

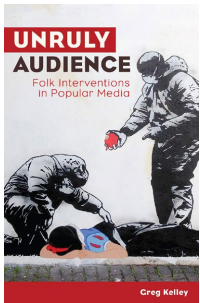
Tok Thompson - Review of Greg Kelley, *Unruly Audience: Folk Interventions in Popular Media*

Greg Kelley. *Unruly Audience: Folk Interventions in Popular Media*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2020. 252. ISBN: 1607329891.

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The theory of *gesunkeness Kulturgut*, or “sunken cultural goods,” was a predominant view which dismissed the originality of folklore, and, by extension, of the common folk themselves. This outlook generally held that common folk created nothing, merely imitated their superiors...

badly. Following this line of reasoning, all folktales, legends, and myths were literary creations first, only later entering into the common realm. Thankfully, folklore scholarship largely refuted this outlook. However, in crafting their defensive position, folklorists found themselves often arguing the opposite, that folklore, to be “real” folklore, had to originate in the folk.

Greg Kelley’s *Unruly Audience* helps deconstruct such false binaries, showing how folklore can indeed originate in an authored realm, yet not, as in *gesunkeness Kulturgut*, be limited to poor renditions. His examples over and over again display the folk (his “unruly audience”) reworking authored materials, and often vastly improving them.

Such moves are in keeping with Stuart Hall’s views of the active consumer, as well as de Certeau’s views of individual agency operating within disciplined constraints. Kelley’s examples include jokes, ad parodies, song parodies, fairy tales, legends, and more. In each, Kelley demonstrates the creative power of the folk, as the official and authorial scripts are inverted, subverted, or radically re-altered. Whether this be

long-lasting children's folksongs based on a short-lived ad campaign, or folk legends continuing in the face of historical documents stating otherwise, the folk are revealed as perennially interpreting, changing, adapting, and re-using commercial and institutional culture.

A key point underlying his themes and examples is that the folk are not only reworking received goods, but that they do so in particular, often counter-hegemonic, ways: making fun of institutional authority by putting a product up for ridicule, or belittling a governmental decree, or re-imagining the sexuality of Disney's chaste fairy-tale characters. This is, writ large, a Gramscian view of folklore, where folklore performs an important role in allowing and celebrating counter-hegemonic stances and reactions against authorial and institutional control (or, as Kelley puts it, the "wonderfully creative world of disruption").

As such, this work overlaps a great deal with media studies, such as in the work of Henry Jenkins, who also investigates the role of vernacular responses to media, especially via the internet. Kelley's work further investigates this complex interaction, as folklore now responds not only to authored literature and institutional teachings, but also, perhaps increasingly, to itself. These intriguing examples are brought out particularly in chapters 4 and 6, dealing with metahumor, and internet saturation. As more and more communication online takes a distinctly vernacular character, "culture jamming" can refer to opposition not only to institutional authority, but also to the mass of tradition, of folklore itself. This focus on the "unruly" part of the folkloric experience, reveals the ever-changing, ever-adapting realm of folklore, brought out by individual agency and collective participation.

Witty, and at times hilarious, the book makes its cogent points largely through well-illustrated examples. This book would be an excellent addition to any graduate seminar on folklore, but also should be of great interest to anyone working in media studies or communication.

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