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Salons 5: Anticipatory Heritage

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Salons 5: Anticipatory Heritage

The “Anticipatory Heritage” salons, organized by the Fellows of the American Folklore Society, considered how the heritage of the present can be employed proactively to create more just and humane futures. Participants discussed approaches for reanimating and revitalizing traditions through incorporating them integrally within community life. They include repatriation and training in archival and collecting practices that empower communities. While folklore has emphasized safeguarding traditions transmitted over generations, anticipatory heritage contends that looking to the future is also needed to advance social justice, heal through remembrance, and generate greater community cultural self-determination. As was the case for participants in all of the salons, these discussions stressed the importance of a critical approach toward heritage, including interrogating who controls heritage-making and, at times, questioned the term “heritage” itself.

Keywords:

(from the AFS Ethnographic Thesaurus), cultural heritage, material culture, documentation, repatriation, intangible cultural heritage, museums, public folklore

ON MARCH 10, 2021, DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, the Fellows of the American Folklore Society (AFS) held a virtual webinar in which six speakers spoke from various vantage points about folklore, heritage, and the public sphere. The webinar was followed by salons, a series of small group virtual discussions held on April 9, 2021, in which participants engaged with topics and issues inspired by the six presentations. Participants, mainly based in North America, also included international participants joining the salons from Europe and Asia. They joined morning and afternoon discussion groups (“salons”) of their choice focused on topics related to the webinar themes. The topics were “Mutual Engagement, Co-creation, and Yielding Authority for Representation: Strategies and Practices,” “Public Folklore, Heritage, and Social

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Justice,” “Tourism through Folklore: Challenges and Opportunities,” “Sustainabilities,” and “Anticipatory Heritage.” The Special Issue editors, who also coordinated the webinar and salons, designed the salon topics to facilitate discourse among colleagues in folklore, heritage, and cognate disciplines. The editors offered discussion prompts that shaped the conversations.

This special issue includes the written versions of the six presentations followed by five summary pieces of the salons, each of which is focused on one of the topics of the small group discussions. There were two groups focused on “Anticipatory Heritage,” Salon I in the morning and Salon II in the afternoon. The summaries of each are below and are intended to preserve the multivocality of the conversations that occurred in the sessions. The Guest Editors invited two to three registrants from each salon to serve as facilitators. One participant served as the reporter who provided the written notes that the editors used to construct the summaries in further consultation with all of the participants listed for each salon. The summaries are organized around central themes that emerged in the discussion. Honoring the requests of some of the participants for anonymity, the Guest Editors have presented the “Anticipatory Heritage” summaries as currents of discourse without attribution to particular individuals.

Discussion Prompt: This salon considers heritage as an endeavor anticipating the future along with rendering the past in the present. How can we carry out anticipatory heritage through our practices of collecting, “salvaging,” documenting, archiving, and programming? How does the framework of “Anticipatory Heritage,” and attention to historical time in the face of crisis, affect folklore research and public practice in public settings like museums, parks, and other spaces?

Salon I Summary

Participants:

Robert Baron, Goucher College (Reporter)

Kurt Dewhurst, Michigan State University (Facilitator)

Jason Baird Jackson, Indiana University (Facilitator)

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, New York University and POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews (Facilitator)

Nicolas Le Bigre, Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen, Scotland

Špela Ledinek Lozej, ZRC SAZU, Slovenia

Selina Morales, Southwest Folklife Alliance

Meltem Türköz, Boğaziçi University, Türkiye

Kay Turner, Independent, Brooklyn, NY

Prospective Practice: Anticipating the Future when the Present Has Become the Past

Participants explored various dimensions of heritage production as prospective practice. Anticipatory heritage anticipates a future when the present will have become the past. Looking at heritage through a lens that points forward, to create a legacy

rather than focusing on the past, participants explored various heritage temporalities. Anticipatory heritage is intrinsic to all efforts to sustain cultural practices. Through engagement with heritage prospectively, heritage may (again) become habitus, embedded in everyday life, often with aspirations for shaping a better future. Crises in the United States, such as 9/11, the COVID-19 pandemic, and activist movements like Black Lives Matter (BLM), heighten consciousness about the importance of creating such legacies.

Documenting Heritage Formation for Equity and Social Justice during the Pandemic

Folklorists and ethnologists are undertaking extensive documentation of narratives and cultural practices modified or newly created during the pandemic. A participatory blog from Slovenia, *Vsakdanjik*, examines transformations in everyday routines and practices triggered by the coronavirus.¹ The *Heriscope*, also from Slovenia, reports on a 5-year project, begun in 2019, of the Heritage on the Margins multidisciplinary research group.² Focusing upon what heritage does, rather than what it is, it includes reflections and materials about heritage formation among linguistic and ethnic minorities, migrants, and occupational groups.

Students in the Folk Art and Cultural Treasures Charter School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, created journals of everyday life during the pandemic, recording what was happening in their communities and exploring its implications for their lives and the heritage of the moment. The curriculum and pedagogy were created by the Philadelphia Folklore Project in collaboration with the Asian American community. Students created a time capsule of what they were observing and doing, such as where they were walking, pandemic rituals, and conversations with grandparents. This project raises intriguing questions about how the world would be reshaped post-pandemic. It demonstrates how anticipatory heritage can help build movements for social change, through a processual approach to generating critical cultural knowledge. From a public interest folklore perspective, it represents a community-driven process of heritage production for movement building and social justice, designed to build relational power and an understanding of shared history that can shape the future.

Archival collection projects are invaluable for documenting anticipatory heritage. The Lockdown Lore Collection Project, a rapid response initiative in Scotland, documented narratives and images of groups of people during the pandemic when everyone other than essential workers were required to stay home in “lockdown.” The project included ethnic minorities and people with disabilities that folklorists and ethnologists might not otherwise encounter in fieldwork or public engagement initiatives. Like other projects during the pandemic, it was occurring at a time of racial justice struggles, providing a counter-narrative to a 2021 government report contending that there was interracial harmony and equitability in the United Kingdom (Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparities 2021).

Since everyone who was able to stay home from work was mainly in their home and a documentarian in one way or another, we need to ask what role folklorists play. Communities were producing anticipatory heritage through documentation

and in streetscapes addressing BLM. Folklorists can engage with social movements and broadly document such anticipatory heritage. For example, Todd Lawrence's colleagues and students at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, documented George Floyd protests and antiracist street art in Minneapolis.³ This kind of project can prevent historical erasure of otherwise ephemeral activist initiatives and movements of often overlooked communities. This type of activism can be viewed as heritage and legacy that works toward a better world.

Ephemeral memorials created during the pandemic commemorated lost loved ones. The Naming the Lost Memorials project embodies the perspectives of the folklorists who created it and are shaping legacies.⁴

Ideologies of Memorialization and Celebration

It would be worthwhile for folklorists to consider the politics around documenting COVID-19 and memorializing its victims. What does documentation do for the present and for the future? It is taken for granted that heritage advocacy is meant for continuity. But continuity can also entail discontinuity. There is intrinsic conservatism to memorialization. Rather than preserving the evidence and memory of a past event, memorialization mobilizes memory. There should be a sense of collective responsibility when governments act irresponsibly in their memorialization. And we need to ask: What do commemorations effectuate, and what are their outcomes?

Heritage can be burdensome, sustained with ambivalence, and reinterpreted as "obligatory heritage." Family china may be retained with respect for its ongoing maintenance within a family, even if it does not follow a current generation's aesthetic preferences. Historical monuments are now often seen as burdensome legacies of racism and discrimination. Monuments are currently planned to commemorate tragedies, serving as a painful burden.

Heritage interventions may be designed to permanently celebrate cultural forms sanctioned by authorities, as has been especially pronounced in authoritarian nations.

Repatriation and Collecting Practices

Movements to redress injustices may *use* heritage or they may be *about* heritage. The BLM movement animated and changed the tone of debates about repatriation, making it a global issue that goes beyond museums. It has become a systemic struggle for justice centered in the experience of colonized people.

During a time of financial crisis, objects are being deaccessioned in museums for a variety of reasons, whether sold for income or devalued because they have never been documented.

However, objects have different meanings at different times. Folklorists need to be trained in skills that will make them successful heritage workers—with training—not just about learning heritage theory, but also including acquisition and deaccession policies and practices, starting with proper documentation. Such practices will ensure that objects will continue to be meaningful in the future and can then be revisited and critiqued.

Re-animating and Reshaping Cultural Legacies

Native American communities are engaging prospectively with heritage to re-animate cultural forms and practices, creating environments where the forms dynamically become part of their lifeworld. In addition to celebrating valued traditions and recognizing endangerment, they insert traditions within rituals and everyday life. However, they are selective in applying heritage to lived experiences, recording oral history to expand the compass of written history. Not every past/heritage practice calls for restoration to the future lifeworld; some can live on in historical consciousness.

Communities, groups, governments, and cultural specialists act preemptively to shape desired legacies, and can selectively filter, edit out, or eliminate negative politically and/or ideologically opposing dimensions. Heritage through conquest has involved transmuting sacred sites to conform to an official religion. The plan for a Museum of Movements (MoM) in Malmö, which was to be the first national Museum for Democracy and Migration in Sweden, was abandoned when the Ministry of Culture decided to allocate the funds for a Holocaust museum in Stockholm instead, ironically seen as a safer choice. The Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg, which began as an idea for a Holocaust museum, went in the opposite direction.

Shaping the Future through Incorporating Traditions in Everyday Life, New Rituals, and Contemporary Art

Some public folklore leans toward *celebration* of the cultural practices of diverse communities. In contrast, anticipatory heritage seeks to move out of heritage status to make traditions part and parcel of everyday life.

Transmission is key to sustaining folklore. During the pandemic, there has been a heightened consciousness of the need to perpetuate cultural knowledge. Community cultural leaders and public folklorists pivoted to the Zoom communication platform for teaching and transmitting traditions and cultural knowledge. Transmission should be directed toward use in everyday life rather than as frozen heritage practices.

Contemporary artists employ folklore to mess with temporal distinctions, collapsing past, present, and future. They make use of traditions sustained over time to shape the future. One artist creates adobe structures that speak to resistance. Others develop new rituals employing traditional elements. They embody a ritual function that plays with the expanse and conception of time, like how Jewish Passover collapses past and present, with all participants acting as if their seder is actually in Egypt during this ritual moment.

Most challenging is dealing with a dark heritage in which one is morally implicated. Germans reckon in self-indicting ways with the role of their country in murdering Jews, Roma and Sinti, homosexual men, and others during World War II. A Polish artist, Wilhelm Sasnal, addresses a public struggling with the dark legacy of the Holocaust. By remediating works of art, he makes them self-indicting. By exhibiting this work in a museum of Jewish history, he invites Jewish viewers to witness this internal Polish struggle, namely, resistance on the part of Polish society and government to

fully acknowledge violence against Jews by their neighbors during the Holocaust. It represents constructive agency in dealing with a difficult past.

Problematizing the Term “Heritage”

The term “heritage” has been used problematically and needs to be interrogated. It has been associated with nationalism and the Confederate flag in the United States. Some historians eschew the term. In writing a collections plan for the Michigan State University Museum in Lansing, Michigan, archaeologists and folklorists accepted the term “cultural heritage,” while historians wanted to use “history.” In contrast, folklorists want to sustain a living heritage for future generations—past to present to future.

Representing and Revitalizing Heritage Forms of Another Culture

Interpreting and representing the heritage of another culture does not necessarily mean co-optation or wrongful appropriation. The language instruction application Duolingo recently added Yiddish to its online programs for learning endangered languages. While using standard Yiddish for spelling and grammar, its creators had to decide which dialect to use. They are millennials (young people born between the early 1980s and late 1990s), including native speakers in the United States from Hasidic communities and a secular family. Based on a survey and their own Yiddish, they decided on the “Hungarian Yiddish” spoken by Hasidim, rather than standard Yiddish, taught in universities. However, when words and sentences are read aloud, Duolingo accepts alternative pronunciations. Some Hasidim are proud that their dialect was chosen and are intrigued to discover it has a grammar.

Imagining and Questioning Heritage Prospectively

Speculative heritage, a term drawn from speculative fiction, points subjunctively to futures imagined as the kind of world we would want to live in, a world of peace and racial equity. It could be seen as a kind of prospective heritage that seeks efficacy through making a better future. An analogy is William Morris’ idea of a better socialist future built through re-engagement with heritage craft practices (1903:1–70).

Anticipatory heritage may involve politicization and/or aestheticization, as well as facilitation. While facilitation, which entails process, is positive, aestheticization is not necessarily positive.

Questioning how the future that we would like to see could be generated through heritage could help to reorient our field through exploring its potentialities.

Salon II Summary

Participants:

Polly Adema, University of the Pacific
Emily Bianchi, Indiana University

Sara Craycraft, Ohio State University
 Michael Dylan Foster, University of California, Davis (Facilitator)
 Amber Hall, Ohio State University
 Mary Hufford, Livelihoods Knowledge Exchange Network (Reporter)
 Adem Koc, Eskisehir Osmangazi University, Türkiye
 Micah Ling, Indiana University
 Alexandra Morosidou, Athens, Greece
 Cliff Murphy, Folk and Traditional Arts, National Endowment for the Arts
 Njoki Mwangi, Ohio State University
 Michelle Stefano, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress (Facilitator)
 Iryna Voloshyna, Indiana University

Implications of the Concept of Anticipatory Heritage

Exploring the term “anticipatory heritage,” we considered how heritage-making requires that we anticipate what heritage, as shaped in the present, will “say” and “do” in the future, whether tomorrow or decades from now. Though we tend to think of heritage practice as preserving a “past,” we’ve not focused sufficiently on what kinds of futures we shape through the making of heritage. Recognizing that making heritage is to an extent already anticipatory, what would it mean for our work to attend more reflexively and critically to this given?

A salient question then becomes: “Who is controlling the heritage-making process and whose vision of the future is guiding it?” Thus, though somewhat self-evident, the notion of “anticipatory heritage” becomes useful, enabling an important and timely hyperawareness of the role of heritage-making in *creating* the futures we want to see. “Anticipatory heritage” fosters attention to the present, as the moment when the future is forged. Preserving heritage entails decision making: How will people in the future access our past as we behold it in the present, which will someday itself be their past? Are we simply taking charge of how we are represented in the future, or, in imagining what people in the future may need to understand about the past, are we actually shaping that future? And since the present is riddled with crises, from racial and social injustice to ecological devastation among others, “anticipatory heritage” cannot be neutral; it must take a political, justice-oriented stance. As such, when translated into practice, “anticipatory heritage” requires actors—the anticipatory heritage-makers—who are driven by visions of a just future and are committed to equitable futures for all. Intervening in discontinuities, we shape continuities.

Heritage-Making in Response to Crises

To the extent that anticipatory heritage, as framed by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1995), is driven by a sense of impending crisis (sudden disastrous rupture and awareness of generational and historical discontinuity), what are these crises? Examples raised included displacements due to war, genocide, environmental disaster, climate change, intergenerational rupture, the pandemic, and, of course, human mortality. Are these crises escalating, intensifying, at historically high levels (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2024)?

Must anticipatory heritage be reactive? Is it not also proactive? Who has the “perspective,” “right,” or “privilege” to recognize or “determine” that something is a crisis? How might this labor of recognition be distributed between communities in crisis and folklorists? How do our models of engagement accommodate a need for diverse, cross-sectoral perspectives? Where do folklorists fit in? Conversely, what does *non*-crisis-driven heritage look like? (Examples: nation-building, marketing of DIY [do-it-yourself] heritage projects, and economic development planning at local levels). Participants discussed a considerable range of crises. The heritage of the Shakers (a Protestant sect) is preserved, not as a heritage for progeny since they are celibate, but for audiences that are local, regional, and national, thus traversing several scales. Another example is the innovative approaches to food stimulated by COVID-19 quarantining in the Balkans: people going to the garden, making something out of what is growing, to which value can be added with the connection that “this is something my grandmother grew.” This gardening wasn’t valued in that way until the crisis of the pandemic changed people’s daily lives.

The term “anticipatory heritage” shifts our attention from a prevailing historical focus on salvaging what is disappearing to reimagining the present from the point of view of diverse heritage seekers in the future to discovering and supporting a wide range of vernacular heritage curators already serving the needs of their communities. Grounding that labor in traditional sites for heritage curation, such as museums, can democratize decision making about which heritage to conserve. That kind of curation is well-served by the training and skills of folklorists, which, in one example considered in our discussion, can be placed at the service of dwindling communities that, like the Shakers, would like to share their story with future audiences. With that, the framework shifts from simply salvaging things on the threshold of disappearance to collaboratively framing present experiences in ways that imagine and engage audiences in the future.

Auditing Heritage Discourse

Is heritage discourse changing? How has it changed since the early days of salvage anthropology? To what models do we look to from our disciplinary past for heritage work in the present? What is the difference between “salvage” work and anticipatory heritage? What is the relationship of both to revitalization? How does the impending lostness of objects of preservation add to their value? How are we dealing with the heritage of *heritage work*, decolonizing a terrain shaped by nationalist discourses? And how are we thinking about the effects of technology in shaping the presentation of heritage online? What a participant called the “inadvertent curation of Twitter and Facebook and so many other (social media) sites” could hardly have been anticipated 40 years ago.

Anticipatory heritage is already supported through a brisk industry that packages and sells kits for scrapbooking and memory making. How can heritage professionals set the stage for the kind of reworlding that goes on among elders, like the Liberian refugees in Philadelphia who, in the course of sharing stories together, are able to co-inhabit the country they left behind? These are ephemeral events and demonstrate

that folklorists can curate by becoming facilitators, not for outside audiences, but for groups that are experiencing crises of dislocation.

Facilitation of reworlding, both following and in anticipation of ruptures, is a kind of memory care work for which folklorists seem especially well-suited.

Traversing Scale

Heritage policies and programs operate at global, national, regional, state, and local scales. How do we reckon with this in our work? When we say “we,” what scales might we be representing? Related questions are: Who is defining and legitimating heritage? How do we shift to accommodate emerging trends to become facilitators of heritage-making that is already underway, linking across time, space, and scales?

In what kinds of historical change are folklorists as heritage workers implicated? Our work has a number of applications, in branding of communities and regions for ecotourism and other kinds of economic initiatives. How does the act of anticipation, itself a kind of speculation, shape the futures of communities we work with? How attentive are we to the dynamic of social forgetting that attends remembering?

Intangible Heritage as Embodied Knowledge

Frameworks like UNESCO’s Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity assume that material and verbal forms of heritage should go together. What new kinds of opportunities for curating heritage are opened up by the concept of “embodied heritage?” What becomes of the concept of “collecting,” which has historically been a primary method of generating folklore’s disciplinary object?

How do our practices form opportunities to identify and support what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004) has termed intangible heritage as “embodied knowledge?” We talked about the intangible aspects of heritage conservation, asking: How can we re-animate items collected in terms of their affects and their meanings, and how can affective components be registered, conveyed, and regenerated? A participant who documented the crafting of masks during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the atmosphere of anxiety that attended standing in line at a JOANN Fabric and Crafts store to procure the materials, or the panic experienced on entering a store with empty shelves, an atmosphere that becomes part of the meaning of the tangible objects.

Collecting still attends crises, but how do images of moments in the BLM movement capture rage and deep sadness? One participant suggested that the heritage professional’s tool kit includes ways of amplifying that rage, or that sadness. Spontaneous shrines that appear along fences and roadsides become objects of ephemeral curation that heritage professionals can document, in order to amplify and extend those voices and messages. How can our presentations of this documentation convey the affect that enables future connections with historical others? How is affect captured? And how can such presentations convey something about the sensory experiences that produce particular affective responses?

If our bodies are the archives, how do we curate those archives (Hufford 2018)? How do we prepare youth for the work of *becoming* embodied memory, to know how

to refresh that memory? How have we attended to vernacular memory care work? Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has given the example of the traditional buildings in Japan that are torn down and rebuilt every 20 years, a process that replenishes and therefore safeguards the embodied memory required in order to keep building them (2004:59).

Decolonizing Heritage Work

What temporalities are invoked in heritage work? How attentive are we to a politics of time (Fabian 1986) that arranges people backward and forward along a time line of progress? Hoarded in museums, troves of the patrimony of others are accrued as indicators of national wealth. Repatriating these materials has been approached as a way of decolonizing heritage work. Participants talked about a shift that seems to be happening. Folklorists began as collectors of what was becoming outdated, outmoded, and disappearing before modernizing influences. Folklorists are increasingly involved in staging and framing community-based collection and reflection, often in relation to historical trauma. One participant questioned a process that celebrates histories of White settlers in ways that can reinforce White supremacist values. Given that there may be shame attached to some of that, how can the remembrance and telling of these stories contribute to healing?

A participant observed that decolonizing work is anticipatory in that it modifies the past in order to change the future. An example is how the garlic festival in Gilroy, California (known for its garlic production), turned the offensive smell of garlic and its stigmatizing effect on the community's public image into an asset to celebrate. This was an intentional, anticipatory transformation of an ambivalent emblem with a positive effect on the community's identity.

How do we do heritage work in trauma-informed spaces? Is this activism? Healing? Trauma can also be historical, so that heritage work can be brought to bear on the healing of wounds experienced generations ago. The process of collecting under the guidance of communities has become part of that process, where the collection and its curation are not the main goal of the work. Rather, focusing on the connections and the mending of ruptures sought by communities through collection and curation has become much more central to our practice, which, as a participant put it, emphasizes heritage as a process that goes beyond the creation of products for consumption, aligned to what David Lowenthal (1998) terms a "preservationist ethos," akin to a neurosis. How can our work inaugurate more dynamic ways of engaging the past, with the future in mind?

Notes

1. See Hafstein (2024); Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2024); Long (2024); N'Diaye (2024); Ronström (2024); and Titon (2024).

2. See Vsakdanjik: Etnološki Zapisi, <https://vsakdanjik.zrc-sazu.si/>.

3. ZRC SAZU, "Heritage on the Margins: New Perspectives on Heritage and Identity Within and Beyond National," <https://www.zrc-sazu.si/en/programi-in-projekti/heritage-on-the-margins-new-perspectives-on-heritage-and-identity-within-and>.

4. "George Floyd and Anti-Racist Street Art Archive," <https://georgefloydstreetart.omeka.net>.

5. For the Naming the Lost Memorials project, see <https://namingthelost.com/memorials/>. See also the 24-Hour Live Stream COVID Vigil archives, namingthelost.com. (Note from the website: "The vigil has ended, but the work continues.")

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