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Introduction

Reception and Resistance

WHEN I WAS A LITTLE BOY, a blocky Zenith brand TV the size and weight of a bank safe graced our family living room. There, after school and on weekends, my three brothers and I would sit—or lounge with pillows on the crimson shag carpet—watching programs like *The Addams Family*, *The Brady Bunch*, and *Get Smart*. This was long before the convenient affordances of remote controls, home recording, and on-demand viewing: we were captive—though not always captivated—media consumers who had no choice but to endure the frequent commercial interruptions to our favorite programs, which at the time we reckoned as an endless nuisance. So together we devised a game to mitigate the boredom. When a commercial flickered onto the screen, one of us would extract himself from his comfortable nest and turn down the TV volume (a task that usually fell to me, as the youngest), and then we would all collaborate to create spontaneously our own sardonic content to the advertisements. Often we slipped quickly into irreverent, distasteful, or subversive themes. I recall that contamination was a common leitmotif: a handsome fellow shaving at the bathroom mirror was, by the alchemy of our invention, inexplicably slathering mayonnaise onto his face; a married couple at the breakfast table gleefully sipped murky motor oil, not coffee; aerosol room fresheners were reimagined as fire extinguishers, mouthwash as kerosene, liquid floor wax as accidental urination on the kitchen floor, and so on. We replaced the existing narration

and dialogue of the commercials with our own voice-overs and we adapted the visuals to scenarios that veered inevitably toward the ridiculous. I recall an instance when one brother chimed in with an extemporaneous voice-over for a sugarless gum commercial. He exaggerated the deep-toned inflection of a professional announcer, trumpeting: “People who chew Trident gum have 20 percent fewer cavities . . . because they have 40 percent fewer teeth.” The game became a regular part of our family folklore and something of a contest as we all jockeyed for the honor of getting off the next best gag or one-liner, each of us trying to match wits with the other—and laughing all the while. Sometimes we were disappointed when the regularly scheduled program resumed, bringing our improvised fun to a sudden halt. In fact, on occasion, when we were particularly engaged with it, the game continued right into the program itself. And so our afternoon TV time was not just passive viewing; rather, it was spontaneously creative and immersive as we interacted purposely with the network programming and its interspersed ads. At the time I did not comprehend the notion of brandwashing (Lindstrom 2011) or corporate control, nor did I recognize the ludic routines with my brothers as interventions against the onslaught. But those early games disrupting commercials may have set me in the direction of musing on the relationship between dominant media and disorderly audience reception—what has been a long pathway leading to this volume and its central focus on folk intervention in popular media.

Try as they might, media texts can never finally control or contain the meanings that they generate. They form only one station of a polysemous discourse, and embedded within them are resources out of which active audiences augment or undermine the aims of production. “The hegemony of the text is never total,” John Fiske observes, “but always has to struggle to impose itself into that diversity of meanings that the diversity of readers will produce” (2011, 93). Folklore is one mechanism in that process, an intervention whereby creative individuals inject alternate meanings into the media that they consume—and in doing so disrupt dominant ideologies.

ROOTS

In the 1970s, about the same time that my brothers and I were giggling in the living room, cultural theorists like Stuart Hall offered a new theoretical model for studying mediated communication. Repudiating the conventional view that communicative acts were essentially static processes with a sender, a message, and a receiver, Hall and cohorts at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham posited that meaning was neither transparent nor predetermined by a hegemonic sender.¹ Gone were the old assumptions that media messages were fixed, unidirectional communications delivered to a passive audience. Instead, Hall opened up an understanding of the complexities of audience reception—negotiated meanings, subjective interpretations, and the agency of media consumers in creating their own cultural texts. Hall's groundbreaking essay "Encoding/Decoding" (2000) outlined different cultural positions or codes by which media texts might be interpreted: (1) the dominant-hegemonic position, which embraces wholesale the political and ideological messages of dominant culture—that is, the "preferred readings" institutionally encoded into the texts; (2) the negotiated position, operating similarly within a general understanding of the hegemonic viewpoint, but texts are decoded according to more particular or locally situated logics, the so-called near view; this position is inherently contradictory, Hall concedes, as it both adapts to and, at the same time, resists dominant ideology. And then there is (3) the oppositional stance, which is unequivocally counter-hegemonic. Readers reject the media codes that are "structured in dominance" (57), instead injecting an alternative frame of reference in order to "retotalize" (61) the message.

Hall's conceptualization is one of the taproots of reception studies, which in some ways is an inapt label given that so much hangs on audience agency in the act of decoding. Rather, the moment of media consumption on the part of readers, listeners, or viewers is more precisely a form of audience *construction* rather than the passivity connoted by the term *reception* (Corner 1983, 267). In any case, reception theory, sometimes called active audience studies, addresses the entanglement of social structure and

agency—specifically, here, the relation between media production and the interpretive consumption of that media.

Not that production and consumption are discrete or easily separable categories. Consider, for example, a standard practice among ratings-hungry producers of reality television. They shoot vast quantities of video from which to edit selectively.² And then they closely monitor audience feedback on blogs, chatrooms, fan sites, and all manner of social networking to determine preferred plot points that are then fed back into a master narrative. Add to that programmed audience participation like voting (as in *Big Brother* and *American Idol*), and the assumed antithetical binary of production and consumption gets muddled (Jones 2003, 404; Tincknell and Raghuram 2002, 211). In effect, consumption becomes a part of the production—blurring the distinction between encoder and decoder.

But this complication is not entirely postmodern or solely a function of contemporary electronic media. Theorists talk about new media, communication after the rise of the internet; and new new media, essentially social media in which the users interact with the content. To demonstrate the longevity of the production/consumption quandary, let's consider a case from old old media, before the printing press.

INTERVENTION IN OLD OLD MEDIA

The art of illuminating manuscripts—adding decorative marginalia to scripted texts—dates back to antiquity, but during the Gothic period especially, up until the advent of the printing press, it became an extensive media enterprise. Between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, the trade of copying and illuminating manuscripts underwent significant changes: monks who had labored freely in cloistered cubicles (for remission of sins) were replaced by wage-labor lay copyists who worked together, on commission, in urban commercial scriptoria to meet the increased demand for books (Eisenstein 1983, 10–11). In that social environment, as the sacred monastic tradition gave way to nascent capitalism, a secular vocational subculture emerged amid the increasingly collaborative production of manuscripts. Even as most of the illuminated texts

during that time remained religious in nature—Bibles, Psalters, books of hours (Christian devotional books), decretals (compilations of papal letters on church doctrine)—the sensibilities of scribes drifted toward the profane. The copyists were often unruly consumers of the very ecclesiastical texts they produced, and their disruptive point of view found (often humorous) expression in the illuminations themselves.

The illuminations include a zoological menagerie of horses, cats, hares, foxes, apes, and birds of all sorts as well as eclectic hybrid beasts, grotesque human figures, and depictions of royalty and clergy. One of the most commonly recurring figures is the curious image of a snail battling a knight. The motif is generally construed as a mockery of human cowardice, though scholars have asserted other possible meanings. For example, the nineteenth-century bibliophile Alexander Comte de Bastard, who published the first facsimiles of illuminated manuscripts, interpreted the motif of the snail emerging from its shell as a symbol of resurrection (based on a pair of images he noticed in the margins of a French book of hours—an archer shooting a snail adjacent to a miniature of the raising of Lazarus [1850, 172]). Lilian Randall (1962) argued that snails battling knights were associated with the Lombards, an ethnic group in the early Middle Ages denigrated for their legendary cowardice. Still others have read the pervasive motif as a portrayal of the poor in their struggle against ruthless aristocracy, as a critique of social climbers, or as a symbol of male and female sexuality. The image has been explained also in practical terms: snails, which love to eat damp paper and could devour manuscripts stored in dank cellars, presented something of an occupational nuisance to bookish scribes, who then illustrated in the margins their contempt for the pests (see comments in Biggs 2013). In this view, the scribes perhaps identified with the knights, seeing themselves as heroic defenders of the text, although that would not explain why, in more instances than not, the snails seem to be winning the fight. In any case, whatever its emergent meanings at the moment of inscription, the ubiquitous snail was for the scribes an iconographic emblem of their occupational lore—and, if nothing else, suggestive of the sluggish tedium of their work.

Other motifs more radically destabilized the host texts they decorated. Clergy figure prominently in the such illuminations—sometimes comically partaking in secular pleasures, like the bare-footed nun in the Maastricht Hours (c. 1300–1325) who hitches up her habit to perform a rude country dance to music scratched out by a friar playing a bellows like a fiddle with a distaff as the bow. These images are sometimes more carnal, as the lustful friar groping a woman on the December calendar page in a fifteenth-century book of hours.

Sometimes the religious figures are scatological: for instance, a nude bishop appears in the margins of the famous Gorleston Psalter (c. 1320) chastising a defecating cleric. In the same volume we find the partially erased images of a nun and cowled figure, whose rude sexual gambols we are left to imagine as the offending illustration of their lower halves was long ago expunged (by some individual who, inexplicably, left alone the defecating cleric and any number of other unflinchingly offensive illuminations elsewhere in the codex). Clerics are not the only ones to engage in erotic shenanigans: in the Feischi Psalter (c. 1290) one male peasant is shown spanking a woman with a paddle, apparently to their mutual delight. A book of hours from Paris (c. 1460) includes this devotional passage from Psalms 32: “I have acknowledged my sin to thee, and my injustice I have not concealed. I said I will confess against myself my injustice to the Lord: and thou hast forgiven the wickedness of my sin.” Meanwhile, in the margin are two characters (a man and a woman) holding distaffs with threads that twine down to the corner of the page where two naked male figures are intimately occupied, curiously joined together anus to anus with a spindle. Cavorting characters in the illuminations are not always human, or even from the same species; for example, one fifteenth-century French book of hours depicts a fox copulating with a cock.

Apes became favorite figures of the illuminators. Their imitative nature made them ideal devices by which human behavior might be satirized. Their depiction is routinely scatological, and often they represent and ridicule the holy order. One series of images from a thirteenth-century English Psalter has the appearance of a simian bacchanal: one ape is vomiting as another presents

its posterior for an ape cleric who, with fingers extended, positions himself for what looks like a pontific proctologic exam; one ape aggressively sodomizes another, while still another on a separate page is graphically penetrated by a stork with a prodigious phallic beak. Elsewhere, an ape pays homage to the bishop while being penetrated similarly by a blue jay, and the whole affair is witnessed voyeuristically by another cleric, who leers from above in a historiated letter D. Birds buggering monkeys with their beaks is a recurring image in medieval illuminations. The simians are also commonly penetrated by arrows shot from across the page, sometimes forcefully from a distant crossbow, as in the Pontifical of Guillaume Durand from Avignon (pre-1390).

The Rutland Psalter (c. 1260), a prized holding of the British Library, flourishes the text of Psalm 86:14: “O God, the proud are risen against me, and the assemblies of violent men have sought after my soul; and have not set thee before them.” Underneath is a demon wielding a bow, having sent the arrow up the backside of an albino hybrid figure. The text itself (the tail of the letter P) has been commandeered by the demon in the pointed pederastic attack. This connotes the melding together of visual and lexical forms that is the signature of illuminated manuscripts; these are not just extraneous marginal doodles—as many medieval scholars dismissed them for years. Rather, on the pages of these codices, the illuminations interact in meaningful ways—semiotically and sometimes literally—with the scripted text. There is another ape in the Rutland, a mock knight brandishing a spear and riding an ostrich. His unarmed target waits on the facing page. It’s a bearded man—possibly Christ—bent over in a passively willing posture.

Musical instruments appear regularly, sometimes played in unconventional ways, as with a number of naked figures playing trumpets with their buttocks. Fans of Monty Python’s *Holy Grail* will no doubt remember this motif featured in one of Terry Gilliam’s animated sequences. There’s an equine variation in the Maastricht Hours: a horse plays a trumpet from its anus while prancing about just underneath the text “Gloria Patri” (“Glory to the Father”). A fourteenth-century Flemish book of hours depicts a naked musician who theoretically could play a duet with himself;

he holds two long trumpets, one to his mouth and the other to his buttocks. The mimetic apes that populate the illuminations also on occasion play trumpets from their nether regions.

Though these enigmatic drawn and painted figures are literally pushed to the side of the manuscript, in no way are they just trivial doodles—or only marginal, in the contemporary sense of the word. They add an extra dimension, argues Michael Camille, whose monograph *Image on the Edge* is one of the most important studies of the subject. The illuminations form a pictorial “supplement, that is able to gloss, parody, modernize and problematize the text’s authority while never totally undermining it” (1992, 10). Illuminated medieval manuscripts provide us with an antique case study of what Hall (2000) may have considered a negotiated position, as the scribes essentially vandalized the very texts they had a hand in producing. Their marginal images were “conscious usurpations, perhaps even political statements about diffusing the power of the text” (Camille 1992, 42)—pointing up the fraught codependent relationship between production and reception. This is the arena where my interest lies, especially in the role that folklore plays as consumers of culture—whether medieval or modern—actively construct their own meanings. Overworked and impish medieval scribes amending, reimagining, and editorializing on venerated ecclesiastical texts with their own impious pictographs on manuscript edges is an early model for the sort of performative disruption in folk culture that animates this study of unruly audiences.

Individuals devising profane expressive forms to undermine established institutions is a well-practiced tradition; the implementation of these forms need not be public or face-to-face, although it is implicitly social. We might point to one particular variety of latrinalia that first appeared in the late 1970s (about the same time that Hall was formulating his theories on audience reception). It involves altering the (pretentiously obvious) stenciled instructions on electric hand dryers in public washrooms, which read as follows:

PUSH BUTTON.
RUB HANDS GENTLY UNDER WARM AIR.
MACHINE STOPS AUTOMATICALLY.

With a sharp device, individuals would scratch away specific letters, revealing another set of instructions with an entirely different message:

PUSH BUTT.
RUB GENTLY UNDER ARM.
STOP(S) AUTO.

In 1980, Charles Doyle conducted an informal regional study of this traditional practice, which at the time had been in circulation for no more than just a few years. Observing scores of examples in situ, he discovered that the alterations of the first two lines remained uniform. However, notable variations occurred in the treatment of the final line, which was sometimes left intact, sometimes excised altogether. Those instances in which it was modified to read “Stop auto,” Doyle argues, “[imply] that the carrying out of instructions 1 and 2, ‘Push butt’ and ‘Rub gently under arm,’ will leave someone in such a state of excitement or enervation as to make driving unsafe or impossible” (1981, 50). More generally, this latrinalic custom is an act of defiance against institutional authority; invitingly anti-bureaucratic, it defaces an official directive outright and inscribes another message of erotic nonsense in its place.

Some years after Doyle’s survey, additional textual manipulations began to appear in the stenciled instructions: a few medial characters were excised, rendering the final line as “STOP AUTO AT ALLY.” The underlying logic remains the same: carrying out the previous steps of the instructions would impede one’s ability to operate a motor vehicle properly. But this version goes further yet, as the reader is directed to park the car in an alleyway, a location more privately conducive to illicit butt pushing and arm rubbing. That the word *alley* was misspelled in this iteration apparently did not discourage practitioners who were determined to amend the original form. One model of hand dryer carried these verbose instructions:

SHAKE EXCESS WATER FROM HANDS.
PUSH KNOB. STOPS AUTOMATICALLY.
RUB HANDS LIGHTLY AND RAPIDLY.
TURN LOUVER UPWARD TO DRY FACE.

Which, through excision, were transfigured into an X-rated directive:

SHAKE KNOB. RUB LIGHTLY AND RAPIDLY.
TURN UPWARD TO FACE.

In its various constructions, this one tradition of epigraphy by subtraction, as Doyle calls it, would not last long. When the World Dryer Corporation, the leading global manufacturer of hand dryers, and other similar companies systematically replaced the stenciled instructions on the machines with procedural pictographs, there was no text left to deface. The first image shows a disembodied hand depressing a circular button; the second image (illustrating the essential step of rubbing hands gently under warm air) shows a pair of hands side by side under parallel, wavy red stripes. The industry had effectively co-opted the folk process, and eradicated the subversion, by removing *all* of the letters—a maneuver that, whatever may have been intended, echoed a well-rehearsed hegemonic strategy: regulating, muzzling, and sometimes eliminating altogether the media of disturbance.

Interestingly, the World Dryer website promotes its most popular hand dryer, the World Model A, as “suitable for high traffic facilities needing vandal-resistant features.” It is not clear whether the vandal resistance is a function of the machine’s rugged cast-iron construction, its porcelain enamel finish, or its relative paucity of instructional text that might be subversively refashioned with a sharp object. Agitators with a mind to flout authority and a will to scratch away letters found themselves without a medium, so their ingenuity turned elsewhere.

A new folk practice emerged in the form of captions to the institutional pictographs, invented instructions written to the side or above the images, depending on their horizontal or vertical arrangement: “Press [or push] button” and “Receive bacon.” Once the wavy red lines had been decoded as a stylized depiction of bacon, this graffiti proliferated. Models of the Nova brand of blowers included a third image, a human facial profile in front of the red lines, inviting individuals to air-dry their washed faces, a much less common ablution in public restrooms. Not surprisingly, the folk mind was ready to extend the emendations to a tripartite

grafitto: “Press button,” “Receive bacon,” “Enjoy [or eat] bacon.” Though these examples do not have the sexual energy of their precursors, as playful subversions of a conventional institutionalized message they are no less iconoclastic. In fact, the implied act of dispensing and eating food in a restroom violates a culturally mandated sense of order/separation; as such, it is, in the parlance of Mary Douglas, pollution and therefore memorably *dangerous* (2002, 36–37). My own informal observation during a recent road trip across the Midwest and Upper South shows that this latrinalic practice is still very much alive. When the wavy red lines became further abstracted as simple straight black lines emanating from the air nozzle, the pictograph no longer resembled bacon, and as a result the folk captions mutated once again, to the nonsensically surreal “Applaud the jellyfish.” Sometimes, the verbal or illustrated instructions were followed by a single sardonically practical tip: “After five minutes, wipe hands on pants,” lampooning altogether the general inefficiency of institutional procedures and equipment.

CULTURE JAMMING AS INTERVENTION

Iconoclastic though they are, the sabotaged directives on hand dryers in public restrooms reach only small audiences. When the same principle of message disruption finds expression in mass media, the defiance is bolder and broader—and the stakes are higher. We are constantly assaulted by commercial messages, and it appears that no print or digital medium is exempt from the strategies of publicists. Ads appear before films, and through product placement the films themselves become vehicles of branding; advertising crawlers stream across every available electronic screen; postboxes overflow with direct mail and glossy flyers; corporate images overrun cityscapes—on busses and taxis, billboards, transit shelters, marquees, sports arenas, ad infinitum. Corporate advertising occupies every bit of negotiable public space, and as a result, it persuasively infiltrates cognitive terrain as well as our thought processes.

As advertising tactics have grown increasingly sophisticated and insidious, it is no wonder that recent years have given rise to

subcultures of activists who passionately challenge the corporate rhetoric that dominates our space and minds. Some are artists, some are hackers, some grassroots protestors, but they are allied in their shared effort to disrupt corporate media messages; they employ a common tactic of adbusting, or culture jamming: using ad parodies, media hoaxes, trademark infringement, and sabotage to undermine and reconfigure the commercial saturation of public life.

Naomi Klein notes that the most sophisticated culture jams are not isolated parodies but rather “[ad] interceptions—counter-messages that hack into a corporation’s own method of communication to send a message starkly at odds with the one that was intended” (2000, 281). So, in practices that are enacted as part of a discourse of civic responsibility, jammers, also called “subverters” or “hacktivists,” use corporations’ own well-funded resources against them. This anti-consumerist pranksterism is a kind of rhetorical jujitsu that “resists less through negating and opposing dominant rhetorics than by playfully and provocatively folding existing cultural forms in on themselves.” But the end goal is always the same: to “impede the machinery of marketing” (Harold 2004, 190–91). Furthermore, Kembrew McLeod argues, such pranking and culture jamming operate as “twisted versions of participatory democracy” (2017, 401), an observation particularly resonant with the notion of folk intervention.

The Gap’s popular 1993 print ad campaign “Who Wore Khakis?” featuring images of iconic celebrities such as James Dean, Steve McQueen, Andy Warhol, and Marilyn Monroe, backfired when Australian jammers propagated parody ads closely mimicking the look of the originals, down to the grayscale photography and placement of the Gap logo, showing Adolf Hitler sporting khakis as well. That idea was pressed further when freelance writer Christopher Corbett penned a humor piece for the *Los Angeles Times* titled “So, Just Who Is a Khaki Kind of Guy?” (1993) associating the pants with other famous twentieth-century personalities like Goebbels, Himmler, Mussolini, Baby Doc Duvalier, Idi Amin, and cult leader Jim Jones. Once the Gap executives openly denounced Corbett, the modest spoof escalated into a full-blown media controversy, receiving coverage in the *New York Times*, *Wall*

Street Journal, *Baltimore Sun*, and Associated Press. “Everybody but The Gap got the joke,” Corbett observed (Olesker 1993); and with its advertising campaign effectively jammed, the company came across as humorless, defensive, and—the worst thing possible from a marketing standpoint—*uncool* (see Klein 2000, 68–73).

More recently British Petroleum became the target of numerous culture jams after the disastrous explosion of the Deepwater Horizon offshore drilling rig in April 2010. Eleven people lost their lives in the initial explosion, and the rig, after burning for thirty-six hours, eventually sank, leading to the largest marine oil spill ever. Almost two months passed before the streaming oil plumes on the seafloor could be permanently sealed, and in that time an estimated 5 million barrels of oil had leaked into the Gulf of Mexico. The catastrophic environmental impact of the accident, coupled with the public’s growing awareness that BP had enjoyed enormous profits while cutting corners on safety regulations (Lyll 2010), made the company a prime target for anti-corporate culture jammers. While the oil was still leaking, Greenpeace UK initiated a rebranding contest inviting participants to redesign BP’s “Helios Sunflower” corporate logo—a logo that, when it was unveiled in 2000, had cost more in development than BP had spent on renewable energy in the entire preceding year (Macalister and Cross 2000). Within a few weeks the contest received more than 2,000 entries, many adapting the logo’s signature geometric form and color scheme but with splashes, drips, and pools of added black to signify the oil spill. A number of entries also replaced the attendant corporate slogan “Beyond Petroleum” with mordant phrases like “Black Planet,” “Business Profits,” “Banking Pollution,” “Bitter Poison,” and “Bad Plumbing.”

Some anonymous activists opened Twitter account under the name BP Public Relations (@BPGlobalPR), ostensibly representing the commercial interests of the oil conglomerate. But tweeted comments soon revealed otherwise:

Negative people view the ocean as half empty of oil. We are dedicated to making it half full. Stay positive America!

We are starting a movement to fix the oil leak. Just mail your garbage to New Orleans and we'll take it from there. The bigger the better! (Torben 2015)

Beyond just using the BP's method or style of communication, this media prank is an instance of outright impersonation, a strategy defined by the culture-jamming network the Yes Men as *identity correction*, "impersonating big-time criminals in order to publicly humiliate them, and otherwise giving journalists excuses to cover important issues" (<http://theyesmen.org/>). It makes sense that tactics like these came to be nominally associated with the jamming of radio waves, which similarly involves deliberate disruption of dominant frequencies.

FAN PARTICIPATION

Not all media disturbances come from ardent protesters, however. Contradictory though it seems, some interventions emanate from fan culture. Henry Jenkins has written extensively about the relationship between the producers and consumers of cultural texts, exploring the ways in which fans, particularly, play a participatory role in re-forming popular media. "[Fans'] pleasures often exist on the margins of the original text," Jenkins writes, "and in the face of the producer's own efforts to regulate its meanings" (2013, 24). In that sense, contemporary fandoms might be likened to the medieval copyists who long ago inscribed their own editorials literally into the margins of commissioned ecclesiastical texts. Jenkins used the term *poaching* to describe the manner in which fans construct unauthorized expansions of the media franchises to which they are devoted. The sheer amount of fan labor in that process is astounding: there is fan art in every medium—videos, music, costumes, theatrical reenactments, and fan fiction, to name a few examples. Fandom energizes a participatory subculture that augments and refashions familiar commercial materials; but, according to Jenkins, those media manipulations are not necessarily subversive: "To say that fans promote their own meanings over those of producers is not to suggest that the meanings fans produce are always

oppositional ones . . . Readers are not always resistant; all resistant readings are not necessarily progressive readings; the ‘people’ do not always recognize their conditions of alienation and subordination” (34). That said, the case studies in Jenkins’s seminal work *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* continually point up what appears to be built-in conflicts of interest between producers and consumers of media.

One example, a subgenre of fan fiction, is slash literature, fan-generated writing that amends and recasts the narratives of primary media texts to develop explicitly homoerotic pairings of central characters that may have been nonexistent or only hinted at in the original. The slash (/) itself comes to represent all of the unspoken sexual tension between same-sex characters that is then made transparent in fan fiction. The first slash literature appeared in fanzines in the early 1970s with the illicit coupling of James Kirk and Spock from *Star Trek*, designated as K/S. Since then, many fandoms across different media have developed their own couplings: Wilson and House from *House*, Draco and Harry from the *Harry Potter* series, Frodo and Sam from *Lord of the Rings*, Captain America and Iron Man from *The Avengers*, Holmes and Watson from the BBC’s *Sherlock*, and so on. This queering of mainstream media is a literary response to patriarchal constructions of sexuality, and it may strike outsiders as curious that, although the couples are overwhelmingly male/male, slash fiction is written and consumed almost exclusively by women (see Jenkins 2013, 191–93; Hellekson and Busse 2006, 17). The genre asserts emotional warmth, sensuality, intimacy, and affection over the sexual objectification and self-serving physical pleasure typical of most male-oriented pornography. Slash fiction allows a fluidity of sexual expression in an erotic universe where gender, in essence, becomes irrelevant. Just as it overtly resists heteronormative masculinity, slash fiction also confronts patriarchal constructions of femininity, argues Joanna Russ, imagining “a love that is free from the culture’s whole discourse of gender and sex roles” (1985, 89). Such fan appropriations of “authorized” popular media create new, alternative expressive forms through which disenfranchised consumers undercut the hegemonic powers of production.

* * *

These preliminary illustrations—medieval scribes, anonymous latrinalists, jammers, and dedicated fandoms—form an eclectic assembly of folk groups, to be sure; diverse as they are, they demonstrate a shared principle: consumers of media are not passive, and they produce their own meaningful expressive culture in the *reception* of that media. Economic and ideological dominant culture manipulates the means of communication to reify the status quo—that much should not surprise us. But nested within that media are resources of resistance. Hegemonic messages proliferate, but those messages are differently activated by the disenfranchised, who formulate alternate meanings to—and thereby contravene—the prevailing discourse of a social system that disempowers them. These are the “contradictory lines of force” that foment popular culture. As John Fiske argues, “If the cultural commodities or texts do not contain resources out of which the people can make their own meanings of their social relations and identities, they will be rejected and fail in the marketplace. They will not be made popular” (1989, 2). This presses to the central focus of this book—the fluid interplay between production and audience reception, between forces of cultural domination and cultural resistance. Most important, this is an exploration of the ways in which folklore operates as a mechanism in that interplay. I will discuss these processes in terms of remediation, “the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms” (Bolter and Grusin 1999, 173), and intervention—a conceptual framework for the creation of new expressive forms as social action, and a means of disrupting dominant modes of media discourse. It is within this larger theoretical universe that I situate *Unruly Audience*. The case studies explored here demonstrate that folklore is instrumental in the agentic, often disruptive, audience reception of popular music, film, tourism, television, advertising, and multi-mediated jokes.

Popular music lends itself to parody. In a sense, its popularity facilitates its undoing by encouraging manipulation of the original form. No authored popular melody demonstrates this more clearly than “The Colonel Bogey March,” the famous military march composed in 1914 by Lieutenant F. J. Ricketts, British bandmaster and

director of music for the Royal Marines at Plymouth. The melody, sometimes identified (anachronistically) simply as the whistling tune from *Bridge on the River Kwai*, is a staple in Western military and popular culture—and a perfect case study of the cross-pollination between popular media production and folk reception. Although the march was written as a melody alone, without words, it quickly became the conduit for numerous comical folk lyrics, partly because the tune was so infectious. None of the adaptations has been more tenacious—or memorable—than “Hitler Has Only Got One Ball,” which emerged initially among British troops in 1939 and remains in oral tradition even today. The song sits comfortably with a wide range of other satirical treatments of Nazism in folklore and popular culture, like the 1943 propagandistic song “In Der Fuehrer’s Face” recorded by Spike Jones; Disney’s animated cartoon by the same title; Mel Brooks’s musical number “Springtime for Hitler” from his film (and later Broadway play) *The Producers*; recent parodic internet videos of a single clip from the German film *Downfall* (2004) that have propagated across YouTube in more than 100 versions; and Godwin’s Law, a playfully conceived media theory regarding the proliferation of Hitler/Nazi comparisons in the blogosphere (related to the logic fallacy *reductio ad Hitlerum*). In chapter 1, I trace the provenance of “The Colonel Bogey March” from its martial, patriotic beginnings to its amplification as a satirical wartime folk song in World War I, World War II, and beyond (“Hitler Has Only Got One Ball” and other military and civilian adaptations). I look at its diffusion among British Tommies and American GIs, and its continued circulation in children’s folklore on both sides of the Atlantic.

A number of scholars have examined the far-reaching influences of Disney, Inc., interrogating the company’s politics (Dorfman and Mattelart 1984; Shortleeve 2004), its labor practices (Grover 1991; Kuenz 1995; Klugman 1995), its consumerist and capitalistic inclinations (Schickel 1997), and its role as an arbiter of American values (Watts 1997). Moreover, several have critiqued the “Disneyfication” of traditional fairy tales—notably Jack Zipes (1995; 1997, 89–110), Waller Hastings (1993), Naomi Wood (1996), and Kay Stone (1975). In chapter 2, I build on that line of criticism

to consider the dialogic relationship between the Grimms' version of "Snow White," Disney's film adaptation, and contemporary jokes that target the film and its characters. Disney is among the world's most recognizable corporations, and everything we associate with the brand—the far reaches of its media and entertainment empire—is built upon the initial achievements of *Snow White* (1937), the first full-length animated feature in the motion picture industry. It was Walt Disney's pet project and he personally supervised every facet of the production. As we know, the film was enormously successful: the plot, characters, and songs became indelibly etched into American popular consciousness. Along with that, however, a corpus of salacious Snow White jokes surfaced in folk culture, far afield from the tightly managed picture of wholesomeness presented in the film. The jokes invite us to look at Disney's emblematic film through a different lens altogether. Of the case studies in the present volume, this one demonstrates perhaps the greatest divergence between the prescribed dominant message of a media producer and the disorderly reception of that media.

Humor is not the only tool that audiences employ to undermine media texts, however. The charged social negotiations of tourism comprise another sort of mediated performance that can be appropriated, refashioned, or sabotaged in audience reception. North Americans alone spend well over \$100 billion a year as international tourists, much of that money flowing into the local economies of the places they visit. Many sites are crucially dependent on tourism for their economic vitality, but the exchange is not unidirectional; it is, rather, transactional, as all parties (tourists, foreign investors, local entrepreneurs, and workers) receive something in the process. As a result, the invention and management of exotic interest in local custom has become commercial strategy. The transaction is especially fraught when viewed through a postcolonial theoretical lens, as the various participants bring divergent national, economic, and ethnic sensibilities to the touristic stage. In chapter 3, I examine the tourist site of Rose Hall, a nineteenth-century sugar plantation in Jamaica that is supposedly haunted by its onetime proprietress, Annie Palmer. Hailing from

England, Annie is said to have been a diminutive white landowner who exploited and terrorized her slaves at every turn, eventually earning the moniker “the White Witch of Jamaica.” The legends of Rose Hall have been soundly, publicly debunked on several fronts, but there remains staunch local attachment to narrated details of an alleged slave uprising there, coinciding temporally with the well-documented Jamaican Slave Revolt of 1831. The regional touristic narrative about Rose Hall, touted as “the most haunted house in the Western hemisphere,” has been symbolically transformed into a metaphor for Jamaica’s historical struggle for emancipation—and as such, it holds tremendous symbolic power. Literary versions of the legend of Rose Hall in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are themselves influenced by an enduring local oral tradition, and manifestations of the legend in popular media (music, television, film, and tourism) have become poignantly and problematically entangled with Jamaica’s troubled history of slavery. This particular nexus of oral tradition, literature, popular culture, tourism, and national identity creates a distinctively rich subject for a study of cultural production and folk reception.

The popular NBC series *The Office*, which concluded in 2013 after nine seasons, featured the inept and bombastic office manager Michael Scott, played by Steve Carrell. One marker of Scott’s obnoxious character was the frequent injection of inappropriate humor into the workplace, the most notable of which was the recurrent suggestively lewd wisecrack “That’s what she said” as a riposte to some innocent comment uttered by a coworker. Although this rhetorical device was launched into wide popularity from repeated use on the television show, it was in play in folklore long before *The Office* first aired. In fact, it has roots in an earlier humorous trope from Edwardian England, “As the actress said to the bishop,” which itself is linked to an even older proverbial expressive form, the Wellerism. By way of these related expressions, chapter 4 examines the form and social use of “That’s what she said” jokes in folk culture and their recent leap as a meme into popular media. This case exemplifies the fluidity between folk and popular culture, and that gray intermediate zone where media production and audience reception commingle in what Jenkins calls “convergence culture,”

the cultural space where “old and new media collide” (2006). It demonstrates the bilateral pathways of cultural production, appropriation, and reintegration that characterize the “folkloresque,” that is, “popular culture’s own (emic) perception and performance of folklore . . . [derived] directly from existing folkloric traditions,” which, in some instances, “inspires a feedback loop in which the folkloresque version of the item is (re)incorporated into the folk cultural milieu that it references” (Foster and Tolbert 2016, 5).

Children are exposed to thousands of brands every day (Lindstrom and Seybold 2004, 6). In the face of that assault, it is not surprising that their folklore demonstrates significant brand awareness, and that they have developed elaborate strategies to deflect the endless barrage of commercial advertising. While a few folklorists have commented on the numerous name brands that appear in children’s lore (e.g., Tucker 2008, Bronner 1988, Sherman and Weisskopf 1995), their observations tend to be primarily tabulations; there has been little substantive analysis of the dynamic process by which children’s folklore disarms and undermines dominant corporate messages. Chapter 5 addresses that gap in the discourse. Children’s folklore draws a wealth of material from commercial culture, and because children are not just spectators or passive consumers, on the playground they frequently adapt and satirize popular advertisements. I examine salient examples, including childhood parodies of ads for Pepsi, KFC, and McDonald’s. A few remarkable parodies linger in children’s verbal play *long after* the original targeted advertising blitz has faded from popular/commercial consciousness. With these and other relevant examples, this chapter draws a theoretical framework regarding the ways in which children perform subversion in their lore and attempt to deflate the power of corporate branding.

Several of these chapters demonstrate that humor is a commonly employed instrument by which audiences disrupt and repurpose the media messages of dominant culture: soldiers invent incongruous, bawdy lyrics for a majestic martial tune and snicker as it circulates irreverently through the ranks; the moviegoing public reimagines cloyingly adorable Disney characters as a rowdy cast of lewd degenerates; children parody ads from

the endless wave of commercial material aimed at them; and fans respond to a familiar TV joke with countless comical remediations in other digital forms. Even the sort of acerbic social critiques and guerrilla tactics of culture jamming mentioned above are realized in terms of dark humor called “laughtivism” (Delaure 2017, 419). Humor is the apparatus of all these folk interventions, whose *raison d’être* is upending established social order. But curiously, in a postmodern turn, certain self-referential forms of humor effectively upend themselves. That is, metajokes, the subject of chapter 6, operate both as vehicle and object of their own intervention. Variations on the practice of self-referential and self-aware joking include parodies of joke templates (formulaic joke patterns manipulated and reconditioned in new jokes), meta-humor (jokes about jokes), joke metonyms (abbreviated allusions to familiar jokes), and anti-jokes (non-jokes performed as jokes). Metajokes create generic ambiguity. Like the ancient Ouroboros, the curled serpent eating its own tail, these self-referential jokes effectively incorporate themselves as they playfully recalibrate our expectations about what jokes do.

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Corporations and institutions that own and manipulate the means of communication expend untold resources to maintain power and shape cultural meaning, generally in the interest of increasing profits. That is not to say, however, that the relationship between producers of media and consumers is a one-way street—or that the marketplace holds total control of meaning. Active audiences have developed strategies of participation (engaging, sharing, promoting, adding content, retooling [see Gjoni 2017, 64]) and resistance (critiquing, parodying, culture jamming, subverting) to assert themselves in the face of hegemonic mediated discourse. They mobilize corporate-driven popular media for their own purposes and engage with it in varying degrees—from unorthodox participation to unruly disruption—as a form of social activism. And folklore, as we’ll see, is one important appliance in that linkage between controlled media production and divergent audience reception, which can be subversive, participatory, or a measure of both.