HARDSCRABBLE ACADEMIES
Toward a Social Economy of Vernacular Invention

Dorothy Noyes

Current intergovernmental initiatives to protect traditional culture rely on a problematic conception of "community" as its creator/owner. Accounts of distributed invention in open-source software suggest that the network model provides a better description of folk process. But the celebrated "flexible network" of contemporary collective creativity is historically specific. Using the example of festival in Catalonia, I show that those forms we call traditional emerge from *in*flexible networks shaped by economic scarcity, political constraint, and an abundance of time: "hardscrabble academies." As traditions move into liberal capitalist settings, they undergo certain characteristic transformations, experiencing contradictory pressures towards dispersal and proliferation, on the one hand, and codification under particular regimes of circulation, on the other.

Keywords: distributed invention, traditional creativity, network, heritage, festival

An implicit history of agency is inscribed in the current struggles over intellectual property regimes. In the beginning was the traditional community, the dancing throng from whose movements culture emerged spontaneously, without intention or forethought. (The remaining enclaves of this past should be preserved for science or tourism and out of humanitarian concerns.) Next came the modern individual, who in his self-authoring was careful also to create the institutions that would perpetuate him. Today we have the network of distributed innovation that has made these institutions porous and allowed knowledge to flow, recombine and renew itself.

The present project arises from discomfort with the first term in this triad, community, as it is invoked in current policy discourse. With often the best of intentions and in response to the indisput-able threats posed by globalization to local peoples and cultures, current intergovernmental initiatives to protect local tradition are resurrecting essentialist conceptions of community. Operationalized as policy, these foster increased commercialization, corruption, and control at the local level. I have argued elsewhere that we will not correct the outdated paradigm of the modern individual by attaching to it the equally antiquated epicycle of the traditional community (Noyes 2006). Thus, of our recognized actors, we are left with the supposedly emergent agent of social creativity, the network.

It is no surprise that, attached to that frumpiest of disciplines, folklore, I should try to crash the network party. Moreover, the network is rapidly becoming naturalized as the root metaphor of social thought, as the organism was in modernity, but fifty years hence the conceptual shortcomings of the net-

work will no doubt be as visible as those of the author are today. When I proceed to assert, therefore, that it is networks all the way down, what I will more defensibly mean is that the metaphor of the network reveals just as much about residual as it does about emergent cultures.[1]

To be sure, there are meaningful differences among networks, and we should beware the euphoria that automatically modifies the noun "network" with the adjective "flexible." All networks are not created and reconfigured at will. The mission may decide the coalition in corporate partnerships and recent American foreign policy. Historically, however, most complex cultural invention has been generated in long-term patterns of interaction among a limited number of stable and distinct positions: that is, in inflexible networks. More broadly, we may see a continuum between traditional and emerging forms of vernacular invention based on differing constraints. While traditional invention is shaped by a scarcity of everything but time, emerging invention draws on an abundance of everything but leisure.

A Note on Terminology and Sociocultural Differentiation

Folklorists address a disciplinary object so unstable that it can only be captured in scare quotes. The internal Other of modernity, the "folk" is more slippery and even more stigmatized than modernity's remote contrary, the "primitive" of tribal societies. Indeed, the primitive, reframed as the indigenous, has made some progress in the policy world. Current attempts to broaden the conversation over intellectual property regimes, both those stemming from the property side and those from the Creative Commons wing, along with scholarly works such as Ghosh's *Code* (2005), have made a point of engaging indigenous communities and examining indigenous or at least developing-country creativity, even recognizing commonalities as well as a common cause. The activism of indigenous communities and of southern countries and their presence in policy forums has made this alliance both possible and necessary.

But when hands are joined or debates opened across this divide, it remains too easy both to polarize and to universalize. The historicity of the indigenous and the untidiness of the modern both tend to disappear from view. We need to recognize multiplicity within the West itself, a diversity of practice that cannot simply be mapped onto the presence of ethnic minorities in a "mainstream" modern population.

Another line of commentators is attracted to the concept of "folk" in a more populist vein, recognizing the vernacular creativity that today relies on digital media but has always used the means to hand (Benkler 2006: 15; Charles Leadbeater, personal communication). Digital communication, in this view, fosters a resurrection or reflorescence as well as a broadening and empowerment of non-elite culture. Analytically and politically, this recognition of ongoing vernacular creation under the modern authorial regime shows progress. But here too specificity is called for: for example, the "pro-am" culture described by Leadbeater and Miller seems largely a vernacular appropriation of modern professionalism, different from traditional creativity (2004).

So to make distinctions that seem necessary to explore even if ultimately we explode them, I will rely on problematic familiar terms, accepting the presentist and Eurocentric assumptions behind them because the global conversation is taking place within the conditions created by those assumptions: we speak from inside the special case. "Vernacular" will refer to all invention arising through informal interpersonal contact rather than codified procedures and institutionalized incentives. "Traditional" denotes the family resemblances of premodern, indigenous, and "folk" practices, all drawing on scarce resources in non-liberal regimes. Note that the catchall character of this category, typically presented as the residuum of the modern, points rather to the status of Western modernity as special case. The vast majority of human invention, including language, is traditional invention. "Folk" will refer to the visible persistence of traditional practice within modernity and its provinces and colonies. "Emerging" will serve as a placeholder for the kinds of con-

temporary vernacular invention arising among fully incorporated actors in contemporary capitalist societies. Of course there is no gulf fixed: traditional creativity does not come to a halt when modern regimes impose themselves, but adapts to a changing social ecology and finds new forms and niches.

This is an essay in the etymological sense, and economy will require me to make appalling generalizations while scanting on footnotes. Please read every statement as a tentative ideal-typing thickly hedged with the relevant qualifications. Note too that I try to place some nuance into what might be seen as a dangerous reinscription of the great divide between tradition and modernity:

1. The difference is of constraints, not mentality.
2. The traditional is made, not begotten, emerging not from nature and spontaneous feeling but from social tension.
3. Traditional forms not only persist but may thrive under the transition to abundance. But gradually they come to signify differently.

From Open Source to Vernacular Invention

The apostles of open source have been eager to account for the improbable success of their model. As Steven Weber explains, by all the conventional wisdom of both economics and organizational theory, open source software should not exist. Classical economic theory argues that the incentive to innovation comes from property rights, but open source gives you only the right to distribute, not to retain. Having free access and no property rights, individuals should not wait as "free riders" for others to solve problems in the code; instead, they voluntarily surrender their time. The unity of the code exists without an organized firm directing it. Open-source products ought to "fork" into multiple local versions adapted to particular needs, yet these local adaptations on the periphery are regularly returned to the center and incorporated into the source code. Moreover, the extraordinary complexity of the code in projects such as Linux should not be possible, much less stable: according to Brooks' Law of Computing, the more programmers, the greater the possibility of mistakes. Yet open source not only depends on

thousands of volunteers, it also responds quickly to technical problems (Weber 2004).

Tracing the open-source process from its beginnings at MIT, Berkeley, and Bell Labs to the current sophisticated, stable products steadily expanding their market share, such as the Apache web server and the Linux operating system, Weber sets out to explain the puzzle of this success, and describes an ideal-typical process that, I argue, is applicable to vernacular invention in general. Open source depends on parallel distributed innovation, that is, the simultaneous reworking of the central "product" by multiple actors in an open social network under conditions of publicity. Use-rights and, in various conceptions, ownership are determined by the degree and especially the quality of participation. Engagement and innovation are stimulated in some cases by immediate need, but as intensely by the desire for peer recognition and the intrinsic pleasure of playing with an interesting problem. Ritualized competition and a technical vocabulary of connoisseurship typically attest to the importance of the latter two motivations. Reciprocal observation, imitation, and criticism maintain the unity of the product; more institutional mechanisms are developed as the product grows in complexity and, more importantly, as its exchange-value in economic or political markets becomes apparent.

We must not fetishize the technology. The Internet did not create social networking but facilitated it. Social network theory itself of course antedates the Internet and, interestingly, empirical studies find that while networks tend to be sparse and frail among the upwardly mobile middle classes – the classic individual/ist actors of modern societies, who thus find networks hard to see – they are as dense and active among traditional working classes as among elites, and mobilized with just as much skill in the search for employment and other resources (Milroy 1987; Hannerz 1992). Traditional art, as I will argue, is also a product of network associations. In short, there is a strong empirical case that the "electronic vernacular" is not different in kind but directly modeled on and derived from face-to-face vernacular habits (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1996). The

virtues of the Net celebrated by hackers – its openness to participation, its ability to pool and recombine ideas – are features of vernacular communication generally.

Hackers themselves claim various lineages. And while the evocation of isolated premodern community on the part of Richard Stallman is suspect (Kelty 2008: 109), Pekka Himanen's account of the "Hacker Ethic" is worth considering as metaphor if not as history (Himanen et al. 2001). Whereas the Protestant ethic descends ultimately from the Benedictine monastery with its emphasis on discipline, says Himanen, the hacker ethic has a still more impressive lineage in the Platonic academy, a highly evolved form of play. The monastery achieved its results through closed walls, obedience to authority, work for its own sake, and the rational organization of time. The academy and its revival in Renaissance science celebrated rather the process of free inquiry in a community open to merit. Similarly, the hacker is not motivated by profit but by passion and "a desire to create something that one's peer community would find valuable": he or she feels a further obligation to share information and expertise for the collective benefit (ibid.: ix). Linus Torvalds, the Homer of the great tradition that is the operating system Linux, spells out the hierarchy of hacker motivations more precisely in what he calls "Linus's Law": survival, social life, and entertainment (ibid.: prologue).[2] Hackers have gone well beyond the need to make a living, he argues; they are out to achieve reputation in a group of peers and to play at "something intrinsically interesting and challenging." Hacking becomes basic to social and personal identity in a framework that counters the Weberian idea of the calling.

The Hardscrabble Academy

All very well, you might say, for wealthy contemporary societies. Nurtured in the narratives of liberal individualism as softened by late modern consumerism, we can seek self-fulfillment in self-chosen activities – and that self was of course conceived in the enclaves of philosophers freed from need. But the current liberal framing of the hacker ethic, especial-

ly in the United States (Coleman & Golub 2008), obscures a family resemblance to a disposition formed under other conditions and described by a different rhetoric. Both the ethos of competitive collaboration and the process of distributed invention are characteristic of folklore too.

I say "ethos" rather than "ethic," shifting us from a normative to a descriptive framework. The liberal moment encourages us to etherealize all practice as guided by free moral choice, but the original meaning of *ethos* as custom or habit reminds us that practice takes shape inside a social economy. Reiterated over time, situated practice fosters a disposition that may persist in changed circumstances.

When old men in the Catalan town where I did fieldwork in the early 1990s referred to their time at "the university," they meant one of Franco's prison camps. Northern Irish Catholics used the same euphemism for a stay in the Maze H-Block in the 1970s (Ray Cashman, personal communication). It is not an unmotivated metaphor: prisons are well-known as sites of political and religious education. Powerful and startling cultural invention takes place there as well, from the placatory message of Golden Venture paper folding to the horrific declaration of the Dirty Protest (Westerman 1996; Feldman 1991).

The prison has some important commonalities with the academy. It is a confined space removed from the world of purposeful activity. On the other hand, it is a space of scarcity rather than affluence and the denizens within its walls are not self-chosen kindred spirits but, from the prisoner's perspective, a motley aggregation imposed from above.

Folk idiom in Catalonia acknowledges a second vernacular academy. In 1989, a man explained the intensity and distinctiveness of his local culture to me: "You come from the University of Pennsylvania; we come from the University of Pedret." As the name indicates, Pedret is a rocky area by a riverside with a sixth-century church in the depopulated hinterland of a provincial town in the foothills of the Pyrenees. My friend thus claimed a time depth and rootedness to which my own knowledge could not pretend, but his phrase can also be translated as the "school of hard knocks" – or rocks.

The traditional community is not unlike like the prison. Folklorists have long been aware that the "folk society" in which epics and ballads are born is not a homogeneous isolate but a borderland (Paredes 1958). The creole turn in 1970s linguistics and folklore named the plantation as a prototypical site of cultural creation, occasioned by the need to construct a sustainable modus operandi out of "fragmented, violent, and disjunct pasts" (Mintz 1996: 302, quoted in Abrahams 2005: 223). Scholars of traditional culture know that the comfort zone and the combat zone are intimately intermingled (Abrahams ibid.: 129–148; Herzfeld 1997). The prison shows us in microcosm what we can see more broadly in borderlands, settler communities, and "traditional communities" *tout court*, that is, locally-based networks in precapitalist societies or – as interests me here – on modernity's periphery. Three conditions shape traditional invention: scarcity, inflexibility, and enforced inactivity.

Material, human, and cultural resources are limited. One cannot engineer schemes ex nihilo and then seek out the ideal means of realization. These are places of bricolage, adapting the "finite and heterogeneous set" of what there is as new needs arise (Lévi-Strauss 1962: 17). Tradition is an endless recycling: we may remember that *invenire* means "to find." Thus traditional culture, made from the objects and vocabulary and people at hand, is moored by indexical links to the lifeworld. In addition, itself reworked as necessary, it acquires thick layers of historical resonance.

Yochai Benkler, thinking in the present, alludes to the "enhanced autonomy" of network structures (2006: 8). But autonomy is just what traditional networks lack: they are inflexible networks or, as the older network theory identifies them, dense multiplex networks with a limited, stable number of important "weak ties" to larger social worlds (Granovetter 1973). As anyone who has lived in a small community knows, relations are experienced less as love and homogeneity than as a tissue of inherited obligations and positions, forced juxtapositions, close mutual observation and suspicion. But actors share an economic and political predicament

that makes cooperation necessary. Conflict is thus endemic rather than acute. Difference coexists over the long term and no single party is strong enough to exercise hegemony over all the others or to pull out and act alone. Actors must create shared social forms that can accommodate diverse interests and meanings. Forms are also drawn in and out of group life through "weak ties" – patrons, officials, clerics, travelling peddlers and laborers – and regular occasions of contact: labor migration, military service, pilgrimage, annual markets, festivals, commercial and marital transactions, and so on. Actors use these opportunities as fully as possible to seize new materials and ideas. Traditional communities are confined but not isolated, stable but not homogeneous, cautious but not closeminded. The privileged expressive genres, notably festival and epic but also fairy tale, ballad, and many others, not only become conduits of social relations, but typically thematize the tensions within them, coding real present difference as historical or fantastic conflict.

Finally, traditional invention emerges from the forced inactivity of precapitalist and peripheral social networks. At the simplest level, labor not subject to capitalist work-time is characterized by periods of intense work in alternation with periods of inactivity, including the dark winter evenings and the festivals interspersed with work days. There is time to make culture, as well as the need to fill silence in a world without mass media. As importantly, the polities that control these societies do not favor individual goal-directed behavior: when not actively repressed, it is not encouraged or rewarded with any expectation of mobility. Traditional networks are places of boredom and frustration, in which the full range of human appetites and aspirations is not served. Opportunities for individual distinction and recognition are limited. Instead of conceiving unrealizable life projects, therefore, many talented actors turn their passion and intelligence to the available spheres of activity. Their personal identity becomes bound to the collective genres. The often obsessive formal elaboration of traditional art reveals both the energies and the claustrophobia of its creators.

Torvalds' three motives thus exist in traditional

invention, simultaneously rather than in succession. Scarcity breeds the survival motive; inflexible networks frame social life and the competitive search for reputation; boredom and frustration drive actors to passionate playfulness. The result is cultural invention, both complex and stable, layered with meanings, multifunctional, and sacramentally resonant with everyday life. Though the conditions of these hardscrabble academies tend not to favor individual fulfillment, they work to the benefit of the cultural forms within them. The encyclopedic character of epics and festivals is frequently noted and justly so, for these are forms that draw on everything the network controls and the diverse talents and needs of everyone in it.

Festival as Distributed Invention

The distinctiveness of local calendar customs in Catholic Europe is often the narcissism of minor differences. Their typical performances – contests, dances, costumes, music, fireworks, aggressive masks and giant mobile effigies of monsters and heroes – are imitated back and forth between rival communities striving to outdo one another. Not unique to their place, as defensive localism would have it, festivals also betoken no unified spirit within the community. Rather, much festival emerges as a "shouting match at the border," confronting not just different ethnic and religious groups but classes, occupations, generations, political factions, and genders (Abrahams 1981). These differences are mapped out both symbolically and in participation across the range of distinct performances in a given event, often in explicit contest. The opposition of angels and devils or Moors and Christians in performance results not in the expulsion of an Other, but in the grudging accommodation of irreducible internal difference. Longstanding civic festivals have taken the imprint of so many self-assertions over time that eventually every new member of the community can find a point of entry there (Noyes 2003a).

All this contestation is paradoxically recognized by townspeople as the currency of local solidarity. The fire that burns is also the fire that warms: conflict is often a valued sign of life in provincial communities. Constrained by publicity and social control, conflict is the fuel of social creativity. Many popular festivals were born in the rivalries of urban artisans (England, central Italy) or in plebeian responses to the exclusionary representations of Church and State (Catalonia). If they endure, they win the uneasy backing of local governments as means of placating the populace and bringing outsiders into the local markets. Over time, these improvisations and isolated elements are brought by the centripetal force of public attention into an ensemble that takes on increasingly autonomous and complete shape over time, incorporating new accretions as they achieve popular acceptance into an emergent pattern of balances and contrapositions that comes to represent the delicate compromises between the multiple elements of civic life. To be sure, this rhythm of creation is not uniform; rather, innovation tends to come in bursts, often in periods of recovery from civil war or other crisis when public attention is directed to the wider world and its challenges (cf. Paredes 1958: 245–246). After such periods, the pressures of reproducing a complex performance over time – in both the consciousness of actors and the coordination of their bodies – smooth out structure. Syncretism leads to synthesis: in their annually recurring coperformance, forms and signs from different economic and political dispensations or different social fragments begin to echo, contrast, polarize, interresonate. Under favorable conditions (i.e. scarcity, constraint, and frustration) they will gradually knit together into a structure as multivoiced and encyclopedic as the Iliad, if obviously of a different order of precision to Linux.

Within the multigeneric ensemble of European festival, one familiar form is the group that goes from house to house or town to town performing for money and, at the same time, claiming to represent the vox populi: mummers' teams, carolers and serenaders, bands of charivari or "rough music," and in modern transformations, trick-or-treaters and various kinds of vigilantes (Noyes 1995). If space permits, these groups often avoid direct competition with one another by claiming distinct territories, but in areas of dense population this is not possible, and

their rivalry can provoke a spiral of innovation in a relatively short period, more easily traced than the long trajectories of civic festival.

Such spirals took shape in both the early and the recent history of a form of folk athleticism distinctive to southeastern Catalonia: the *castell*, a "castle" constructed out of interlocking human bodies. *Colles* (gangs) of castellers compete at local saint's day festivals and sometimes in specially organized contests to see which group can erect the most complex construction of multiple "stories" of bodies with interlocked arms supporting the feet of the bodies who stand on their shoulders in the next layer. This "trunk," varying in difficulty according to the number of bodies per story and the number of stories, is topped by a "bouquet" of children aged 5–10: a layer of two topped by a crouching "lifter" who helps to stabilize the *anxaneta*, the topmost child, as she raises herself on the shoulders of the two and waves a hand to the crowd to show the completion of the castle.

The genre evolved from the final figure of a dance that was popular at the festivals of the region in the second half of the eighteenth century. With formal elaborations that presumably emerged in the competitive displays typical of young men at events that assembled potential marriage partners, the "castles" gradually split off from the dance. Soon they were a popular audience attraction, and towns contracted groups of dancers to perform them, as did some rich landowners. By the early nineteenth century, there was a summer festival circuit in the region traversed by gangs of *castellers* made up of young men drawn from the lowest class of landless unskilled workers. Some of these bands had a prior identity as bands of combatants from the irregular militias circulating in Spain during the War of Independence and the Carlist Wars. They earned a scanty living from festival to festival, but it was materially no worse and socially far freer than what awaited them as day laborers at home (Suárez-Baldrís 1998: 51–53).

In the history of the *castellers* we may see the ascending levels of motivation in our model (without excluding the presence of the "higher" layers in the earlier stages): survival, reputation, play. If the form

began as sexual display and soon became a means of economic gain, differential identities and the contest for prestige took their place early. In 1805 the city of Valls, historical seat of the *castells*, already had two groups, the Gang of the Peasants and the Gang of the Artisans (ibid.: 50). Through the next two centuries, different groups in Valls are documented, usually identified by the leader's nickname or as the New Gang and the Old Gang of the moment (ibid.: 82). At the same time, teams in other towns emerged, and eventually the label "Boys of Valls" gave way to the generic term *castellers*. Intercommunal competition – which in the context of the Carlist Wars that divided country and city often had more serious political resonances – played as important a role as intra-communal.

Despite the communal identities of the gangs, performers were drawn from the available pool of talent without regard to origins: in the nineteenth century many gang members were picked up along the road from other towns (ibid.: 74). Competition meant more than one gang outshouting the other. It prompted the improvisation of increasingly difficult forms: "pillars" stacking single individuals, simple castles of ever-increasing height and variable lower structure, and complex castles depending on multiple trunks joined at the top, all lovingly chronicled by the journalists and painters of the period. Because the castles demand both a large "pinecone" of supporters to bolster the base with interlocked arms, and lightweight adolescents and children for the top stories, they engaged most of the male population in certain towns. The technical problems were thus widely understood and each performance provided an endless topic of critical discussion in taverns, much like football matches in the twentieth century.

After the end of the Franco regime in 1975, *castells* experienced a powerful revival. Like other festival forms, they were energized by political liberation, Catalan cultural revival, new media, and generous subventions; they also received a special ideological boost as an alternative emblematic national performance to the *sardana* that had patiently danced out the Franco regime. Where the *sardana* went round in closed circles, the *castells* raised them-

selves upward, an apparent vernacular correlative to the national vocation for architecture celebrated in Gaudí, Sert, and Bofill and also to the entrepreneurial, competitive, open spirit claimed by Catalan business. The *castells* were at any rate far more interesting to the young than was the dowdy *sardana*. Old *colles* found eager new members among women and immigrants; new *colles* were formed across a geographic area far exceeding the original range of the practice.

In the late 1990s, the four or five *colles* recognized as most skilled set themselves the challenge of "recovering" certain castles reputed to have been built in the 1880s: the "clean 4 of 9," a nine-story edifice with four persons at each level and no pinecone, and the "3 of 10 with sheath and bracelets," a ten-story construction of three-person layers with collars of supporting bodies on the first three stories, decreasing in number with each elevation. These efforts, passionately chronicled by local journalists, confirm the pattern of competitive distributed invention.[3] Typically one prominent *colla* sets a goal at the beginning of the summer, proposing to essay a given castle at one of the major festivals in October. This intention becomes public through rumor and sometimes with an official announcement. Any gang that wants to be recognized as a rival is obliged to take up the gauntlet and "work" the same castle.

Guided by a "gang leader" and a "technical team" of the oldest and most experienced *castellers*, a gang's effort also entails the experimentation of each individual member: the "galleys" of burly men on the bottom, who have to learn to respond to shifting loads with constant support; the lower layers, who have to angle their bodies and test their circumference so as not to overcompress the upper stories or, alternatively, allow the castle to "open" from above; the middle stories, whose task is to control their breathing and muscle tension so as to absorb motion from above and instability below; and the "bouquet" of children on top, who need to balance themselves and master their fear while climbing as fast as possible so that the accumulated weight does not overwhelm the lower stories. Each of these layers is subdivided into multiple roles. Crucial too are

the *grallers*, the musicians whose strident rhythms regulate the collective motion. The testimonies of *castellers* show much discursive consensus on political matters affecting the *colla*, but a wide variety of technical preoccupations depending on position. The trial and error of all of these participants – in a 3 of 10 summing 700 or 800 performers – goes to accomplish this complex whole. One knee buckling, even one breath out of place, sends the whole thing down. But it is no one-voiced communal creation: some actors are more central than others, each actor has different technical challenges, and the line between supporters and onlookers is indeterminable in the press of the crowd.

The castles are essayed in the most public of surroundings, the main square during a festival. This publicity has long been enhanced by journalism and more recently by television, the Web, and cell-phone cameras. A festival typically has one or more guest *colles* competing with the local gang, with citizens of both towns and a larger community of aficionados following closely. In 1998 and 1999 this competition culminated in the conquest of the two legendary "total castles." The Minyons de Terrassa, founded in 1979, erected the clean 4 of 9 for the first time in the twentieth century in October 1998. In the following month another new gang, the Castellers de Vilafranca, pulled off the 3 of 10 with sheath and bracelets, and a week later the Minyons, who had announced the 3 of 10 as their own project that summer, topped the *vilafranquins* by not only raising but "unloading" it: bringing it down one story at a time without collapse.

These achievements spurred the historic *colles* to reclaim their dignity, and in the early season of 1999 the Colla Vella Xiquets de Valls announced its intention to erect the 4 of 9. In the end, old and new competed in real time. Between noon and 2:00 P.M. on Saturday, October 24th, the two *colles* of Valls, at home at their festival of St. Ursula, faced off the Minyons de Terrassa, performing outside the traditional region at the festival of St. Narcissus in Girona. At noon the Minyons opened by raising the season's first "supercathedral," a two-trunk 5 of 9. The Valls competition began an hour later, with the opening

Colla Joves essaying the clean 4 of 9. They got as far as the lifter, who lost her nerve and came down. Simultaneously in Girona, the Minyons launched their own 4 of 9, but it came undone from the bottom just as the lifter was getting into position. A few minutes later, the Joves in Valls returned to the 4 of 9, and despite a shaky start and a substitute lifter, erected the castle. The Colla Vella, which in the end had not felt ready to attack the 4 of 9 by October, applauded its rival team the Joves fervently, "half for the admiration that this castle awakes in any *casteller*, half for Valls patriotism" (Brotons & Beumala 2000: 58). Performers in Girona and Valls were aware of one another, minute by minute, through live television coverage in the bars off the square. We may surely think of this as parallel distributed processing.

To be sure, this open competition meets with resistance from vested interests. The acclaim for the Minyons after their triumphant 4 of 9 in 1998 was tempered by strong criticism of their agreement to perform on the same day as the major competition in Valls, forcing *castell* aficionados to choose between the two events. Moreover, they showed a lack of "respect for tradition," given the historical primacy and prestige of the Valls festival (ibid.: 48). This is the idiom of ownership in Catalan festival: respect for accomplishment is countered by the "respect for tradition" claimed by those with historical capital and now assisted by such international systems of authentication as the Unesco World Heritage lists. The discourse of authenticity is often a strategy for creating scarcity and high-value rival goods (Bendix 1997; Noyes 2006). Catalan festivals with any claim to antiquity have complained of being "copied" ever since they began to garner tourists and national dignity in the late nineteenth century. Of course these long-established festivals tend to persist in provincial towns which in the seventeenth century were fervently copying the festival models of the capital. Though such towns might be forgiven for forgetting their own lack of originality three centuries later, memories run very short indeed where prestige is at stake. The head of the Castellers of Vilafranca, the most fervent critic of the Minyons' disregard for tradition, was criticized in turn a month later for

premiering their 3 of 10 not at an established festival but a competition invented purely as an excuse. Other *castellers*, however, argued that the criticisms were "envy" and that a castle has to be brought out as soon as it's ready: it is a dish that will not keep.[4] And once served, the appetite moves on to other things: at the end of the year the Minyons began to test the 4 of 10.

The competitive tendency of the most prestigious *colles*, exacerbated by the media, is also tempered by both longstanding social control and the higher value of play. Many criticize the incipient professionalism of the *castellers* of Vilafranca and several *colles* reject the model of an athletic contest by boycotting the annual competition held in Tarragona. *Colles* assist one another in forming the pinecone, and their supporting musicians often play together at the end of a performance; relationships of "godparentage" exist between older and newer *colles*. Local pride is explicitly invested in improving on the *colla's* own record, offering hospitality, and behaving graciously. It is less the desire for profitable proprietorship than a continuing awareness of festival's role in mediating intra- and intercommunal tensions that has kept the *castells* from turning into an organized sport.[5]

Tradition Meets Choice

Despite tensions over ownership and professionalization, *castells* have thrived as conditions shift toward abundance, mobility, and autonomy. New technologies have been incorporated insofar as they support communication among rival performers and the participatory periphery (Lave & Wegner 1991), questioned when they foster the codification of the practice and/or its participants. New participants have, as always, been welcome, but they now come from a wider social range. The form itself, depending on corporeal and generational diversity for its constitution and on body-to-body communication in regular rehearsals for its transmission, is not amenable to commodification. This, along with the self-conscious resistance to appropriation of most *castellers*, has kept the form rooted in local communities despite its presence on television, the Internet, and the opening ceremonies of the 1992 Olympics.

Traditions formed under scarcity and constraint often flourish as conditions change, particularly when the social capital of the inflexible network has a first opportunity to spend itself under new abundance and autonomy. But traditions change with their social base. As the mutual knowledge of the inflexible network disperses, pressures grow toward diffusion on the one hand and control on the other.

Many folklore genres intensify with enhanced communication. It is now widely recognized that the golden age of European costume and folk art was not in an unlocatable past of pristine isolation, but coincided with the economic expansions, labor migrations, and political self-assertions of modernity (Hofer 1984; Bendix & Noyes 1998). Today the Internet has provided a comparable boost to verbal and performance arts. Festivals and traditional music have a vigorous second life online. Where a well-educated population shares a small language and high connectivity, digital interactions may thicken live ones – as with Catalan festival websites such as www.festes.org – or revive dying genres by creating a performance context in virtual space that no longer exists on the ground, as with the Icelandic verbal dueling that takes place in real time on chat boards (Kaplan 2006). Jokes, urban legends, and rumors – impersonal genres with little formal complexity depending on rapid circulation and anonymity – find their ideal medium online.

Complications arise when the tradition has perceived political or economic value in a market beyond its participatory network. Then pressures increase rapidly to transform process into detachable object, improvised practice into codified production, social reciprocity into market exchange or regulatory control. The complex public megagenre of epic falls under state control (ancient Athens or contemporary central Asia), enters the authorial regime under state patronage (Virgil, Milton) or becomes industrial product (Hollywood), parallel distributed processing giving way in each case to the division of labor. Festival turns into top-down spectacle or commodified leisure, though its dependence on thinking bodies not just as creators but as medium limits its susceptibility to control. The simpler

domestic genre of the fairy tale evolves into the eminently liberal genre of the novel, with subsequent industrial production as film, television, celebrity culture, and self-help.

Artisanal, ritual, culinary, medical, musical, and dance traditions are being rapidly incorporated into the global economy, through two primary labeling regimes. Consumer pressures turn them into "world culture" that circulates and hybridizes; state-driven pressures turn them into "heritage," "cultural property," or controlled-appellation products artificially withheld from replication in order to monopolize revenue.

Applied to tradition, both heritage and IP regimes transform what they attempt to preserve. Processes become things: the moving practice becomes a reproducible template; the inflexible network becomes a bounded "community." Forms and their makers become exhibitions of themselves in a "second life of heritage" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998) and these are not only obsolete forms that would otherwise be discarded as rubbish. For despite its rhetoric of pricelessness, heritage is big business, and local speculators in search of personal profit or a *deus ex machina* for a struggling community are freezing living traditions into heritage at a frenetic rate, often to disappointing results. Moreover, the codification necessary to police authenticity curbs internal innovation, cutting off vernacular creativity at its source. Those populations designated as folk are reduced to a purely curatorial role. The tradition, conversely, becomes detached from present concerns and loses its wealth of indexical meaning: it may die as actors cease to pour their lifeblood into it (Noyes 2006).

But the genie of genre is not willingly funneled into the bottle of property. Culture wants to spread. The plot of the fairy tale, the verbal formulae of epic, the powerful rhythms of festival, all of the endlessly reiterated devices refined over centuries by thousands of performers are not simply *aides-mémoire* but insinuate themselves into the bloodstream of listeners, crying out for reproduction. [6] Moreover, unlike germplasm in the hands of Monsanto, genre cannot be manipulated to conceal its source code.

And so the new conditions of abundance, flexible

networks, and autonomous, speeded-up activity create countervailing pressures toward hybridization, free circulation, and the recycling of old devices into new activities and products. Folklore nourishes the fusions of tourist art, ethnic-inspired high art, fashion, cuisine, world beat, new age religion, alternative medicine, body culture, social movements and public celebration. It also thrives under cultivation by amateurs, "pro-ams" who take up tradition not as obligation but as avocation. Nor are these cosmopolitan voyages a new development: one need only consider the last two hundred years of social dance or the last two millennia of religious syncretisms.

The hardscrabble academy is a proving ground. If a cultural form can endure constant pulling and stretching across generations, if it can meet the multiple needs of a population that does not possess an abundance of forms, then it will have sufficient formal integrity and semantic flexibility to travel. Indeed, as the social network becomes more attenuated and the actors exposed to the form are less invested in it, mimesis can become increasingly formal, decreasingly social, and the form itself will encounter less pressure.

At the same time, the form comes to signify differently. Transmitted in social transactions between people who have enduring relationships, traditional culture is embedded in context. With knowledge is transmitted the metaknowledge of what it is for, how it is to be used; with knowledge comes responsibility. When the interaction takes place in the narrower set of relations between, say, a Brazilian émigré capoeira initiate and his respectful students in a Berlin health club, context must be turned into text to make the transfer across settings; metaknowledge must also be more efficiently and explicitly conveyed: in the process, they are codified and made rigid. Alternatively, in commodity transmission where network nodes are leapfrogged and person-to-person accountability lost, context and metaknowledge are reduced to liner notes or shaven off altogether (Noyes 2003b). Hence the anxieties of indigenous people about sharing ritual knowledge, and hence the impossibility of an open global database (Brown 2003; Digital Dynamics across Cultures). Knowledge without

context is unsafe, and knowledge without obligation confers power that is subject to abuse.

The End of Traditional Invention?

What about new traditional forms? Will contemporary equivalents of the epic and the festival, multifunctional and enduring, continue to emerge? Not from the rich world, with its abundance of baskets across which to distribute eggs. Complex domain-specific inventions, such as software or snowboarding, arise out of voluntaristic "pro-am" networks, but that, as we have shown, is not the same thing. What then about the populations historically identified as the folk: the poor to whom the wealthy look not only for spiritual but for cultural redemption?

Conditions of scarcity, social control, and forced inactivity persist in microcosm in prisons and refugee camps, where many kinds of traditional invention are visible in the short term. But in the wider world, globalization and consumer capitalism have transformed subalternity. Poverty is assuredly still with us, but for the most part the poor lead no bare life in this world full of people and stuff: they live densely atop refuse dumps. Their inventions still rely on recycling and bricolage (Cerny & Seriff 1996), but the available world of objects and interlocutors, however damaged or damaging, is abundant and diverse in kind and origin. There is no obvious focus of cultural attention amid such clutter.

The inflexible network has ceased to exist, despite widespread attempts to recreate its objectified version, the "traditional community." Neither initiatives to control the movements of labor while freeing those of goods and capital nor the biopolitics of discipline and surveillance impose effective constraint from above. There is imperfect coordination between regimes of control, and the poor often slip between jurisdictions (which in the absence of protective resources is experienced as insecurity rather than freedom). Subalternity now creates mobility instead of restricting it. Both states and markets push much of the world's population into increasingly chronic migration and displacement. Among this mobile proletariat, kin and other relationships are maintained by instant messaging and card-

charged cell phones, time-constrained one-to-one channels not conducive to the development of large-scale collective forms.

Even where people still live in their old communities, there is scant time for dancing. Poverty is shifting from underemployment to hyperemployment, in maquiladoras or "new economic zones" where essentially forced labor consumes available energies at an unprecedented rate.

Under these circumstances, it is unclear whether new complex collective forms can still take shape.[7] Amid our present abundance, the cultural loss may not be great. We can less easily spare the political-economic learning that risks disappearing if we fail to recognize traditional invention for what it is: not the spontaneous outpouring of a one-hearted collective, but the hard-won formal accommodation of diverse actors in a small space. It comes neither from nature nor from freedom but from social constraint. Nature is our fantasy of the past, freedom our fantasy for the future, but constraint is our reality as we strive to inhabit a stressed ecosystem in increasingly tight quarters with others. Traditional culture, rightly understood, can inform democratic practice in plural states (Noyes 2003a: 262–271). It has global lessons for us as well.

Notes

1 And, for that matter, about the complex web of relations underlying the modern author-function, but culture created under the authorial regime has a more distinct dynamic and will not be considered here.
2 Torvalds is perhaps remembering Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which ascends from survival and security through social belonging and recognition to "self-actualization" (Maslow 1970). The higher needs come into consciousness as the lower ones are satisfied.
3 I take the following account from Brotons and Beumala (2000).
4 Brotons & Beumala (2000: 49).
5 I summarize this paragraph from comments by Brad Erickson.
6 Memetics might be invoked here, but see instead the work looking at cultural process on its own terms: Bauman & Briggs 1990; Urban & Silverstein (eds.) 1996.
7 Note that I say new *forms*, not new performances in which an existing repertoire is adapted to a new situation. I mean this statement as a provocation: I am not

sure that I believe it myself, but I think we should ask the question.

References

Abrahams, Roger D. 1981: Shouting Match at the Border: The Folklore of Display Events. In: Richard Bauman & Roger D. Abrahams (eds.), *"And Other Neighborly Names": Social Process and Cultural Image in Texas Folklore*, 303–322. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Abrahams, Roger D. 2005: *Everyday Life: A Poetics of Vernacular Practices*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Bauman, Richard & Charles Briggs 1990: Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19, 59–88.

Bendix, Regina 1997: *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Bendix, Regina & Dorothy Noyes (eds.) 1998: In Modern Dress: Costuming the European Social Body. Special issue, *Journal of American Folklore* 111 (440).

Benkler, Yochai 2006: *The Wealth of Networks*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Brotons, Xavier & Joan Beumala 2000: *Les meravelles del món casteller*. Valls: Edicions Cossetània.

Brown, Michael 2003: *Who Owns Native Culture?* Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Cerny, Charlene & Suzanne Seriff (eds.) 1996: *Recycled, Re-Seen: Folk Art from the Global Scrap-Heap*. New York/ Santa Fe: Harry N. Abrams.

Coleman, E. Gabriella & Alex Golub 2008: *Hacker Practice: Moral Genres and the Cultural Articulation of Liberalism*. Anthropological Theory 8, 255–277.

Digital Dynamics across Cultures. www.vectorsjournal.org/ issues/03_issue/digitaldynamics.

Feldman, Allen 1991: *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ghosh, Rishab Aiyer (ed.) 2005: *Code: Collaborative Ownership and the Digital Economy*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.

Granovetter, Mark S. 1973: The Strength of Weak Ties. *American Journal of Sociology* 78, 1360–1380.

Hannerz, Ulf 1992: *Cultural Complexity: Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Herzfeld, Michael 1997: *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State*. London: Routledge.

Himanen, Pekka et al. 2001: *The Hacker Ethic and the Spirit of the Information Age*. New York: Random House.

Hofer, Tamás 1984: The Perception of Tradition in European Ethnology. *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 21, 133–147.

Kaplan, Merrill 2006: Capping Verses in Cyberspace: Textuality and Performance on an Icelandic Chatboard. Paper

presented at the American Folklore Society Annual Meeting, Milwaukee.

Kelty, Christopher M. 2008: *Two Bits: The Cultural Significance of Free Software*. Durham NC: Duke University Press.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara 1996: The Electronic Vernacular. In: George E. Marcus (ed.), *Connected: Engagements with Media*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara 1998: *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Lave, Jean & Etienne Wegner 1991: *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Leadbeater, Charles & Paul Miller 2004: *The Pro-Am Revolution*. www.demos.co.uk/publications/proameconomy.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude 1962: *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Maslow, Abraham 1970: *Motivation and Personality*, rev. ed. New York: Harper and Row.

Milroy, Lesley 1987: *Language and Social Networks*, 2 ed. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Mintz, Sidney 1996: Enduring Substances, Trying Theories: The Caribbean Region as *Oikoumene*. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* n.s. 2, 289–310.

Noyes, Dorothy (ed.) 1995: Façade Performances. Special issue, *Southern Folklore* 52.

Noyes, Dorothy 2003a: *Fire in the Plaça: Catalan Festival Politics after Franco*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Noyes, Dorothy 2003b: Group. In: Burt Feintuch (ed.), *Eight Words for the Study of Expressive Culture*, 7–41. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Noyes, Dorothy 2006: The Judgment of Solomon. Global Protections for Tradition and the Problem of Community Ownership. *Cultural Analysis* 5, http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~caforum/volume5/vol5_article2.html.

Paredes, Américo 1958: *"With His Pistol In His Hand": A Border Ballad and Its Hero*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Suárez-Baldrís, Santi 1998: *Castells i televisió. La construcció mediàtica del fet casteller*. Valls: Edicions Cossetània.

Urban, Greg & Michael Silverstein (eds.) 1996: *Natural Histories of Discourse.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Weber, Steven 2004: *The Success of Open Source*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.

Westerman, William 1996: *Fly to Freedom: The Art of the Golden Venture Refugees*. New York: Museum of Chinese in the Americas.

Dorothy Noyes is associate professor of English and Comparative Studies and Director of the Center for Folklore Studies at the Ohio State University. Author of *Fire in the Plaça: Catalan Festival Politics after Franco* (2003), she studies the traditional public sphere in Romance-speaking Europe, the social organization of vernacular creativity, and the careers of sociocultural concepts.

(noyes.10@osu.edu)