songs: Ballads as Literary Fictions for Young Adults* (Libraries Unlimited, 2009), this paper will present a case study of the Child ballad, "The Gypsy Laddie," or as it is better known in North America, "Gypsy Davey." There has been much discussion on both sides of the Atlantic about this ballad, its historical connections, the values expressed, and changes made in it through the aegis of time and travel. Associations have been made with this ballad to various old world legends regarding Lord Cassilis and his lady as well as the infamous Gypsy leader Johnny Faa as well as the myth of Eurydice and Orpheus and the medieval lay of Sir Orfeo. As ballad commonplaces and supernatural motifs, such as bespellings, were modified and rationalized when the ballad arrived in the new world, the story changed drastically. These changes will be explored as will the ways the various contemporary reworkings, reclaiming some of the magical attributes of earlier versions, are keeping "The Gypsy Laddie" alive for new generations of listeners and readers.

Legends as Recontextualized News

Russell Frank
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Among the many attempts to demonize or de-legitimize the candidates during the 2008 presidential campaign were tales cobbled together from out-of-context quotations and other snippets of real news stories, or from satirical opinion pieces and blogs. These politically motivated tales were then posted online or circulated by e-mail and passed off as real news stories themselves. They offer "proof" that Barack Obama is a Muslim or wasn't born in the United States, or heals the infirm when he touches them; that John McCain confessed to

committing war crimes in Vietnam; that Sarah Palin made statements that were even less cogent than her actual statements; and so on. The intriguing thing about these stories is that their credibility rests on the credibility of the mainstream news media, even as they contribute to the undermining of the credibility of the mainstream news media. This paper will present several examples of the phenomenon, summarize the efforts of the indefatigable debunkers at snopes and urbanlegends.com to track the various distortions to their sources, and discuss the ever-increasing role of journalism as a source of raw material and verisimilitude for material that may be considered a sub-genre of contemporary legend.

I (Don't) Like Ike: Post-Hurricane Legends in Electronic Discussion

Virginia Fugarino
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In the early morning hours of September 13, 2008, Hurricane Ike landed on the Galveston coast, moving into the state of Texas and knocking out power for approximately four million people (Feibel et al 2008). Ike landed as a category three storm with winds of 110 miles per hour (Drye 2008), and, prior to the storm's landfall, the residents of Galveston Island were told to evacuate, although thousands of Galvestonians refused. After the storm, questions arose in the wake of the natural disaster regarding the extent of Ike's damage (both human and financial) and about when life in the greater Houston-Galveston area would return to normal.

Rumors and legends are common after disasters and, among other functions, serve as a way to share information that has been heard in situations when information may be ambiguous or difficult to gather. As days passed after Ike, power was restored to larger numbers of residents, allowing more people to gain access to information sources, such as the Internet and television. Articles on Internet sites created places for readers to find out information, but, due to the ability to leave comments on articles or blogs, they also created places for individuals to add to, question, support, or discredit information put forth by both the news "authorities" or by other individuals. This paper will explore legendary material resulting from two Internet items on the *Houston Chronicle*'s website. It will highlight some of the trends in the legends that circulated in these posts, including some of the anti-legendary responses, and will comment on some of the possible functions of these legendary materials.

Something's Afoot: Transvaluation, Retruthing and Repurposing - Is There a Contemporary, Contemporary Legend Process?

Diane E. Goldstein
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Newfoundland

When the Perspectives in Contemporary Legend seminars began twenty seven years ago in Sheffield, Bennett, Smith and Widdowson, defined their mandate to, "stimulate discussion of the nature, forms and functions of the legends **of our time**" (1986, 8). While many of the legend types we study have stayed the same over those twenty seven years, the times have not, and it is no stretch to surmise that the nature, form and functions of the legend reflect those changes. The impact of technology, media and other cultural changes on legend telling in the interim have been significant enough that Jan Brunvand suggested in frustration at one of our meetings and later in print (2004) that the "urban" legend was, in fact, vanishing. And although others would argue that the legend is still very much alive and vital, there can be no question that the contemporary, contemporary legend is often disseminated differently - by the push of a computer key, on a website, or through a photo-shopped image, and that the term "urban legend" has become a part of common parlance along with the popularity of self-conscious legend debunking in popular culture. Twenty seven years ago it would indeed have been an impossibility to find a news story reflecting the popular use of the term and concept, such as could be found in the reported words of outgoing American Vice President, Dick Cheney, in January 2009, "It's just an urban legend that I exceeded my authority as Vice President" (Khanna, 2009). This new popularized use and view of contemporary legend as shorthand for an untrue story might appear easy to ignore, since our work is not primarily concerned with debunking, but there can be no question that the popular concept has an impact on **the people who tell the legends we study,** creating legend self-consciousness and hyper-sensitivity to both the terminology and the genre.

This paper will explore the idea that technology and debunking genre-sensitivity have created a series of processes tied to issues of transvaluation, retruthing and repurposing of legend. Parallel to the work of Urry (1992) and Rojek (1998) on "post tourism", "characterized by the fact that the tourist increasingly accepts the commodified world and therefore does not seek authentic values" (Blom 32), this paper will explore the notion of "post legend" process, a process which, like post-tourism, concentrates on a secondary layer of meaning and experience. Although this is largely a discussion paper, rather than a case study, examples will come from legendary content and performances surrounding the discovery of six (severed) feet that washed up on the shores of British Columbia last summer.

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Grepping the Net for Urban Legends

Filip Graliński, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland

For the past seven years I have been collecting Polish chain letters for my website dedicated to modern folklore. In 2007 I started compiling urban legends, with the focus on Polish legendary material available on the Internet. The question soon arose about how to find as many legendary needles as possible in the Web haystack.

The initial approach was to simply use the Google search engine and submit queries for urban legends in general and specific tale types in particular. Web pages with legends were stored in a consistent and systematic manner using a browser add-on (just keeping links/bookmarks is not enough as the half-live of a web page is surprisingly short). Unfortunately, the procedure involved hours of painstaking labour, carefully hand-crafting hundreds of queries and looking through hundreds (sometimes thousands) of Google results, almost all of which were false positives.

The solution is to apply techniques developed in computational linguistics and information retrieval and to create a specialised computer system for collecting legends from the Web. In this paper, I will present such a system, capable of capturing and storing web pages containing urban legends. The system's modules include a web robot fetching blog entries, comments to news articles, Internet forums and Usenet groups (these are the publicly available Internet sources where urban legends crop up most often). Another module sifts through all these texts in search of urban legends. The same techniques as the ones used e.g. for spam filtering are applied and the system learns what looks like an urban legend from the feedback received.

Finally, some estimates of the coverage of urban legendry by web texts will be given.

Food Packaging: Telling tales? Real or Fictitious?

Kirsten Hardie, Arts Institute at Bournemouth, Bournemouth, United Kingdom

In contemporary food packaging design a wonderful world of words, images and tales exists. Behind the obligatory product name and ingredients listings consumers can read clever puns, intimate stories and interesting facts upon the box front or label. In many instances yarns are spun, tall tales are told as marketing approaches stretch our imaginations and distort truths in the attempt to sell.

Whilst packaging has always attracted consumers via words and image, increasingly the way in which packaging as 'silent salesman' (Pilditch, 1973) operates is intriguing. The language used in label designs is increasingly more entertaining in its effort to entice us to buy. We are spoken to in a familiar tone as packaging design enters into big conversation with us through its small type.

This presentation investigates how packaging as a vital marketing tool and cultural artefact communicates to consumers through its printed commercial messages, cleverly designed with its physical form. Through a number of dynamic international case studies (including The *Fabulous Bakin' Boys*, *Firefly Water*, *Ben and Jerry's*) the presentation will explore what packaging offers beyond its food contents and how the language of a brand can form comfortable acquaintances and provoke interactivity with consumers.

The presentation considers how words *tell tales* about the product, culture and consumers. Examples will showcase unusual and unique stories that are played out upon the pack as brands project their identities and values, and occasionally, create fun, fictitious facts that we are invited to engage with through its words.

Drawing upon theories from material culture and marketing the presentation considers the psychological function of packaging and how consumers engage with food packaging; how they use and relate to the packaging; how they form emotional bonds with the product.– how packaging offers lively creative thinking and tales that can intrigue.

Architectural Anomalies and Aetiologies

Elissa R. Henken
University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia

Legends explaining the natural landscape, whether the formation of mountains, rivers or lakes, have long been studied, especially when in the form of onomastic tales. What I plan to examine here is legendry about the man-made landscape, concentrating my attention on buildings. Much of this legendry is in the form of aetiologies, explaining why a building has taken a particular form (shape, decoration, location); some describes the responses of architects, clients, or the public to the building created. Architectural legends appear with especial frequency on college campuses, but arise also in connection with civic constructions and private homes. I plan to delineate the range and variety of these legends and discuss some of the concerns and attitudes expressed (rivalry, treachery, jealousy, disdain, arrogance, practicality).

"Polio Pics" and the Doctor from Toronto: The Use of Vaccination Contemporary Legends by the Public and the Medical Community.

Andrea Kitta
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Contemporary legends concerning immunization are prevalent both on the internet and in the lay, alternative health, and medical communities. These legends, which are frequently treated as fact by members of the above mentioned communities, inform medical decision making and become the basis for medical information. Additionally, they are used as a method of training medical professionals and as a way to reinforce the beliefs of the medical community. Legends concerning contamination and disease spread are common; however, some of the most disturbing legends are often mundane at first appearance. The link between MMR and autism may be prevalent in the media and a cause of concern, but it is the stories concerning the refusal of education and medical treatments that may ultimately inform inoculation decision making. Since the lay public, alternative health care communities, and medical professionals believe these stories to be true, dissuading their beliefs can be difficult, especially once these stories are picked up by the media or are widespread on the Internet. My research involves Internet and media analysis used in conjunction with personal interviews to demonstrate the use of these legends, their inherent issues, and provide possible solutions for communicating medical risk.

Towards a Folklore Praxis of Popular Cinema: a case study of Dirty Pretty Things

Mikel J. Koven
University of Worcester, United Kingdom

Alan Dundes suggested, in his 2004 Presidential Address to the American Folklore Society, that Folklore studies lacked a grand theory of its own. This paper takes issue with that assumption, and argues that folklore studies' continued quest for the role of the traditional within any cultural phenomenon is, in fact, a grand theory of folklore; one which simultaneously recognizes the object-oriented connotation of the word "folklore" while also denoting a specific theoretical position. A popular movie, while clearly not an object of folklore, can still be studied as folklore through the utilization of folklore praxis, through an interrogation of the filmic text in light of the role which tradition either plays or rejects.

In order to explore this folklore praxis applied to popular cinema, this paper proposes four informing questions: 1) What group is the film about and what are the relationships of the filmmakers to that group? 2) What are the main expressive forms in the film, including the use of folklore genres, and what are the connections of that expressive form to the group in question? 3) Given the group's expressive forms, what has been retained over the years (traditional) and what has changed (dynamic)? And 4) what other expressive forms can be seen in the film?

The "organ theft" legend at the heart of Stephen Frears'

film Dirty Pretty Things will be discussed as a case study of this praxis. More than simply a film which dramatizes a famous urban legend, seeing the film folkloristically enables an alternative understanding of the processes and meanings of the text which would have hitherto remained largely ignored using alternative methodologies.

"Just Urban Legends": Political Talk in the Case of Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick

Janet Langlois
Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan

When Michigan State Attorney General Michael Cox noted that allegations against the then-mayor of Detroit, Kwame Kilpatrick, were "just urban legends," he inadvertently picked up on many residents of the Greater Metropolitan Detroit Area's debates about their city leader's possible misdeeds. Cox's statement, designed to protect the mayor by debunking accusations of official misconduct, accurately named the flow of talk in the city and its suburbs.

People argued whether or not there had been an infamous party at the mayoral mansion sometime in 2002, whether or not the party may have resulted in the severe beating of lap dancers by the mayor's wife, their subsequent deaths in 2003, and the related laying off of Detroit Police officers and the mayor's bodyguards (Executive Protection Units or E.P.U.) assumed to be too close to the case. Although the Mayor and his Chief of Staff were ultimately removed from office in 2008, accused of perjury and misconduct, and have served or are serving jail sentences among other sanctions, the rumored party and its aftermath remain unverified.

This paper will be a preliminary presentation of data, drawn from *The Detroit Free Press*'s investigative reporter Bill McGraw's coverage, and from 25 college-student data searches, interviews with Detroit residents, and evaluations. The latter data set is part of a group ethnographic project on the Kilpatrick case, conducted in the fall of 2008 as part of a course focusing on interdisciplinary approaches to rumor and legend. Part of the focus of the analysis will be to test rumor and legend models, especially those concerning the intersection of talk, politics, and the court system as well as various media representations.

Full Circle: The Recycling of Disease Narratives

Jon Lee

Memorial University of Newfoundland

Conspiracy theories, xenophobic gossip, and etiological arguments constitute three of the more common forms of narrative that circulate during disease outbreaks. All of these forms are ultimately damaging, whether to communities, businesses, ethnic groups, or individuals. A logical response to this problem entails countering such narratives, either post-creation or while they are still

nascent. However, legends have proven notoriously difficult to eradicate, and predicting what exact narrative forms will appear in future epidemics is largely futile.

Scholarship detailing the possibilities of eradicating or countering narratives is full, and details many of the problems associated with such acts: that rumors seen as being personally consequential and relevant are more likely to be believed and spread (Kimmel and Keefer 1991); that spreading rumors is thus a purposive action for both narrator and narratee (Bordia and DiFonzo 2005); that rumor-telling is a social act, shaped by the communities we have been raised in (Fine and Khawaja 2005); and that it is not even necessary that a narrator believe a rumor to have some impetus for passing it on- only a belief that the events in the narrative could have happened (Fine and Khawaja 2005).

Drawing on research from folklore, as well as other fields, this paper will examine some of the reasons behind the popularity and longevity of rumors, and will attempt to offer new strategies for dealing with harmful narratives. Ultimately, it is my hope to offer a few simple strategies that, while they may not eliminate the narratives altogether, should greatly lessen their negative impact.

Chinese Culinary/Restaurant Contemporary Legends and Rumours: The Historical Intertextuality of Multiple Origins.

Robert MacGregor
Bishop's University, Lennoxville, Quebec

In 2005 and 2007 three widely circulated rumours appeared on the Internet. Allegedly, Chinese restaurants in Georgia, New Jersey, and British Columbia were serving rats as chicken. The three cases are recent manifestations of Chinese foodlore urban legends and rumours.

My paper will explore the texts, the discourses, the multiple origins of the 'Chinese Restaurant Foodlore' – legend and rumours. Texts and motifs develop from a large body of expressive practices developed by cultures. Rather than analyzing a single incident (a synchronic analysis), I will discuss the legend, rumours, their happenings and meanings through time, approximately 205 years. In discourse theory this is known as diachronic analysis. Aspects of the legend genre will be shown and presented, from Canada, United States, Great Britain, and Australia. Intertextual story weaving will be presented; some of the texts will include: political and labour slogans and discussions, songs, jokes, cartoons, advertisements, children penny dreadful books and comics, stage presentations, television and radio shows and most recently e-mail and pictures posted on the Internet.

The concept of memes, ideas that propagate in social environments, will be discussed as they related to disgust, an emotional trait of feeling sickly. Disgust is one of the emotions that is most commonly evoked by contemporary legends and rumours. Eating rats and mice evokes the highest degree of disgust and the event is the longest remembered, most discussed, and the most disseminated urban legend. Because of this recent research on memes, and disgust, my presentation infers that for over 205 years, many types of texts, woven through various English-speaking cultures, the ingestion of rats and mice as a legend, as a rumour continues to circulate in 2008.

Forwarding an "Assemblage of War": chain emails as contemporary legends?

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Following the deployment of larger numbers of Canadian Forces to Afghanistan and the United States invasion of Iraq in 2003, I began to receive emails, from a number of my contacts, that were, essentially, chain letters of support for troops serving in either Afghanistan or Iraq, encouraging me to pass along the email. These emails consisted of an assortment of photographs of soldiers in combat, engaged in routine drudgery, or humanitarian work sometimes combined with military or patriotic symbols, and accompanied by captions, slogans or verse that, when taken together, convey a narrative about the military personnel depicted in the photographs. These chain letter emails bear a striking resemblance to the emergent practice of decorating the outside of homes and business and other outdoor spaces described by Jack Santino as "Folk *Assemblage*" (Santino19) that began to appear after the launch of the Gulf War in 1991, that Santino asserts are a public expression of concern and support for the service personnel involved in the war (Santino 27) that serves to connect like-minded people in the community (Santino 28) and provide them with the feeling that they are actively helping the troops serving in the war (Santino 32).

Jan Fernback (2003) and Russell Frank (2003), among others, have shown that internet contemporary legends are, like their oral counterparts, "reflections of a collaborative response to some form of community crises" (Wyckoff 1993: 2). Examples of the chain emails sent to my informants and myself, as well as those found on social networking sites and Web Pages employ different combinations of the same or similar photographs, symbols, messages, and narratives, and may portray soldiers from the United States in one email and those from Canada in another, or depict troops serving in either Afghanistan or Iraq, not unlike the "photographic urban legends" described by Russell Frank (2003) that combine real photos with fictitious texts (Frank 136). Through a closer examination of the content, structure, and the context of diffusion of these email *assemblages* of War, I aim to show that they may also be regarded as contemporary legends.

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Cure and Curse: The Priest's Supernatural Abilities as Depicted in Newfoundland Folklore

Jodi McDavid
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Newfoundland

This paper emerges from work conducted for my PhD thesis on the role of the priest as illustrated in the folklore of Atlantic Canada. Historically, the priest has had an impact in small Atlantic Canadian communities, as elsewhere, in the interpenetrating spheres of politics, community economics, religion, and culture. Coping mechanisms to deal with the omnipotence of the priest include expressions of ambivalence, anger, and amusement. These expressions are typically manifested in story and legend as well as song, jokes, dites, memorates, proverbs, personal experience narratives, and so on.

In general, the Priest as a character features prominently in legend, although for the most part, these narratives tend to be supernatural legends, historical legends or morality tales with a similar complex of motifs and themes. Stith Thompson's Motif *Index of Folk Literature* identifies one hundred and twenty-five clerical narrative motifs found repeatedly in tradition. And as Lawrence Taylor notes, "priest stories, and the beliefs and behaviour associated with such clergy are -- collective representations on the nature of religious power". The narratives provide an outlet for concerns otherwise unexpressed in folk religious culture and thereby form a cultural critique of priestly privilege and behaviour. The expression of political resistance through folkloric forms (such as stories) provides a socially acceptable counter-hegemonic critical commentary on social issues through a culturally accepted means of communication.

This paper builds upon these issues and examines findings from the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive which address the myriad of beliefs related to priests and their supernatural powers.

It is True – it was Written by a Journalist

Bodil Nildin-Wall
Swedish Institute of Language and Folklore, Uppsala,

Sweden

In the wake of an international – mostly American – debate on autobiographies and novels purporting to be true events from often chequered careers, Sweden got its own debate in the late autumn of 2008 to January 2009. The book in question was first published in 1995 and written by the Swedish journalist Liza Marklund, who is also a well-known author of crime novels. The original title is *Gömda – en sann berättelse (Hidden – a True Story)*, but it has also been published in English with the more spectacular title *Buried Alive*. In September 2008 Monica Antonsson, another Swedish journalist, published her book *Mia – sanningen om Gömda (Mia – the Truth about Hidden).* The debate started slowly, and it was instigated not by traditional media but by quite a few private blogs.

Shortly: *Buried Alive* is the story of Mia, a highly intelligent Swedish young girl, who falls in love with and marries a refugee from Lebanon – the man with the black eyes. He very soon starts to abuse her, physically and psychically. She ends the marriage and instead meets Anders, a confident and stable man from northern Sweden. However, her former husband continues to stalk, threaten and abuse her, their daughter and her new husband. Sweden can't guarantee their safety and they flee, first to Chile and later to the USA.

I do not intend to try to unravel the "Truth", but rather to outline how both journalists – but above all Liza Marklund – use clichés from popular culture, such as bodice rippers, motifs from traditional legends, prejudices about foreigners and Swedes, all in order to establish their separate truths.

Sarah Palin and Barack Obama: Joke, Rumor and Legend, and Politics in the U. S. Presidential Campaign, 2008

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While folklorists have analyzed popular cartoons and jokes attached to major American political figures—for example, Michael Preston's focus on anti-Nixon jokes circulating between June 1973 and June 1974, Elaine Miller's focus on the depiction of Geraldine Ferraro (Walter Mondale's vice-presidential candidate during the 1984 Mondale/Regan presidential campaign) in editorial cartoons, and Jeannie Thomas's focus on dumb blond jokes in relation to Dan Quayle (George Bush's vice-president from 1989-1993) and Hillary Clinton (first lady to Bill Clinton during Clinton's first term as president, 1993-1997)—, relatively few folklorists have analyzed contemporary legends and rumor and gossip in relation to American political figures who dominate the national landscape for some set period of time (one notable early study of rumor and legend in relation to political figures and national political and social landscapes is Jean-Noel

Kapferer's work).[1] This paper will be a preliminary review of the jokes and legends associated with the primary political figures in the USA presidential campaign of 2008: the two presidential nominees (Democratic candidate, Senator Barack Obama and Republican candidate, Senator John McCain) and their respective choices of vise-presidential candidates (Democratic Senator Joe Bidden and Republican Governor Sarah Palin). Of the four figures, Senator Obama and Governor Palin were by far the figures with whom jokes and legends were most often associated; thus, the nature of the jokes and legends associated with them will be my primary focus.

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The Devil and the Ark: Russian Legends on Noah and the Flood

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Soviet scholars once claimed that Russian Orthodoxy had a pre-Christian base, which enabled them to assert that folk tradition was actually not "religious" at all and could be preserved. Despite this supposed tolerance, the official policy of atheism in the Soviet Union resulted in a paucity of research on religious legends. Only in the last ten years has this material been "rediscovered." The legends under consideration here provide insight into the extent of animistic/Christian syncretism within Russian Orthodoxy. They also allow us to make some significant conclusions about the way biblical material was re-imagined within the Russian context and about legend genre.

This paper presents an analysis of Russian legends about Noah and the Flood. In these legends God orders Noah to build an ark, because humans (except Noah the Righteous) have become corrupt, and God intends to destroy them in a flood. However, these stories also present additional details that explain the nature of reality and identity in the Russian culture. For example, the legends tell how the remains of mammoths in the Siberian

tundra came to be. In addition, they feature descriptions of the sanctity or evil nature of other animals, such as the cat and mouse.

Of particular interest are the relationships between the spouses and between Noah's wife and the devil himself. Satan is essential to the legends' content. In essence, this legend cycle demonstrates the integral nature of God and Satan within this belief system. This parallel is also reflected in the spousal relationships depicted in the legends. Noah interacts with God, while his wife converses with the devil (and nearly causes her husband's downfall). This episode certainly recalls the Fall of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden (note that the Afanas'ev collection includes a legend in which Noah is conflated with Adam and his wife is called Eve). More importantly, these legends illustrate common perceptions of gendered identity within the Russian context. Each sex has its flaws and strengths, which the legends exploit to convey messages about appropriate social behavior for women and men.

"LMAO – That Wasnt Even Scary": Comments on Legend-Related Performances on Youtube

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While writing "Levitation Revisited," a study of children's levitation rituals (2008), I discovered that some of the most intriguing information on this subject is available on YouTube. Kids have been posting a significant number of videos of levitation performances, inviting comments that reveal sharp awareness of legends and rituals circulating within the childhood underground. These comments have been numerous and complex. How can folklorists analyze comments on YouTube videos? We need to develop a more systematic methodology for this kind of analysis, which will be needed as children's interaction on the Internet continues.

My paper analyzes 228 comments on a levitation video posted on YouTube in the fall of 2006. This video, filmed by a female high school student in the state of New Mexico, ends with the sudden appearance of a monster's face. Young viewers' comments on the video have been both evaluative and prescriptive. Both praise and blame have come from viewers who have been scared by the video, but unequivocal scorn has come from those who have found the video boring. Some comments have summed up legends told before levitation performances, while others have included mock-legends that have circulated on Facebook and MySpace, as well as through text-messaging. Using Erving Goffman's *Frame Analysis* (1986) and Brenda Danet's *Cyberpl@y: Communicating Online* (2001), I suggest an analytical approach to YouTube video comments that elucidates intersecting frames (real life, performance, and others). Because of the ease with which young people move from one frame to another, complex interactions grow rapidly as comments multiply.

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[1] This is not to say that folklorists, and specifically legend scholars, have not addressed the socio-political relations and landscapes in which legends and rumors are emergent and the social anxieties they address; many legend scholars have done this, too many to note in a short abstract.

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With a Potbelly Stove on His Back: Local Character Anecdotes about Mi'kmaw Matthew 'Mattie' Mitchell

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Matthew 'Mattie' Mitchell, a Mi'kmaw-Montagnais prospector and guide who lived on the west coast of Newfoundland between the mid-1800s and 1921, is the subject of many anecdotes and legends in the present. He is perhaps best known for his discovery of the Buchans ore deposits when a campfire he built melted nearby stones. Stories of his adventures 'on the country' often depict him as a man of extraordinary strength, endurance, and skill – he could carry a potbelly stove on his back, travel extremely long distances by foot, and hunt caribou by the light of the moon. More recently, it has been said that when his body was relocated from one cemetery to another a few years after his death, it showed no signs of decomposition.

What fuels these narratives? Who tells them and for what purposes? How might these anecdotes be located in the oral traditions of both Mi'kmaw and non-native Newfoundlanders? And, what information about intercultural relationships is embedded in their tellings? This preliminary study of anecdotes found in both archival sources and print media will explore how such narratives are used in the present (see Tye 1989), as well as the vernacular attitudes embedded within them (Hiscock 2006). In particular, it will examine the role of these anecdotes in the recent resurgence of Mi'kmaw culture in the province, the reclaiming of Mi'kmaw identity, and the emergence of Mi'kmaw pride.

I Had the Best Night's Sleep in 8 Years: Obama Election Personal Experience Narratives

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On November 4, 2008, Barack Obama was elected 44th president of the United States. From a stage in Chicago, Illinois's Grant Park, President-elect Obama delivered his acceptance remarks. In footage familiar to television viewers around the world, noteworthy attendees such as the Reverend Jesse Jackson, himself once a contender for the presidency, and talk show superstar Oprah Winfrey, openly wept as they and the crowd estimated at 240,000 strong hung on every word uttered by the president-elect.

The impact of this election result extended far beyond Grant Park. While all presidential elections ultimately conclude with a winner and a loser, I think the case can be made that Obama's win resonated more deeply and with a larger public than any recent memory. Some have claimed that it is Obama's identity as the first black US president that has caused such profound responses. As my own family and friends began calling and emailing each other after the television networks officially called the election in Obama's favor, and through the days and weeks that followed, I realized that a corpus of personal experience narratives were developing focused on election night. Similar texts also developed around individual responses to the Obama's inauguration on January 20, 2009. Using the texts I have been able to collect regarding both the election and inauguration, I will classify and analyze informant personal experience narratives. These texts offer compelling evidence regarding the aspects of candidate Obama and the 2007-08 election season that led to unprecedented voter engagement in a campaign.

Ominous Links: A Journey through the Hypertext of African-American Conspiracy Theorists

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This paper presents an explication of the transmission of conspiracy theory knowledge through the hypertext mediums of internet forums, websites, and public video upload sites such as YouTube.com. The central examples are taken from African-American groups and individuals promoting separatism as a way of moving against the knowledge contained within conspiracy theory worldviews. They include advocates of historical revisionist approaches to modern Afrocentrism as it relates to Moorish and KMT culture, Black Hebrew Israelites, and secular admirers of the Nation of Islam and the Black Panther Party's political efforts during the 1960s and 70s. Global conspiracy knowledge maintains a close connection to the folklore genre of legend through the wide variety of conspiracy theories made public via hypertext by African-American groups and individuals. With so many accessible beliefs on the same subject and important to members of the same ethnic group—in terms of worldview—the effect produced is that of the "debate about belief" that Linda Dégh and others find to be a central quality of legend.

This study of the dissemination of alternate ways of knowing through hypertext mediums also demonstrates that gaps exist in more traditional means of dispersing knowledge about government; particularly when it comes to bureaucratic institutions with a wide range of goals and legal authority such as the American FEMA. With the debate about conspiracy belief so public in the form of hypertext broadcasting, it is now more important than ever that bureaucratic institutions examine the socio-cultural critiques of scholars such as Gary Alan Fine and Patricia A. Turner. This way they might better participate—for the benefit of the public services they seek to provide—in the formation and dissemination of knowledge surrounding their intentions.

Rabid Cows and Undead Dogs: Veterinary Occupational Legends

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Legends play an important part in veterinary medicine, particularly in the environment of a large teaching hospital. Vet school instructors warn their students about the dangers of cockiness through stories of one-time students who playfully squirted each other with spinal fluid from a dead cow, unknowingly exposing themselves and classmates to the rabies virus. Or they tell a version of another near miss, when a university veterinary hospital almost lost its accreditation because of an intern's carelessness. After practicing surgical procedures (in the more elaborated versions, removing its eyes and a limb), the intern euthanizes the dog, places it in the cooler with other corpses, and then finds the dog crawling around and crying in pain the next morning. Veterinarians considering an internship or residency at a particular hospital are regaled with stories about memorable characters and events there, such as the overwhelmed intern who committed suicide by jumping from a high-rise building. In most contexts, these narratives are told among veterinary professionals as cautionary or educational tales, but vet students also share the more gruesome legends with non-veterinary friends for their shock value.

This paper, part of a larger project on veterinary occupational folklore, examines several of these legends, their uses, and situated meanings—particularly as an expression of veterinarians' sometimes conflicted relationships with animals and the act of euthanasia. I also consider these stories within the larger context of contemporary legends in general, particularly in relation to what Diane Goldstein calls "needle-prick narratives" and contamination themes in general.

BOOK REVIEWS

The following eight reviews are reproduced by permission of SAGE Publications, Ltd., London, Los Angeles, New Delhi, Singapore and Washington, D.C., They come from "Dossier: Rumors and Urban Legends," edited by Véronique Campion-Vincent, *Diogenes* 213 (2006): 147-184. The reviews by Gérald Bronner, Véronique Campion-Vincent, Jean-Marc Ramos, Jean-Bruno Renard, and Michele Simonsen were translated from French by Jean Burrell. I want to thank Véronique Campion-Vincent, *Diogenes* editor Luca Scarantino, and Hannah Shackley of SAGE Publications for their kind permission to reprint these reviews.

Adam Burgess, *Cellular Phones, Public Fears and a Culture of Precaution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Why have we included a book whose index does not contain the term 'rumour'? Because Adam Burgess's remarkable work on public fears in the face of the risks that mobile phones (also called cell phones) are said to present is a thorough analysis of the social conditions encouraging expression of the technophobia that is rife nowadays, with the mushrooming of rumours about the supposed harmful effects of many new technologies.

Taking the opposite tack to current received ideas, this courageous book demolishes all the more firmly the arbitrary theories at the root of the risk culture and the precautionary principle because it avoids any condemnation of the moralists exploiting risk, whom no scientific study could convince. In fact fears of mobile phones are not based on proven scientific facts – the author reminds us that all the large-scale studies have exonerated them – but on the possible future appearance of harmful consequences.

The author's approach is close to moderate constructionism, according to which social problems are constructed more by actors than by events. Burgess emphasizes the importance of 'suspicious sensibilities vis-à-vis the "contaminations" of modernity' (p. 16). Alarmists are quick to accuse reassuring scientific results of being biased because they are financed by manufacturers thought to be careless of risks to health; however, it is striking that such questions about actual motives are never asked of them and they are assumed to be altruistic and irreproachable. 'The heightened perception of risk appears to be connected with the growth of individualization and the decline of beliefs, social institutions and practices' (p. 28), more than mechanically determined by the state of our environment.

Then, describing the revolution brought about by mobile phones, which blur the boundaries between public and private, work and play, and have become a significant element in the socialization of teenagers, the book traces the genealogy of these fears along a path from x-rays, power lines and microwaves up to low-frequency waves of all kinds. A rapid study of the main routes for the international dissemination of fears about mobile phones emphasizes the focus on the supposed dangers of masts and reminds us that these campaigns have had no effect on the increase in the use of mobiles. The two final chapters return to the culture of precaution encouraged by the authorities who, in Adam Burgess's view, have abdicated in the face of the alarmists, who set themselves up as representative of public opinion but are in the comfortable situation of not being accountable to those they are supposed to represent.

This is a book that will make its mark. However, two criticisms may be advanced. First, a piece of research in which only English-language sources are cited is bound to be limited when it mentions non-English-speaking countries. When Adam Burgess states, after a rapid presentation of a French expert's 2001 report called the Rapport Zmirou, that there is no serious concern about mobile phones or masts in France (p. 174), he passes too swiftly over the successes of organizations battling against the erection of relay masts (see www.priartem.com) or the activities of politicians (see www.mouans-sartoux.net/aschieri), leading to the setting up of the Agence Française de Sécurité Sanitaire de l'Environnement et du Travail (see www.afsse.fr/afsse1024). Adam Burgess is well aware of the significance in France of the case of contaminated blood in the loss of the authorities' legitimacy, but he did not find anyone there to analyse the situation.

This is not the case for Italy, where he carries out a real analysis of the controversy around Radio Vatican's masts

and the precautionary measures taken against elettrosmog (pp. 194–203).

Second – and this is only a minor methodological observation – the abbreviation EMF used from page 6 onwards is not defined until page 134, which says that it stands for non-ionizing electromagnetic fields. It does not figure in the list of abbreviations, nor the index.

Véronique Campion-Vincent

Véronique Campion-Vincent, *La Société parano. Théories du complot*, *menaces et incertitudes*. Paris: Payot, 2005.

La Société parano belongs to the category of useful texts; its intention is to 'identify the main lines, current tendencies' of what are commonly called conspiracy theories. What are they? – a paranoid universe that can be defined by phrases like 'it's all connected'; 'nothing happens by chance' or 'things aren't what they seem'.

This volume will prove useful to all who are interested in perversions of contemporary thinking; in it they will find a living museum of the weirdest conspiracy beliefs. It is also useful because the conspiracy myth is continually changing and could today be an undercover and increasingly intrusive passenger on our relationship trip with the world.

In Véronique Campion-Vincent's view this is in fact one of the specificities of the conspiracy myth's contemporary form: when we were thinking it was limited to reactionary thinking, it is on the contrary rife in all sections of the population and extends beyond political topics. The second aspect of current conspiracy thinking is imagining the existence of 'mega-conspiracies', plots whose ambitions are thought to be worldwide. It is as if imaginative themes, like everything else, were becoming global.

Though they may seem different from one another, the many examples provided by the book appear to converge on a common condemnation. A strong impression emerges from the book, which parallels an underlying concern, that the categories of collective anxiety have altered during the last few decades. In this overview one example stands out as emblematic – John F. Kennedy's assassination (75 percent of Americans said in 1992 that they supported the theory of a conspiracy in that affair). Who was responsible for that murder? There are different answers: the KKK, people from outer space, the mafia, etc., but the body that keeps coming to the surface like a sea-snake is the CIA. The American government agency's implication is in fact not fortuitous, it turns up as the ideal culprit in every plot, since it represents the poisonous figure of American governmental power.

It is at this point that Véronique Campion-Vincent reveals the full scope and importance of the subject she is dealing with. She explains that two malevolent entities emerge from the contemporary imagination concerning conspiracies: science and the USA. Previously the ideal culprits were deviants or minorities, in other words, other people. Fantasy fears provide new actors for the theatre of hate, and these actors could very well be other selves, as an expression of self-hate, since science, like the USA, is one of the paradigmatic figures of western contemporary life. It is an idea, suggested by reading this book, that deserves to be studied further.

In conclusion the author quite accurately reminds us that chance is the unwanted host of conspiracy theories that claim to reveal how disparate elements of human history fit together. In a sense the world's complexity is always denied in favour of a search for a single cause. Maybe it is not illegitimate to worry that contemporary thinking sees doubt and widespread suspicion as a mark of intelligence rather than a weakness of judgement. And so, rather paradoxically, we feel like quoting Nietzsche, one of the great figures of the philosophy of suspicion: 'Let chance come to me.'

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Véronique Campion-Vincent and Jean-Bruno Renard, *De source sûre. Nouvelles rumeurs d'aujourd'hui*. Paris: Payot, 2002.

Legend is presented in this book as a 'daughter of History impregnated by Myth' (p. 19). Through this clever phrase we can measure the road travelled since the late 19th century, when it was possible to read, from the pen of a disillusioned poet, that to make history live we should 'kill off legend' (Catulle Mendès, La Légende du Parnasse Contemporain, Brussels, 1884, p. 266).

Despite that aphorism legend has lost none of its vitality. It has conquered new areas and still runs around just as freely. Rumour is its best representative in the contemporary world. It is a relatively brief statement which is subject to frequent manipulation along the chain of transmission. And because it is lightweight the message can be disseminated very rapidly among the population. Because the spread of information is facilitated by modern channels of communication, the internet has become the tool of a new folklore chiefly made up of urban legends. These rumours of todayare defined by Véronique Campion-Vincent and Jean-Bruno Renard as 'anecdotes from modern life, of unknown origin, related as true, but false or doubtful' (p. 20). They are connected with belief, whose function is not to alert individual consciousness to historical, scientific or objective knowledge of facts. Rumours target group thinking, which finds in them elements for putting feelings into words and expressing a socially shared emotional state. Therefore it is important not to avoid semantic issues when studying rumours because analysis of their content can help us both to pin down the symbolic dimension of the message and to understand the reasons for its seductive power.

What do today's rumours tell us and what older narrative motifs can we link them with? These are the first questions to which Véronique Campion-Vincent and Jean-Bruno Renard give us substantial answers using an exemplary methodology. Having assembled a first corpus in their previous book on urban legends (*Légendes urbaines. Rumeurs d'aujourd'hui*. Paris, 1992 [2002]), they have collected some new data with a view to drawing up a veritable catalogue raisonnéof modern folklore. Over several months they gleaned the most diverse messages, making sure they did not neglect any of the channels on which suspicious information circulates. Then they worked at separating true from false by subjecting the content of each to a well-documented evaluation. The results of their lengthy meticulous study are contained in this book. In it we find the whole spectrum of fears, desires and temptations that characterize our times, and also the very

varied forms these feelings or tensions can assume in the discourse of our contemporaries. And so almost 150 rumours with their variants are laid out before our eyes in carefully arranged boxes. These inset descriptions often reflect back to us virtual or fantastic worlds modelled on the internet or dominated by sexual performance. But most frequently it is the cry of a mind tormented by fears around food, technophobia, urban violence and the return of wild animals that breaks through; and while some statements depict fantasy situations or at times even funny ones, other pictures show a real fascination with the supernatural. This themed review is backed up by a study of sources and a table of ideas, both of which increase the book's academic interest. Reading these we are tempted to conclude that rumour in cities is seldom a legend *sui generis*. Indeed for the authors urban rumour reactivates a familiar narrative motif, adapting it for a modern situation. Old and new seem to intermingle to produce a recast version of reality that is more often than not distorted. As the content of the message borrows as much from the past as from the present, it might be said that it partakes of a bipolar temporality. This temporal coupling is the work of an implicit thought process involving symbolic forms, which draw their raw material from collective memory and imagination to reconstruct the data the attention is focused on. In other words, cognitive functions that are attending to a current event at the same time facilitate the 'return of cultural elements left behind' into the field of consciousness. Since the mental representation of an event does not involve any special effort of consciousness or reasoning, we can understand more easily that belief in rumours is unrelated to educational level, as the authors discovered.

 Cognitive mediation therefore plays an essential part in the life of rumours. It intervenes not only when they are created but also when they are passed on, modifying the content of messages. And so participants quite involuntarily alter in their discourse events they may have witnessed or been told about. The most frequent distortions result from three operations, which Véronique Campion-Vincent and Jean-Bruno Renard describe most precisely. There is amplification, which amounts to exaggerating details; transposition, which is moving information to an unaccustomed context; and reconstruction, which affects the overall structure of the item. These manipulations explain the success of urban legends because they allow everyone to graft on personal elements. However, there is another explanation for their spread. It rests on the more sociological arguments provided in this book. If rumour arouses so much interest among the urban population, this is also because of its social utility. In this case spreading a false piece of information reveals a genuine problem. Sometimes it is even the way to cope with it. It is true that the anecdote of the radioactive diamonds sold by the Russian or Albanian mafia repeats the legendary theme of the evil-bearing necklace (pp. 51–3). But given recent events, this story may be understood as a symbolic warning of the risk of nuclear pollution, which, since the Chernobyl disaster, has become one of our contemporaries' chief preoccupations. The ideology of security may also have something to do with it, as is shown by the paragraph devoted to the legend called 'the compassionate terrorist' (pp. 242–8). In this story, traces of which are found in traditional folklore, a suspicious person warns someone to whom he feels he owes something about an imminent criminal act he is preparing to commit, so that he/she can avoid the danger. What should we think of such a rumour resurfacing in French cities at the very moment when the government was announcing in December 2002 that the 'Vigipirate' measures were being strengthened to combat threats of attack? Whether deliberate or not, the spread of that message, perfectly synchronized with the preventive measures, was part of the campaign to raise awareness about the rise in urban violence. From that example we can understand that the authorities have no interest in putting an end to some rumours. In the end it matters little to them whether the rumour is false, unlikely or immoral if it makes their job easier. It is then a combination, legitimized by circumstances, of rationality and belief, an unnatural marriage that, in the view of the book's authors, demonstrates an appreciable development in public behaviour: 'Scorned and resisted in the past by self-confident public officials, who expatiated on the infantilism of an ignorant public, deriding and deploring it, rumours . . . and the legends that flesh them out, are often listened to today, nay even respected as legitimate warnings forecasting a disaster which they might help to limit' (p. 336). In these circumstances can we really 'kill off legend'?

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Pamela Donovan, *No Way of Knowing: Crime, Urban Legends and the Internet*. New York and London: Routledge, 2004.

   This study is adapted from a PhD thesis and stands at the crossroads between several disciplines: sociology, criminology, communication (study of the internet, which was still a new medium when the research was being carried out in 1995–9) and folklore. In her brief preface Pamela Donovan contrasts the optimistic climate then with the climate of pessimism and general crisis that followed the 9/11 attacks.
   In her introduction the reader learns that the study arose out of three questions posed by Pamela Donovan on: (1) the relevance and fundamental truth that rumours – at first sight an ancient folk genre – still have for many people (pp. vii–viii). Indeed, contrary to forecasts common in the 1950s and 1960s, television, media ubiquity and globalization have by no means made rumours and urban legends disappear. In particular, legends about crime play a significant, though non-institutionalized, part in 21st-century societies (p. 5). (2) Differences between the messages put out by legends about crime and institutionalized information on crime (p. 5). (3) The truth status accorded to legends about crime (p. 6). The analysis is based on observation of discussions between supporters and opponents of the veracity of crime legends in the discussion forums on the alt.folklore.urban website, which was the most active site for the study of urban legends at the time of the research.
   The analysis was backed up by questionnaires and interviews and examination of press articles and academic studies of three crime legends. They were selected because they are old and have been directly denied in the media and by the authorities. The cases are of violent crimes committed against people, which arouse dramatic

reactions very different from the reactions to crimes against property (p. 7).

Following Linda Dégh (*Legend and Belief*, 2001, reviewed in this dossier) and Tamotsu Shibutani (*Improvised News,* 1966), Pamela Donovan sees the legend as a 'public conversation' involving not only the text of the legend but also the reactions of the supporters and opponents of its veracity, as well as those of the authorities. The meaning and truth status of a rumour or legend are the result of a 'group transaction' continually being negotiated by those who recount and discuss them (p. 9). Pamela Donovan rules out a sterile quest for the origins of these crime legends, which cannot be attributed to malicious operators, but asks questions about the modes of believing in their veracity and the links between the legends and fears of violent crime or the very widespread feeling of being exposed to danger in the present-day world. (pp. 10–11).

The case studies deal with three crime legends, which take up the next three chapters:
• snuff movies – the legend states that real murders have been shot and sold for a very high price to aficionados of arousing films, whether as films, videos on cassette or online
• organ thefts – more often than not the legend features young male victims who wake up in a hotel room minus a kidney (or even both) having been drugged by a seductive blonde. These versions circulate in rich countries (and differ from the versions in poor countries, where the victims are very young, adopted or street children)
• kidnappings – the legend has women and children kidnapped at random in shops, malls, or amusement parks in order to force them into prostitution.

The legend about snuff movies appeared in the USA in the late 1960s. It was taken up again in the mid-1970s by spokesmen for virtue: first moral crusaders saying that snuff movies were the ultimate and logical form of pornography, then radical feminists who also considered their existence logical in a macho world polluted by pornography, where women were treated as sex objects. Newspaper investigations, often dealing with serial killers, also say today that this legend is true and (this is one of its main features) it has generated an impressive number of fictions (novels and films). It is the legend that is most discussed in the groups observed and those who criticize its content often use an extended cognate definition of it to include films of extreme violence – collections of executions, torture, bloody accidents – and sadomasochistic pornography, which really do exist. Like certain feminist moralists, believers frequently say that it is impossible to know whether snuff movies exist or not, so ambiguity persists. In fact this view, which is found in the three cases studied, gives the book its title. Its protective function is obvious.

As for the legend about kidney thefts, people are lukewarm believers and it is the sceptics who are the moralists. They stress the damaging effects of such stories on the donations needed for sick people awaiting transplants. In the American context the legend probably allows anxieties to be expressed about a very high-quality medical system that is fully accessible only to those who have sufficient means.

We refer readers to Pamela Donovan's article in this issue of Diogenes –'How Idle is Idle Talk?' – both for the presentation of the third case studied and for the study of

the forms of belief and scepticism that take up the following three chapters.

The last chapter stresses the function of these crime legends. They tame the fear of becoming a victim by describing organized crime as extremely complex and ever present, but saying that we can always protect ourselves with the help of the knowledge provided by legends, knowledge that circulates in familiar channels. The relationship between the 'official discourse' of the news and the mass fictions transmitted by the media on the one hand and the 'ordinary discourse' of crime legends and folklore on the other is more complex than we thought: the world of folklore is not a cut-off romantic refuge but reflects and interacts with the media world.

Crime legends, which display many archaic features, among them the omnipotence accorded to the agents of evil, are nevertheless rational and their supporters insist on their veracity, appealing to many authorities (hospitals, police, journalists) to back up what they say. Knowledge passed on is akin to a protective shield against a world of anarchy and widespread selfishness. That knowledge remains relatively impregnable to sceptics' attacks because it carries meaning.

This innovative study is written in a dense but agreeable style.

Véronique Campion-Vincent

Pascal Froissart, *La Rumeur, histoire et fantasmes.* Paris: Belin, 2002.

Pascal Froissart's book fills an important gap in a research field that is otherwise crowded. In fact this volume is not another study of rumour but a book on works about rumours: the author attempts to define the conditions for the possibility of the study of rumours, its assumptions, its instrumentalizing or ideological errors, in other words a veritable epistemology of rumour studies. Original and intelligent, Froissart's book scratches 'rumorologists' where they itch!

The work unfolds following two complementary approaches: part 1, which is diachronic, is a 'pre-Allport & Postman' archaeology that digs up studies of rumour before 1945; part 2, which is synchronic, draws up a critical typology of research hypotheses related to rumour (rumour is false; rumour contains a hidden message; rumour has to be controlled).

Part 1 has the merit of presenting and analysing little-known work, though Allport and Postman, Rosnow and Shibutani cite these forerunners, and the historian of rumour Hans-Joachim Neubauer mentions them in his book *Fama. Eine Geschichte des Gerüchts* (Berlin: Berlin Verlag, 1998, Eng. trans.: The Rumour. A Cultural History, London: Free Association Books, 1999). Froissart reminds us of Louis William Stern's (1902) work on the linear, degraded transmission of a message – already noting omission, addition and alteration mechanisms – of work by Rosa Oppenheim (1911) on a press rumour, by Frederick Bartlett (1920) experimenting with the ability to recall folktales and drawings, by Clifford Kirkpatrick (1932) modifying Stern's methodology protocol by eliminating the intermediary role of the experimenter, who became just an observer of successive transmissions.

Froissart's aim is to highlight the emergence of a concept, that of 'rumour', 'a category created . . . recently

which is a nonsense when applied in that way before a certain date' (p. 51). If the old notions of 'rumour in circulation' or 'reputation' are ignored in favour of the exclusive idea of 'distorted message', Froissart goes further still by suggesting that rumour is a false concept, vague, often contradictorily defined (for instance, reduction and the 'snowball' effect) and covering a multiplicity of phenomena. A specialist in information and communication science, the author stresses the crucial role of the mass media in disseminating and even creating rumours, so contesting the traditional idea of 'word-of-mouth'.

Froissart rightly criticizes an essentialist conception of rumour – which matches a word with an eternal reality – but in doing so he falls quite naturally into the opposite extreme, nominalism, which says a word corresponds only to a conventional reality, the mind's view. To say it is impossible to talk of rumour before the word appeared ('rumour became a reality', p. 63) would mean, to caricature, that universal attraction, the electron and chromosomes did not exist before the words appeared! Rumour is no more nor less a false concept than all the ideas in the human sciences – for example, intelligence, the unconscious, social class – subjects of constant debate and constant re-evaluation.

In Part 2 the first theory discussed is 'rumorography or the precision fantasy'. Froissart invites researchers to show modesty on the question of the truth of rumours, condemning 'rumorologists' abuse of their position of authority: they pretend to tell the truth regardless of the process that leads to truth and is far from simple to follow' (p. 151). They often forget they are not the ones who hold the absolute truth, but experts putting forward a relative truth. The author catches Allport and Postman in their own trap, revealing that one of the 'realistic' illustrations used by the American psychologists in their experiments on transmitting information contains a crude error: two road signs side by side say 'Cherbourg 50 km' and 'Paris 21.5 km', a bizarre detail since the two cities are 332 km apart! But this anecdote is emblematic: in order to criticize the pseudo-real Froissart has to rely on another 'real' seen as truer than the first. The relativist position, which denies the possibility of establishing true and false ('impossible veracity', p. 137), is untenable and would end by giving up on distinguishing between correct and incorrect information.

The second theory, 'rumourancy' – a purist would have preferred 'rumouromancy' on the terminological model of the 'mancies' or arts of divination such as cartomancy, chiromancy, necromancy – is the propensity of researchers to interpret rumours, to unveil their 'hidden message'. We are happy to follow the author in his 'criticism of the single meaning' (p. 182) and his suspicion of symbolic systems 'steamrollered' onto rumour, as is often the case with psychoanalytical interpretations. The author himself does not avoid dodgy interpretations: what are we to think of the provocative hypothesis, on scarcely any foundation, that the rumour studied by Jung telling of intimate relations between a teenage girl and her teacher concealed a story of sexual abuse (p. 178)? We could not subscribe to the statement that 'there are as many interpretations as speakers [and] rumorologists' (p. 186). This is to forget that interpretation does not arise from individual whim but from a search for symbolic coherence,

which is backed up not only by the rumour's content but also by the paratext, the sociocultural context, the militant use of the rumour by the people transmitting it. As Jean-Michel Berthelot clearly demonstrated in his epistemological study of sociology, the hermeneutic paradigm is just as valid as a way of understanding society as causal or dialectical paradigms (L'Intelligence du social, Paris: PUF, 1990).

The third theory, 'rumorocracy or the fantasy of control', criticizes the medical metaphor comparing rumour to an epidemic caused by a virus or microbe, and the illusion of measures for combating rumours. Froissart emphasizes the vanity of mathematical models for the spread of rumour, the error in thinking that undifferentiated subjects carry rumours or that they are spread mainly in popular and poorly educated circles, and finally the ineffectiveness of denial: all this has been clearly demonstrated but, pace the author, by studies of rumour themselves. It is easy to criticize the baroque herpetological metaphors (the typology of rumours corresponding to kinds of snakebite, depending on whether the prey is killed by a jet of poison, gradually paralysed or swallowed alive) or entomological ones (rumour like insects is said to go through three stages: larva, nymph and imago) presented by Françoise Reumaux as an 'outline for a theory of rumours', but Froissart ignores the theoretical and methodological contribution made by the modelling of rumour by Michel-Louis Rouquette in the 1990s, around the concepts of involvement, attribution, negativity and instability. All three concepts are absent from Froissart's book. He mistakenly writes that experiments on the linear transmission of rumours only measure recall ability (p. 121). This is to neglect studies which show that memory is not the only factor operating in the process of message reduction: reproduction of details is better when subjects have a 'neutral' relationship with the message than when they feel involved (M.-L. Rouquette et al., 'Influence de la pertinence et de la structure sous-jacente sur la mémorisation des énoncés', *Bulletin de Psychologie*, vol. XXX, 1976, pp. 59–64).

For the requirements of his demonstration Froissart writes about 'rumorology', the (pseudo-)science of rumours, but this amusing neologism is a rhetorical effect since there is no discipline or specialization with that name. As I have written elsewhere, it is lucky for the study of rumours that it is connected to many disciplines (sociology, psychology, folklore, communication, history and so on), so that none of them can claim a monopoly.

Froissart's book, which will be enjoyed by all those specializing in rumour, is a salutary critique of the work being done in that research area. However, it would be ridiculous to conclude from it that no research can be carried out on the subject. Pascal Froissart himself has written a fine monograph on an African rumour that stands comparison with the most traditional research ('La rumeur du chien', in F. Reumaux, ed., *Les Oies du Capitole ou les raisons de la rumeur*, Paris: CNRS Editions, 1999, pp. 105–20). Though he denies it, Froissart is certainly interested in the veracity of the rumour (he encourages his journalism students to investigate events and he cites the police report on the case) and he attempts an interpretation of it in terms of social symbolism ('The rumour about the dog is the best illustration of these social tensions', p. 115).

Finally it is not the smallest virtue of Froissart's book that it offers innovative and illuminating approaches to the social representation of rumours: a bibliometry of works on rumour, a study of metaphors for rumour, analysis of the iconic figurations of rumour (for instance, Norman Rockwell's famous drawing). Pascal Froissart's excellent website, a true French-language 'portal' for the study of rumours, reflects this richness and intellectual curiosity: <http://pascalfroissart.online.fr>.

Jean-Bruno Renard

Bengt af Klintberg, *Glitterspray och 99 andra klintbergare*. Stockholm: Atlantis, 2005.

The title of this book, which could be translated as 'Glitterspray and 99 Other Klintbergers', shows the extent to which urban legends are associated with the folklorist Bengt af Klintberg in the minds of the Swedish public. The common noun derived from his surname has already found a place in the supplement to the Swedish National Encyclopedia: ' "klintbergare", after Bengt af Klintberg, popular name for a modern travelling kind of legend that many people consider to be true'. The fact is that for about 30 years now the author, who specializes in traditional as well as modern legends, has been systematically collecting and analysing the urban legends going around in Sweden. His first two collections of urban legends, *Rottan i pizzan* (The rat in the pizza), 1986, and *Den stulna nyuren* (The stolen kidney), 1994, had already made his name familiar to the public. But it was particularly the radio programme *Folkminnen*, which he presented with Christina Mattsson from 1990 to 2004, that made him famous. The legends contained in *Glitterspray* were provided by readers' letters, radio listeners' contributions and comments collected at conferences all over Sweden. Furthermore this third collection, unlike the two previous ones, also includes legends spread on the internet.

Glitterspray comprises 100 urban legends, each one represented by a full version (around a fifth of the collection), followed by comments (about four-fifths). Nearly all the genre's common themes are represented: sex, scatology, crime, happy or unhappy accidents, disasters, exotic foods, modern technologies, terrorism, etc. As the author emphasizes, most of these legends are also in circulation in the rest of the western world. Some are great classics, whether relatively recent, like 'The two stolen kidneys' (p. 10), very recent, like 'The grateful terrorist', or with a very long history, like 'The runaway mother-in-law' (p. 11).

However, there are a few exceptions to the international character of *Glitterspray*'s repertoire. For example, legends about the sinking of the Estonia, which went down in the waters of the Baltic in the space of an hour in 1994, killing 859 passengers, are of necessity known in Scandinavia especially. Some of them began to go around in the days following the disaster, others were still in circulation six months later. The oldest, which tells how a passenger's widow got a phone call from her husband who was shut in his cabin and described the water rising, then was abruptly interrupted, is a fiction in Klintberg's opinion. The details have never been corroborated by anyone close to those who drowned and are technically well-nigh impossible. But they are extremely similar to the stories that did the rounds about the planes involved in the 9/11 attacks.

Other legends exploit the well-known motif of the accident avoided by a chance event or providence: a lorry-driver is late and arrives two minutes after the ship has sailed; another is stopped for speeding, has his licence withdrawn and cannot sail. Another legend has the second-in-command surviving but then crossed off the list of survivors by the ship's owners to stop him revealing compromising details about the Estonia's defective safety. Other, more sinister, legends explain the shipwreck as an act deliberately carried out by the Russian mafia, who preferred to see the ship sink rather than have its cargo of cocaine confiscated by the police and the culprits unmasked; or even by the Swedish state, to drown traces of radioactivity from a top-secret cargo. It is clear that even though legends about the Estonia circulate only in Scandinavia, the motifs in these stories and the psychological processes that produced them are fairly universal.

Each type of legend is represented by one of its versions, reproduced in full not just in summary, apparently in the informant's very words. This means that the author, without undertaking an extended stylistic analysis which the size of the repertoire would not allow, can make valuable observations on the gradual crystallization of the narratives into a more dramatic form as they are passed on.

Not only does Klintberg indicate precisely his informants' names and geographical provenance, he also notes their certainties or doubts about the story they are telling. In my view, that may be this book's most valuable contribution. We must alter the far too simplistic received idea that legends are fictional stories that people believe are true. It would be more accurate to say that the legend is a narrative so composed that the issue of the veracity of the events described is relevant, unlike a funny story for instance. As Marie-Louise Tenèze has appositely expressed it, the legend has meaning only in the discourse resulting from it: a discourse that has to do, not only with the lessons to be drawn from the events in the story, but also the degree of faith to be placed in it. It is clear that the line between a particular funny story and a particular urban legend, for example, is not related to their content, which may often be identical, but to the attitude of the speaker and audience to them: should we laugh or should we comment?

Klintberg correctly remarks that an urban legend – which in Scandinavian languages is called vandrehistorie, that is, 'wandering story' – is not necessarily fictional. It may very well be based on a true event which was impressive enough to give rise to a dramatized form and thus to be passed on orally. In this regard we should note a definite development in the public's attitude to urban legends. Around 20 years ago, before the word and the concept became commonly known, people tended to be too credulous. Nowadays they tend to be too suspicious. Though Klintberg, in common with all those specializing in urban legends, sometimes has to disabuse informants by proving to them that their story is a 'wandering story' without foundation in reality, he is occasionally forced to take the opposite course, for instance in the case of 'Kevin Costner's au-pair' (p. 71). A Swedish girl who wanted to work for an American family contacted the 'Smiths'. But when she arrived she realized she had been hired by the

famous actor Kevin Costner, who had used the pseudonym to begin with in order to ensure that he was taking on a girl who was serious. Klintberg's first informant in 1993 thought this story, which had happened to the daughter of an old classmate's friend, was suspicious: it was like an urban legend. Since then Klintberg has received 15 versions of the same legend and considers it is based on a genuine event. First, it is only attested in Sweden. Second, other details in the first version – the girl's first name, where she lived, the final comment of her mother, who had never heard of Kevin Costner – disappear in subsequent versions, which on the other hand give the story a more dramatic form. Personally I would add another argument in favour of the likely truth of the initial event. Even in its final phase the narrative is only imperfectly 'folklorized', it has not generated any variants as to the employer's real identity. But a folklore text by definition generates variants. In an entirely fictional urban legend we would expect similar stories also to feature Tom Cruise, Brad Pitt or any other teenage idol.

The comments of *Glitterspray*'s author especially concern the likely veracity of the events related and the genealogy and transmission of Swedish legends and the existence of parallels in the USA and Europe, mainly Britain, Germany and France. But the issue of the meaning of these urban legends and the psychological or sociological reasons that encourage their emergence is dealt with too, though more succinctly.

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Margarita Zires, *Voz, texto e imagen en interacción. El rumor de los pitufos.* Mexico: Miguel Angel Porrúa and Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana Xochimilco, 2001.

The rumours, legends, stories and messages communicated through the media constitute a complex network of texts that are ever-present in our modern society. In the book *Voz, texto e imagen en interacción. El rumor de los pitufos* (Voice, text and image in interaction: the Smurf rumour), Margarita Zires analyses the different versions of a rumour that circulated in Mexico in the 1980s. According to the rumour, Smurf figures (that is, the characters of the television show) would come to life and kill children.

Based on an exhaustive amount of research, the author gives us an understanding of the cultural dimension of the rumour, through the formulation of a theoretical methodological approach that captures the complex process of group communication that, depending on the cultural context, facilitates the production and transformation of rumours.

Rumours, according to Zires, are collective, group phenomena that travel through social groups and sometimes even from one group context to another. By studying the rumours in a given society, one may be able to discern the society's various 'cultural fabrics' as well as their often differing standards for verisimilitude. According to the author, the cultural standards for establishing the verisimilitude of the different versions of a rumour in different cultural contexts are the result of the specific oral, written or audiovisual discourses that circulate within each particular context.

One of the more salient aspects of this work is the vast amount of empirical research undertaken by the author

and her thorough analysis of the various versions of one basic rumour that circulated in very different cultural contexts. To this end, she used a broad variety of methodological instruments, the focal point of which are the group interviews she conducted with children from both urban and semi-rural environments. She also includes analyses of television programmes; texts written by the children themselves; questionnaires; field observations; analysis of statistical data and individual interviews with various informants.

By comparing the rumour in three different cultural contexts, the author offers a broad analytical perspective. The first context she studies is Nezahualcóyotl, a marginal and underprivileged town incorporated into the metropolitan area of Mexico City, where audiovisual media have a high impact, and print media a relatively low impact on the population. The second context, El Pedregal, is a residential area of Mexico City with a population that enjoys high socio-economic status. There, print culture is as powerful an influence as audiovisual culture. The third and final cultural context is Valladolid, a semi-urban village 200 kilometres from the city of Mérida, in the Yucatan, where the socio-economic conditions might be characterized as somewhere in the middle range. This region was selected for study because of its strong identification with Mayan traditions and culture, and the relatively weak influence of audiovisual and print-related culture among its population.

Based on the material gathered in interviews and surveys, the author focused on specific versions of the Smurf rumour in each cultural context. In each context, Zires presents an exhaustive analysis of the stories she heard and, most especially, of certain associations that elucidated a great deal about the realm of children and their stories, which in turn allowed her to extract a variety of definitions of verisimilitude.

In the case of Nezahualcóyotl, the children talked a lot about supernatural occurrences, which were clearly related to the discourses of popular religion, popularly held beliefs, and tales of terror and mystery. A number of different stories emerged from this context, such as the 'Smurf apparition', the 'spiteful Smurf' and the 'Smurf possessed by the devil', the associations of which establish a relationship with a collection of beliefs regarding magic, witchcraft, and the power of God, the devil, the Virgin and the dead. In this context, the rumour became so widespread that several bonfires of Smurf figures were lit in the community.

In the case of the children from the area of El Pedregal, the rumour bore no verisimilitude at all. In this context what predominated was a tendency toward rationalist thought that manifested a rejection of the notion of murderous Smurfs. Despite this, however, the children in this area were well aware of the different versions of the rumour. Some children even expressed mocking, scornful attitudes toward those children who believed the rumour to be plausible. The children in El Pedregal ascribed a certain level of prestige to written documents, reading and writing, whereas they held television in lower esteem. The only version of the rumour that attained any level of credibility among this group was the story of the 'robot Smurf'. In this sense we can see how the figure in question only acquired verisimilitude if it was closely linked to the application of technological advances. The myth regarding the unlimited possibilities of science and

technology was quite prevalent in this particular cultural medium.

The first and most notable aspect of the case of the children in Valladolid, in the Yucatan, was the sheer volume of stories they produced. In the oral narrative that emerged from this context, it is possible to discern elements of a pre-hispanic, Mayan indigenous discourse as well as elements of a popular Catholic religious discourse with Mayan touches. In this context, the author listened as the children talked about rumours of an 'Alux smurf" or an 'X-tabay smurf', both of which are related to characters from Mayan legends which, in turn, are associated with a great many characters such as the wolf-man, the medusa, the fairy, the vampire, the sprite, the devil, and other religious figures. These characters tended to exhibit characteristics similar to those of characters from the Mayan legends, or at least had found themselves similar contexts.

Beyond simply pointing out certain aspects of the cultural heterogeneity that characterizes contemporary Mexican society, the author also considers aspects that have, until now, largely been overlooked by the macro-structural perspectives that fail to consider the particularities of local logics of cultural production. For this reason, Zires' book is truly an ideal source for gaining access to the oral cultures of contemporary Mexico.

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Margarita Zires, *Del rumor al tejido cultural y saber político*. Mexico: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Xochimilco, 2001.

More than 15 years of theoretical and empirical research on rumour has gone into the writing of Del rumor al tejido cultural y saber político (From rumour to cultural fabric and political knowledge). The topic of rumour had not been very closely examined in Mexico and Latin America until author Margarita Zires began her studies in the field.

The book is divided into two main sections. In the first four chapters, through the presentation, discussion and critical analysis of the most important research carried out to date on rumours in different social disciplines, the author weaves together a theoretical reflection through which she contests the instrumental and unidirectional notions of communication. These notions are what gave rise to the concept of the rumour as a false, negative and downmarket form of communication. Margarita Zires, however, offers us a new perspective by transforming the aforementioned notion of the rumour into something far broader, redefining it as a form of oral communication that exists through its interaction with other forms of mediated communication, as a kind of space for the collective interaction, discussion, formulation and creation of new social meanings.

In the first chapter, based on a critical analysis of the classic studies that associate rumour with the distortion of reality and political propaganda, and with the aid of the Foucaultian perception of power, Margarita Zires formulates her own perspective regarding the political dimension of the rumour.

In the second chapter, the author analyses the cultural dimension of rumour. To this end, she reconsiders and criticizes the works of functionalist sociologists, social psychologists, structural anthropologists and psychoanalysts. The author concludes that the question of what is true and what is false are not her primary concerns. What she is most interested in are the standards of verisimilitude and the logics of narrative production in different socio-cultural and temporo-spatial contexts.

From the author's perspective, rumours serve not only to analyse cultural constants, they also express contradictions and constitute an exceptionally valuable space for studying the multiplicity of perspectives – sometimes convergent but often contrary – that allow the researcher to identify cultural differences.

In the third chapter Margarita Zires analyses the specificity of the rumour as a form of oral, collective and anonymous communications. The rumour is an oral product that circulates through word of mouth, is produced in institutional interstices, and transmitted through informal channels of communication. In the fourth chapter, the author concludes the first part of her book with a theoretical methodological proposal for approaching the rumour as an oral communication phenomenon.

In addition to its theoretical-methodological contributions, Zires' text has historical value, for it offers a record of various rumours that were in circulation in Mexico during the latter third of the 20th century: rumours, myths and contemporary legends that express different ways of seeing and interpreting the world. Thanks to this book, we can appreciate a society's myriad ruminations in all their complexity, and understand that discursive fabric that lends substance, density, meaning and foundation to the ways in which different social groups in Mexico think and live.

In the second part of the book the author presents three cases considered to be paradigmatic, in order to understand the different dimensions of the rumour. Through the rumours that circulated in 1994 regarding the murder of the Institutional Revolutionary Party's candidate for the presidency of Mexico, the author offers an analysis of the political dimension of the rumour. Through her analysis of the different versions of the rumours that emerged following Colosio's murder, the author underscores the processes of verbal interaction that gave rise to various different social meanings ascribed to the image of the government in general, and certain politicians in particular. This analysis, as such, also reveals the interviewees' impressions of their own capacity for social action and intervention as political subjects. The discourses present very different definitions of politics and its scope: some are quite categorical whereas others are more tentative and malleable. They also express desires, hopes, fears, values and beliefs in the very process of their creation, formulation and transformation.
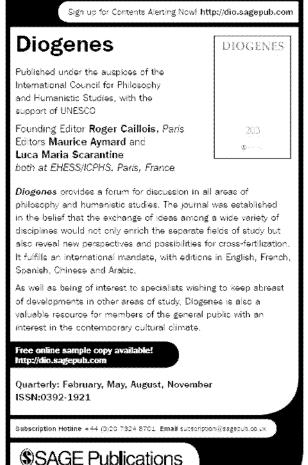
On another note, through analysis of the various versions of the Smurf and Chupacabras (Goatsuckers) rumours, the author offers an analysis of the cultural dimension of the rumour through an analysis of the discursive mechanisms and norms governing the social construction of verisimilitude. The stories recounted by the people interviewed by the author reveal the voices of different social institutions – religion, science, popular culture – in constant dialogue with one another. In the very act of recounting a story, the storytellers reproduce the voices of the culture that informs them, and they confront those voices, criticizing or recreating them to give

meaning to their actions, to create new meanings, and to recreate or reproduce old ones.

From my perspective the book *Del rumor al tejido cultural y saber político* should be mandatory reading for anyone who is interested in what is commonly called 'public opinion', for it is far more than a mere study of rumours; this work is an analysis of the various forms in which new social (political and/or cultural) meanings are created, formulated and learned.

This book has the great virtue of presenting both the author's discoveries (achieved through an exhaustive research process) and her research method. As we read this book, we can experience the dialogue that the author establishes not only with other researchers of rumour but with several generations of students, still going through the education process, with whom she has carried out a serious, meticulous and rigorous group investigation.

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Diogenes

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