

Showbiz as a Cross-Cultural System: Circus and Song, Garland and Geertz, Rushdie, Mordden, . . . and More

James A. Boon
Princeton University

An attitude at once critical and apologetic toward the same situation is no intrinsic contradiction in terms (however often it may in fact turn out to be an empirical one) but a sign of a certain level of intellectual sophistication.

—C. Geertz, “Ideology as a Cultural System,” *The Interpretation of Cultures*

What intellectual “attitude,” critical and apologetic, suits situations of showbiz? How might this vast arena of human endeavor be approached ethnographically and comparatively? What, perforce, does “the show business” mean—not just here and now (America since P. T. Barnum) but elsewhere and earlier: across cultures and eras, continually transformed and translated. Should anthropological modes of interpretation, philosophically inclined, address showbiz situations? What would distinguish such studies from, say, the anthropology of tourism?

Anthropologists of touristic topics, intent on practices our profession long dismissed as degraded, may still trail vestigial standards of cultural authenticity (even when contesting them).¹ One “theoretical” advantage to showbiz is that nothing even heuristically authentic adheres to such experience. Why? Because, for one thing, it’s a business and, for another, it’s all show. Another advantage is the abundant indication that showbiz is here—alas, everywhere—to stay. Think only of global theme parks, polyHollywoods, “the World of Coca-Cola,” and computerized special effects—which industry, its promoters claim, saved California’s post-Cold War economy.

Unless showbiz gets canceled by the millennium (I write in 1999), anthropologists and cognate cogitators, assuming we too are not canceled, may have to find something to tolerate, perhaps like, and rarely even to love about it. Why, after all, should ethnographers, comparative hermeneuts, or global critiquers be different from everybody else?

Seeking alternative meanings of and for commodity culture, I have assembled a showbizzy essay about showbiz (one going a bit native, so to speak). Its

interscored segments—five shorts and two feature presentations (numbers 3 and 6)—run as follows:

1. Preliminaries (P. T.)
2. Showcased Definitions (I. E.)
3. Cultural So-Called Systems—Redisbursed (C. G./E-P.)
4. Hunches and Winks (a.k.a. Hypothesis)
5. Singin' as if Sententiously (Pre-CD)
6. The Same Showbiz? Rushdie's/Mordden's/Mine . . . (I. A.)
7. Methodological Coda, with Clowning Conclusion (Finis)

Preliminaries (P. T.)

Showbiz is no easy matter to define, chronologize, or contextualize. One fact, however, seems sure—P. T. Barnum coined the rubric that “showbiz” abbreviates and sloganizes (such is advertising!): “Barnum conceived of popular entertainment as a business, which he called ‘the show business,’ and he talked of amusements as ‘merchandise’ that were subject to the same laws of trade as any other goods” (Toll 1976:31). But this certainty hardly pins things down. Just what those “laws of trade” might be, I leave to practicing economists—such folk as show up on snazzy Louis Rukeyser’s winky *Wall Street Week*. Let me address instead a stock formula behind Barnum’s popularity: lots of sensationalism and a little edification.²

It all started in the 1840s on Broadway near St. Paul’s Chapel (still standing), when and where a youngish Phineas T. Barnum gazed on Scudder’s American Museum (disturbing “freaks” displayed in formats considered educational and therefore moral)—and saw that *it was* good. What explains the eerie attraction: “It was probably the word *curiosities* that held the magic for the man. . . . Suddenly, Barnum’s enormous energies were focused. At the age of thirty-one, he made up his mind to buy a museum” (Culhane 1990:34). To its “combination of information, amusement, self-improvement, titillation, and respectability” (Toll 1976:29), Barnum soon added “lecture-plays” billed as “chaste scenic entertainments,” plus artful gimmicks—for example, those “This Way to the Egress” signs—to keep the crowds flowing on out. On both sides of Barnum’s “Egress,” unadvertised attractions also proliferated:

The commercialization of sexuality . . . was manifest in other leisure institutions. Museums, for example. . . . In 1850, Dr. Wooster Beach’s National Anatomical Museum and Academy of Natural Science, on Broadway, exhibited “figures of men and women naked in lewd, lascivious, wicked, indecent, disquieting and obscene groups, attitudes, and positions.” . . . Besides diagrams and models of reproductive organs, . . . “malformations” includ[ed] a hermaphrodite, a “hottentot female” with an enlarged clitoris, . . . venereal disease[, and] a model of “virgin breasts, . . . those rare beauties so peculiar to the female form, without which she would be despoiled of one half her elegance and loveliness.” Still other museums permitted soliciting by prostitutes. Even “respectable” museums like P.T. Barnum’s . . . conveyed a sense of sexual freedom. [Gilfoyle 1992:127]³

Erotic commerce flourished, then as now, in the environs of museums, plus burlesque (natch) and “higher” spectacle—like Palmo’s Opera House (it once featured nude polkas and minuets) and the elite theater Niblo’s. “Concert saloons” amalgamated French vaudeville, Italian opera, German beer garden, and English theater in entertainments for middle-class whites (working-class Irish, German immigrants). Between the acts, performers solicited customers for sexual service in secluded alcoves (Burrows and Wallace 1999: chs. 37, 45, 54, 64; Gilfoyle 1992: ch. 11).

This slightly hidden history of show business—a history of titillation that titillates in turn—extends from saloon prostitution to shifting “sex districts.” Eventually, in Gotham, “tenderloin sections” catered to both workers and the well heeled (straight, gay, and so on) and to Euro-Americans, African Americans, and Hispanics—variously isolated and integrated (as in Harlem’s famed Renaissance).⁴ As each technology emerged (cheap sheet music, affordable piano rolls, the phonograph, later radio), concert-saloon life remained a virtual cauldron for national brews of “popular music”—ragtime, Tin Pan Alley, rock ‘n’ roll—commodified out of America’s demimondes.⁵

Yes, ever since Barnum (and long before), so-called showbiz has entailed alternative trades, often enough rough. Compared with many predecessors, competitors, and successors, Barnum was a model of restraint: a Democratic Educator. In 1870, he enterprisingly transformed fixed “museum” into mobile “circus”—first his “Traveling Moral Exposition of the Wonder World,” then “Magic City,” “World’s Fair,” and “Greatest Show on Earth.” In each new guise of wonder, Barnum booked differences that current ethical standards deem taboo: extremes of size, “monstrosities” of combination, brands of “defectiveness.” Leafed through today, any book about Barnum (and they abound) parades attractions that seem perversely designed to offend norms of decency cultivated since. That such shows were promoted as “moral” *then now shows* how different, culturally, history keeps becoming.

Most notorious for us current spectators of Barnum’s own “moral defectiveness” are his racist humbugs—George Washington’s 161-year-old slave nursemaid, Joice Heth; “the ‘What Is It’ or ‘Man-Monkey,’ ” later disclosed as William Henry Johnson, a microcephalic black American of dwarfed stature (Kunhardt 1995:149). Such merchandise is hard to fathom nowadays, especially in light of Barnum’s bighearted, tolerant, more ethical side:

Barnum taught Johnson to speak “jungle language,” and how to smile continuously. He also threatened to dock Johnson’s pay if he ever revealed his true identity. . . . But as time went on [after 1859], Barnum and Johnson became close personal allies. [Johnson was] given an ever-increasing salary and share in the profits. [Kunhardt 1995:149]

Appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, Barnum was probably not obsessed with race (that entered showbiz with minstrelsy), or with ethnicity (that came with mass immigration), or with gender (that came with Lydia Thomson and burlesque). Rather, Barnumesque showbiz refracts (but does not reduce to)

current critical accusations of racism, sexism, and classism. Barnum, moreover, although trafficking in manifold prejudice, also merchandised virtuoso talent (e.g., the delightful Jenny Lind). In short, Barnum's "system" of exhibition(ism)s, such that it was, orchestrated sensory contradictions into medleys of display. Because Barnumian curiosities were so diverse, no particular packaging of them could endure. Their very variety portended ongoing obsolescence; their excessiveness ensured further novelties next year—rather like auto fins at a later date. Barnum's *spécialité* was constantly to alter scruples of propriety: "pushing the envelope of embarrassment," I'd call it. This mainstay of showbiz endures. (Note an American TV example: the recent wave of sit-coms, even during pre-V-chip "family hours," flaunting a newly utterable "P" word—to tweak *the organ of male vulnerability, displaced from Achilles' heel. Next up: Viagra!*)

Barnum's show business—relying on mass ticket purchases and promoted-product sales—was fundamentally oriented to the near future. "Entertainment" contrives always to be just ahead of becoming passé, primed for refurbishment with each turn of technology: circuses in tents, by train, over the airwaves; vaudeville from the stage, via radio, on TV; songfests in saloons, from wax disks, on CD; flickering light from slow blinks, celluloid, videotape, the Internet. All new media both repeat and rework past mixes of distraction elevation.

Of course, showbiz—never really new—derived from previous politics and poetics of patronage—by the polis, royal courts, nobility, religious bodies, municipalities, state endowments, imperial "bread and circuses."⁶ To alight at sundry "sites" along this deep history, I might cite showbiz antecedents listed in Robert Burton's 17th-century *Anatomy of Melancholy*; hurry, hurry, hurry:

Every palace, every city almost, hath his peculiar walks, cloisters, terraces, groves, theatres, pageants, games, and several recreations; every country some professed gymnics to exhilarate their minds, and exercise their bodies. The Greeks had their Olympian, Pythian, Isthmin, Nemean games in honour of Neptune, Jupiter, Apollo; Athens hers: some for honour, garlands, crowns; for beauty, dancing, running, leaping, like our silver games. The Romans had their feasts . . . sea-fights, theatres, amphitheatres able to contain 70,000 men [with] delightsome shows to exhilarate the people; gladiators, combats of men with themselves, with wild beasts, and wild beasts one with another, like our bull-baiting or bear-baitings . . . dancers on ropes, jugglers, wrestlers, comedies, tragedies, publicly exhibited at the emperor's and city's charge, and that with incredible cost and magnificence. [1977:79]

To such "exercise rectified" Burton adds "ordinary recreations which we have in winter":

cards, tables and dice, shovelboard, chess-play . . . music, masks, singing, dancing, Yule-games, frolics, jests, riddles . . . merry tales of errant knights, queens, lovers, lords, ladies, giants, dwarfs, thieves, cheaters, witches, fairies, goblins, friars . . . , such as the old woman told [of] Psyche in Apuleius, Boccace novels, and the rest . . . for men's ears are charmed with novelty. [1977:81]

Given these copious precedents, my initial salute requires revision: P. T. Barnum did not exactly invent showbiz (that credit doubtless goes to the ex-Soviet Union). America's Barnum, nevertheless, did *name* "the show business"; and he promoted it into a characteristic discourse of modernity and after. Now, *advertising* is part, if not the whole, of showbiz. Yes, in *advertising*, to name a thing—to brand and package it—is tantamount to invention. "Origins," moreover, really cannot count in enterprises devised to preclude affirming the "genuine article." In certain antimetaphysical respects, showbiz may even have gotten a jump on deconstruction; or such is my hunch.⁷

Barnum's entrepreneurial style and publicity stunts have been designated America's national essence—by the French:

Barnum was the personification of *américanisme*, . . . continually mounting projects of astonishing commercial daring . . . , which resembled both carnival and the poster in its economic effervescence and in the challenge it posed to ordinary notions of distinction.

"Advertising is like learning," [Barnum] wrote. "A little is a bad thing." . . . Barnum shattered the privacy of the home, and in that, appropriately enough, he was assisted by the poster . . . connect[ed] with the more novel and ambitious projects of the entertainment industry.

The poster . . . was allied to . . . *américanisme* and *arrivisme* . . . in which a form of social roulette prevailed, submitting class identity to the vagaries of the marketplace. [Verhagen 1995:122–123]

Needless to add (or advertise), such vagaries today seem less a matter of *américanisme* than, I'm afraid, *globalisme*. They are downright international. The world keeps getting exaggerated.

Showcased Definitions (I. E.)

What is *business* doing next to *show* in Barnum's fateful metonymy? Bring on the reference texts (browsers welcome!). My *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (WNCD) pegs our composite lexeme succinctly: "The arts, occupations, and businesses (as theater, motion pictures, and television) that comprise the entertainment industry" (1st ed., s.v. "show business"). But buyers should beware the false clarity of uniform gloss (and shun still skimpier entries available as off-the-rack, ready-to-wear definitions retailed in "soft-wear" dictionary substitutes). Real tomes—the bigger and mustier, the better—print-parade multiple meanings in tallies of usage. And usage alone—both Wittgenstein (a showy philosopher) and Malinowski (a showy anthropologist) revealed—subverts "the referent" by enacting (accessing?) always slippery *signifiance*.⁸

Fat dictionaries can be enjoyed rather like revues—each item a dazzlingly arbitrary outfit or garb: a "WORD!" It is not for nothing that, in *Sartor Resartus* (1908), Thomas Carlyle (a showy savant) compares symbols with clothes. (Closely read, dictionaries destabilize denotation—unlike a "foundational" knowledge genre misleadingly lumped with them: encyclopedias.) On, then, with the show of "show business" in extravagant displays (designated by that

strange WORD!—*diction-ary*) by diverse impresarios: Samuel Johnson, Noah Webster. We shall ogle the noun first, saving adjectival *show* for second.

Business (archaic *business*)—role, function, mission, trade, line, or “commercial or mercantile activity engaged as a means of livelihood”—tumbles and slides into several further senses worth blocking off:

Movement or action (as lighting a cigarette) by an actor to establish atmosphere, reveal character, or explain a situation—called also *stage business*. . . .

[or] a. personal concern < none of your *business* > b. RIGHT < you have no *business* hitting her > . . .

[or] a. a serious activity requiring time and effort and usu. the avoidance of distractions < immediately got down to *business* > . . .

[or] a. a damaging assault b. a rebuke or tongue-lashing: a hard time c. DOUBLE CROSS. [WNCD, 1st ed., s.v. “business”]

Stage business may be a lexical model for *show business* (or *funny business*). Connotations of personal rights and undistracted activity lend *business* hitched to *show* an oxymoronic flavor. Indeed, were not *show business* felt by users to be slightly contradictory, the coinage’s “catching on” (as a category or a slogan) would prove equally perplexing to rhetoricians, semanticists, or advertisers. Definitional downsides of *business*—damaging tongue-lashings and hard times—only enhance the irony of its association with glamour and glitz. And that “double cross” gloss seems too good to be true. But dictionaries are actually *nothing* but short-circuiting semantics—a fact that explains addiction to them of witty aficionados: Borges and Freud, Hugh Kenner and Vivian Darkbloom, Vic Turner and (we’ll see) Cliff Geertz.⁹

Any *Webster’s* wraps meanings-as-usage up with synonyms—in this case: COMMERCE, INDUSTRY, TRADE, TRAFFIC, whose *shared meaning element* (italics “his”) is promptly stipulated: “activity concerned with supplying and distribution of commodities” (WNCD, 1st ed., s.v. “business”). To save time, I cite my prized jumbo version (the very edition favored by Vladimir Nabokov—heroically transnational, finger-lickin’ lexicon leafer) on *commodity*:

That which affords convenience or profit, esp. in commerce, including everything movable that is bought and sold,—goods, wares, merchandize, produce of land, etc. . . . [T]he term *commodity* has been devised to serve as a corresponding singular [to *goods*, aggregate of elements of which wealth is comprised]. [*Webster’s New International Dictionary*, 2nd ed.]

This misleadingly pat “definition” mystifies (you might say) *commodity*—a term devised and revalued (“recommoditized,” so to speak) into arguably *the* critical mot of the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries, God willing. One wildly successful commodity in contemporary theory is the term *commodity* attached to *fétiche*—a veritable blockbuster.¹⁰

But I want to stress something different: a lack—what my desk edition leaves out of *business* as “activity in commodities: supplying and distribution” (WNCD, 1st ed.). Omitted (forgotten?) is *desire*; yes, desire: *want*. I need hardly

remind readers of abundant academic inquiries—Saussurian, feminist, interpretive, postmodernist, new historicist, writing-cultural, après-colonialist, Lacanian, Žižekian—bent on reinjecting *desire* into inadequate “laws” of political economy. Gilles Deleuze (1993) for one, and companionable nomads, exposes bias toward production redistribution in neoclassical theories of value. We Deleuzians—plus we Sahlinsians, de Certeauans, and so on—refuse to deny arts of consumption their fair share of credit in constituting culture. Remember: *desire*.¹¹

Here I aim only to advertise (and I am not the first) an appealing possibility: America’s master of humbug anticipated in *popular* practice all this “high” thinking. Old Barnum animated gaps of desire by conjoining business to show, thereby netting “big bucks.” And discourses of value—from Veblen (1953) on conspicuous consumption, to Bataille (1997) on *dépense* (expenditure), to Baudrillard (1988) on metasimulacra—have been playing catch-up theory ever since. This proliferation of critical critique may remind even minimally ironic consumers of “growth” (my metaphor is industrial—and informational). Whether the theory industry (“the know business”) will ever surpass Barnumian show business is deliciously difficult to guess (Boon 1999:17–18, ch. 13). On the infrastructural side (versus superstructural “ideas” clothed in the “word” *theory*), I recently overheard Russian news reports that enterprising subversives and/or subversive entrepreneurs, fed up with the U.S. merchandising invasion, have launched an alternative fast food franchise in nativistic meat pies. (I confess to wondering if these ex-Soviets will call their product line McPeroshki.)

So! If Barnum’s “show” hooked “business” to consumerist cravings—fetishistic, hedonistic, sometimes even wholesome—what else might his tricky composite imply? *Show* affords *Wörterbuch* (dictionary) surfers varied thrills in definitional display. Individuated or conjoined—*showroom*, *show window*, *show bill* (an advertising poster), *showboat*—our entertaining term just keeps rollin’ along and reticulatin’ contradictions (*WNCD*, 1st ed., s.v. “show”).¹²

Nuances of *show*—“appearance, evidence, spectacle”—fertilize paradoxes of agency and truth. Even neighboring words seem affected. A die-hard Frazerian could sniff around for sympathetic magic on dictionary pages themselves (e.g., *WNCD*, 9th ed.) And presto: semantic contamination! Near *show* lurks *shrive* (“to administrate the sacrament of penance”), *shuck* (as in corn), *shrinkage* (*Seinfeld* enthusiasts, stop your snickering), and *shtick* (Yiddish, I recall, for “an entertainment routine—a BIT”). In such riotous alphabetical company debuts *show*: from Old English “sceawian—to look, look at, see.” *Show* means—by *means* I mean semiotically “*substitutes as*”—“exhibit, or offer < *show*-ing new spring suits >.” Exhibits are staged *for* “wonder or ridicule” and/or to arouse interest or stimulate sales (as in autos) or “demonstrate quality in breeding” (as in dogs). *Show*, then, suggests performance and spectacle “for the notice of others.” (Dictionaries, as a genre, overlook *the* ethnographic question: what those “others”—showees?—in fact *do* notice.)

There is more (still in *WNCD*, 9th ed.). *Show* has legalistic sides: “Allege, plead < *show* cause >”; demonstrating “by argument or reason.” (Can’t you just hear O. J.’s lawyers: “The defense shall *show*. . .”) I note also definition b—“a

false semblance”; so much for the law. As a verb, *show*’s synonyms line up neatly: manifest, evidence, evince, demonstrate—a matter of revealing outwardly. But this appearance may be “more or less true.” And suddenly *show*, dictionarily, becomes SIGN (implicating all of semiotics) and “ostentation”; looking this medieval word “up” refers us to precapitalism.

Modern meanings are more circumscribed—“a radio or television program” and that old standby: finishing “third or at least third in a horse race” (*WNCD*, 9th ed., s.v. “show”). (Or there’s my personal example: “*Guys and Dolls* is better than a *show*.”) These usages—coupled with “the sense of ENTERPRISE, AFFAIRS < he ran the whole *show* >”—make *show business* sound less oxymoronic than redundant. You don’t suppose it has anything to do with gambling?¹³

Finally, *show* proper means “an indication of metal in a mine or gas or oil in a well” (*WNCD*, 9th ed.); avoided are “shows” of sexual readiness (estrus, heat): after all, this is no CD-ROM on MTV. Nor does our prim source “traditionally” print allusions to “Is she showing?”; and no hint of menstruation sullies its premier version’s stodgy *show* (*WNCD*, 1st ed., 1973). Product lines (commodities) later learned to flaunt periodic cycles (onset/duration/finis) in all-out ads, ultimately merchandising “Motrin for Moms!”—even the “material Mom” (a.k.a. Madonna). This “menstrual show business” now dares, like the others, to speak once-unmentionables and challenge puffed-up propriety. Yet any showbiz liberation retains shifted standards of restraint, scruples even—which brings us (back) to cultural systems. Next segment, please.

Cultural So-Called Systems—Redisbursed (C. G./E-P.)

About the time P. T. Barnum coined “show business,” E. B. Tylor helped promote “culture” into anthropology’s official problem or, as I prefer, paradox (Boon 1973).¹⁴ Minimally, *culture* implies contours in experience—as lived and enacted, as discoursed and represented (it helps to think of languages). (Anti)Disciplines of all stripes wrangle and fret over how cultures get authored, contested, transmitted, transformed, displaced, regendered, deracialized, and pre-de-re-post-constructed—whether in arts (high and low) or in everyday life (as an art).¹⁵

But what has all this to do with showbiz? “Hows-about” slotting showbiz into Geertz’s capital corpus—which phases from interpreting “cultural systems” (1973), to loosening this analytic notion (1983), to a heightened sense of contingency visited on comparative hermeneutics “itself” (1987, 1995).¹⁶ Taking cues from Geertz himself, I ask not what “cultures” (or systems) are (or were) but, rather, how they body forth *palpably* as enacted argument.

Clifford Geertz (billed as “C. G.” on recent book jackets) used to use a recurring titling device: “[You-name-it] as a Cultural System” (hereafter C.S.)—“Religion,” “Ideology,” “Common Sense,” “Art” (Geertz 1973: chs. 4, 8; 1983: chs. 4, 5). An editor prone to overconformity might *Gesammelt* Geertz’s *Shriften* by retitling them into full “family resemblance,” with each alias annotated:

- “Literature as a C.S.” (“Found in Translation”)
 “Statecraft as a C.S.” (*Negara*)
 “Science as a C.S.” (“The Way We Think Now”)
 “Chutzpah as a C.S.” (“Centers, Kings, and Charisma”)
 “Agrarian Capitalism as a C.S.” (*Agricultural Involution*)
 “Law as a C.S.” (*Local Knowledge*, part 3)
 “Entrepreneurship as a C.S.” (*Peddlers and Princes*)
 “Nationalism as a C.S.” (“After the Revolution . . .”)
 “Cultural Theory as a C.S.” (“Thick Description”)
 “‘Thick Description’ as a C.S.” (*Works and Lives*)
 “Cliff Geertz as a C.S., Interpreting Aforementioned C.S.s in Java/Bali/Morocco”
 (*After the Fact*)¹⁷

To assuage postmodern readers put off by any inkling of “system,” our cagey editor could point out a legerdemain in the notion as Geertz “deploys” it: “Cultural systems must have a minimal degree of coherence, else we would not call them systems” (1973:17). Nor does Geertz essentialize cultures (rather, they are “essentially contestable”).¹⁸ Nor does he totalize theory: “Cultural theory . . . is not its own master; . . . one cannot write a ‘General Theory of Cultural Interpretation’ ” (1973:25–26). “Religion,” too, disquiets in Geertz, setting “ordinary human experience in a permanent context of metaphysical concern and rais[ing] the dim, back-of-the-mind suspicions that one may be adrift in an absurd world” (1973:102).

Even normalized to “Whatnot as a C.S.,” Geertz’s *Werke* retain variegated techniques for *getting at*—sometimes in self-conscious maladroitness—*whatever it is that cultural systems might be*. My italics lightly pastiche (in the way of Marcel Proust) Geertz’s precepts of and for interpretation.¹⁹ To cite the genuine, radically caveated article: “Yet so far, whatever has been learned about how to get at the curve of someone else’s experience and convey at least something of it to those whose own bend quite differently has not led to much in the way of bringing [different disciplines] into intersubjective connection” (Geertz 1983:156). I call this “face” of Geertz’s style “authoritatively cursory”; and, personally, I *like* it (a lot). Geertz’s writing strikes me as standing—in that American way of his—for the plurality of cultures as such. To *show* what I mean, consider his interpretive tactics (“I will contain myself and refer, and that briefly, to only three” [Geertz 1983:156]): (1) looping, (2) looking up, and (3) symbolic “actioning.”²⁰

The first tactic involves looping. Religion (whatever it *is*) is *gotten at* by Geertz hermeneutically (1973: ch. 4). Whenever teaching his famous article (it debuted in 1966), I try imagining its “narrator” behind a pulpit, encouraging readers to join in intoning a “text for the day”; namely (all together now),

Without further ado, then, a *religion* is: (1) *a system of symbols which acts to* (2) *establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivation in men by* (3) *formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and* (4) *clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that* (5) *the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.* [Geertz 1973:90, emphasis in the original]

Spiritedly unpacking each phrase's concatenation, Geertz apes a worthy homilistic tradition. One might ape his aping (parody still being "the highest form of praise" and all that) and replace *religion* with *showbiz* (absolutely no disrespect intended: I happen to be religious, whatever that *is*). Doing so engenders the following bastard:

With more ado to come, then, a *showbiz* is: (1) a glut of commoditized performances enacted to (2) trade on fleeting impulses and trauancies in everyone anywise gendered by (3) trafficking in intersensory illusionings of passing fancies and (4) hitching these concoctions to so conspicuous a profit motive that (5) the impulses and trauancies seem repeatedly pleasurable . . . for their "15 minutes of fame" at least. [absence of emphasis in my derivation]

A thoroughly postmodern pasticheur (which I happen *not* to be) could then loop, or lurch, across comparative evidence of spectacle, entertainment, magic, and carnival—cultural routines that concentrate punch lines, induce sensory satiety, and play on, with, and against decorum. Such habits of transgression skewer strictures of respectability and counter regimens of kinship, law, church, officialdom, political watch groups, or other agencies of control. They may even make a spectacle of their own infrastructure, seeming to bite the hand that feeds (and monitors) them. (American showbiz examples here include digs at sponsors by the sponsored: recently, K-Mart tweaked by Rosie O'Donnell or MTV's advertisers [Coke, Bud] razzed by Neil Young; earlier, Bristol-Myers deflated by Alfred Hitchcock [eventually "Sir"] and Lipton's oh-so-brisk tea [with bags that "flow-through" too!] goaded by Arthur Godfrey—the most popular celebrity on Earth when my outmoded consciousness of showbiz first emerged. Times do change.)

A *second interpretive tactic* pursues "meaning" (sense *and* nonsense) by looking things up, with winks, in dictionaries—various ones. Geertz's "Art as a Cultural System" does so delightfully—and, perversely, not until its conclusion: "'Art,' says my dictionary, a usefully mediocre one, is 'the conscious production of arrangement of colors, forms, movements, sounds or other elements in a manner that affects the sense of beauty'" (1983:118). (Change "affects the sense of beauty" to "gratifies the sense of consumer desire," and we pass from art to showbiz; that is how close the two "systems" are, definitionally.) Another "reference book containing words . . . alphabetically arranged" (I looked it up—*WNCD*, s.v. "dictionary") adorns Geertz's address to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. It opens thusly, "'Thought,' says my dictionary (suitably enough, given the nature of the occasion, the *American Heritage*), has two primary meanings: . . ." (1983:147). Geertz, then, rifles dictionary diversity—mediocre ones, legacy-laden ones, Sanskrit-in-Indonesia ones. His readers learn that the familiar practice of "looking up" meaning is rather *fremde* (estranging), when you really think "thoughts" about it. My essay has already tried to convey as much when deciphering *show business*, which "cultural system" *seems* less recondite than "art" but may, deeply, not be.

Like Geertz, I applaud puncturing pretentious theory by tactical use of pedestrian reference works. I also try to elevate lowdown terms of everyday life by trespassing in upmarket compendia. Consider, then, several stray definitions from the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*, Compact Edition, Micrographically Reproduced, s.v. “show”)—which stately (though shrunken) tome sports no *show business* (or—heaven forbid!—*showbiz*) per se:

A shew of gladiatorial pageantry; in more trivial [!] use: an exhibition of strange objects, wild beasts, dancers, acrobats, etc. held usually in a booth or portable building, with a small charge for admission; royal marriages and funerals; to display one's cards face upwards; in *Cockfighting*, to make an array of (cocks) on either side, (*Obs.*).

Unnnnncanny!!!!²¹

A *third interpretive tactic* in Geertz poses prose bugaboos for would-be speed-readers. As if deviously to befuddle copy editors, he cobbles together polybracketed speech acts of indirect discourse in multilayered, hyperallusive, self-questioning argumentation tracked through comparative evidence. Like, for instance:

Common sense seems to us what is left over when all these more articulated sorts of symbol systems have exhausted their tasks, what remains of reason when its more sophisticated achievements are all set aside. But if this is not so, if knowing chalk from cheese, a hawk from a handsaw, or your ass from your elbow (“earthiness” might well have been adduced as another quasi-quality of common sense) is as positive an accomplishment, if perhaps not so lofty a one, as appreciating motets, following a logic proof, keeping the Covenant, or demolishing capitalism—as dependent as they are upon developed traditions of thought and sensibility—then the comparative investigation of “the ordinary ability to keep ourselves from being imposed upon by gross contradictions, palpable inconsistencies, and unmask'd impostures” (as a 1726 “Secret History of the University of Oxford” defined common sense) ought to be more deliberately cultivated. [Geertz 1983:92–93]

Prior to that second “sentence” (if you can call it that!), the essay explicates general qualities of “common sense” rather patly: naturalness, practicalness, thinness, accessibleness, immethodicalness. Yet Geertz remains alert to paradoxes of thickly describing thinness and claiming expertise in worldwide plain speaking. Indeed, he *performs such paradoxes* on the page (that’s “symbolic action” in Burke’s [1966] sense).²² Spewing forth commonsense conventions and clichés, Geertz entangles readers in persiflage that surely rivals Teutonic convolutions in philosophy (“as a cultural system”). The cited sentence’s rhetoric *shapes* snippets of “practicalness” into verbiage *manifestly* interpretive—semantically nuanced, eruditely qualified, hermeneutically looped: not very accessible at all when you really get right down to, and dirty about, it.

I consider “Common Sense as a C.S.,” adroitly alliterative, one of Geertz’s pivotal essays (1983: ch. 4). Its salute to Evans-Pritchard on “magic” may appease E-P. buffs upset by “Slide Show” (Geertz 1987: ch. 3)—a spin-off from

the common sense piece. There Geertz peruses Oxbridge styles of studious self-effacement that authorize expertise through understatement. The “of course discourse” is Geertz’s keen tag for litotes-laden implications that “it goes without saying.” Geertz both demystifies and illuminates Evans-Pritchard’s text building (as do Karp and Maynard [1983])—both directly and indirectly. What I shall tag “E-P. *selon* C. G.” is depicted in Geertz’s commentary through exaggerated contrast:

The extreme simplicity and regularity of sub-sentence punctuation (as few commas as possible, mechanically placed, and hardly any semicolons at all: readers are expected to know when to breathe). . . . the related avoidance of clause embedding, amounting almost to a phobia. . . . [t]he passion for simple subject-predicate-object sentences, unmodified and undecorated, is intense. . . . Though E-P spoke at least French and Italian fluently, there are virtually no foreign phrases, aside, of course, from native vernacular, in his ethnographic writings. Though he was very broadly educated, literary allusions play little role . . . the absence of jargon, anthropological or any other, is so nearly total as to seem ostentatious. The only speech act of any frequency is the flat declarative. Quizzical interrogatives, hedging conditionals, musing apostrophes simply don’t appear. [1988:59]

Is this prose “aware” of capturing E-P.’s style antithetically—of caging it in terms laden with the very markings E-P. eschewed? But of course. C. G.—virtuoso in strewing commas, hedging conditionals, and proliferating semicolons—doubtless here muses in ruses. *Hail the conquering Geertz!* (my *apostrophe*). (According to professional pub talk, Evans-Pritchard met his maker in the bathtub while reading *Interpretation of Cultures*; apocryphal or not, that anthropological tale helps me dream that E-P.’s and C. G.’s styles might mutually appreciate each other’s differences—as C. G. does, I am persuaded, E-P.’s.)

Against the one’s “studied air of unstudiedness” (Geertz on Evans-Pritchard) stands the other’s “gosh and gollyness”—a manner of clause embedding amounting almost to a mania.²³ I once speculatively tied Geertz’s “attitude” (Burke 1987) to William James and other pragmatists (Boon 1982:138–141).²⁴ I—also American, although differently—sympathize (culturally) with interpretive slants toward *relative hyperbole*. Whence comes the present effort to direct “you’re putting me on discourse” toward transnational showbiz and the anthropology thereof.

Hunches and Winks (a.k.a. Hypothesis)

In sum, three devices—looping without further ado, narratively looking up, and symbolic actioning—animate Geertz’s approach. They make “system” contingent on media of argument and institutions of practice, even before his admonitions against Grand Theory (1973). Later, to “defoundationalize” common sense (not to mention “systems”), Geertz grew winkier about thin/thick distinctions (1983). Yet *possible* winking was already part of “culture” in Geertz’s masterly commentary on theory that “is not its own master” (1973: ch. 1). “Thick Description”—all about duplicities of sheep stealing, contrarily interpreted

by Jewish peddlers, Berber warriors, French proconsuls, colonialists, and anthropologists—adds a haunting phrase: “Culture, this acted document, thus is public, like a burlesqued wink” (Geertz 1973:10).

Agreed. But what about “culture” that winks again, culture *like* “like a burlesqued wink”? What about scenes where as-if winks are themselves as-if? In 1973, Geertz had added, “The thing to ask about a burlesqued wink . . . is not what [its] ontological status is. . . . The thing to ask is what [its] import is” (1973:10). Likewise, I think, with burlesqued burlesqued winks: winky winks, culture *acted doubly doubly*.

Geertzian winks (as thickly *acted* as they are described) may *really* be already burlesqued burlesque; recall these insights:

But the point is that between what Ryle calls the “thin description” of what the rehearser (parodist, winker, twitcher . . .) is doing (“rapidly contracting his right eyelids”) and the “thick description” of what he is doing (“practising a burlesque of a friend faking a wink to deceive an innocent into thinking a conspiracy is in motion”) lies the object of ethnography: a stratified [!] hierarchy of meaningful structures [!] in terms of which twitches, winks, fake-winks, parodies, rehearsals of parodies are produced, perceived, and interpreted, and without which they would not (not even the zero-form twitches, which, *as a cultural category*, are as much nonwinks as winks are nontwitches) in fact [!] exist, no matter what anyone did or didn’t do with his eyelids. [1973:7, exclamatory winks mine]

Few interpreters—“native,” “nonnative,” or in-between (hybrid?)—could out-wink that passage, which still deserves repeated reading, sometimes winking, sometimes remembering having winked, or not. (Such rereading is a good simulacrum of culture in part and in process.)²⁵

Cultural realms do exist where criteria of wink *versus* nonwink (e.g., twitch) get kicked experientially upstairs, where nonstop burlesquing is *expected*. Call it showbiz or something analogous. Might not such realms stage their own “hard surfaces of life,” “densely textured facts,” “piled-up structures of inference and implication,” “bodied stuff” (Geertz 1973)? Yet the crux of interpretation here is not “whether it sorts . . . real winks from mimicked ones,” per “Thick Description” (Geertz 1973: ch. 1). Instead, hopes to sort blinks and winks (and parodies of either) seem beside the point, more or less. I therefore ask, *What* might a dutiful, unapologetic anthropology of “show businesses” resemble? *How* do supposed thinness and routine elbow poking articulate with other practices?²⁶ *Where*, foursquare, might showbiz overlap with “deeper” life? My stabs at answering these questions may exceed three (I haven’t counted).

Even before the era of Demi Moore (a star I hate, along with her ex, only him [Bruce Willis] more so), showbiz shared a feature of Geertz’s “sacred symbols”: “Both what a people prizes and what it fears and hates are depicted in its world view, symbolized in its religion . . . ; its vices are as stylized as its virtues” (1973:131). In showbiz, of course, distinctions between vice and virtue blur. Come to think of it, they do so in many “a people’s” religion or worldview.²⁷ Yes, transgression looms large in religion as well—unethicized varieties, at least (James 1958).

In 1964, Geertz crisply opposed “science” (sparse, restrained, diagnostic-disinterested) to “ideology” (ornate, vivid, suggestive-engagé). Any science/ideology dichotomy has itself since blurred—nowhere more vividly than in Geertz, as metaphors of templates, maps, and matrixes have receded. Yet a working contrast between so-called science and ideology (“justificatory apologetics”) remains helpful. Showbiz conspicuously avoids science’s “tempered” language; it embraces an ornateness associated with ideology: chock-full of pun, paradox, hyperbole, ambiguity, analogy, rhythm, and irony (Geertz 1973: 209). As a “tentative hypothesis” (the only kind), I do declare showbiz “commercialized experimentation in such *style*”—figurative practices in figurative usages. Showbiz, my theory has it, delivers the trope and nothing but the trope—for a fee. (Showbiz also delivers *de trop* [too much] and nothing but *de trop*, still for a fee.) If “ideology” entails political “oversimplification” (hyped and oversold), showbiz entails *sensory exaggeration*, also oversold. The two discourses—ideology and showbiz—may “of course” dispute each other; they may also, alas, abet each other.

Imagine, then, a Venn diagram partly converging showbiz with religion, ideology, “art,” and that cultural (anti)system Geertz artfully frames as “common sense” (1983:78).²⁸ Conventional appeals of and to “common sense” assume a reality of brass tacks, unfussy experience, foibles and *faiblesse* (faintness), earthy unpretentiousness, “going without saying.” Yet, as Geertz portrays it, any presumptive unfestoonedness is itself altogether figure laden and culturally contingent. Amid the humdrum, too, human meaning proves circumstantially *relative*: that’s one profoundly philosophical punch of C. G.

Like common sense dicta (and not unlike *bricoleurs*), showbiz “makes sense” from loose ends and bits: lingual bits (jokes), theatrical bits (routines), musical bits (songs). Yet, unlike common sense, showbiz blatantly festoons; it dresses up vernacular know-how to tweak pieties, deflate grandiosity, undercut sanctimoniousness. Thus, like common sense, only flamboyantly, showbiz redeems, or seems to, the irredeemably all-too-human stuck-in-the-mudness of waging love and life and death and dearth and consumption. Its “stars” (human bits—misfits and drifters elevated into celebrity) resemble us common folk—recognizable but overblown—as Roger Caillois (1979) insists.²⁹ But why do I insist so again: “*Said a scarecrow swingin’ on a pole / To a blackbird sittin’ on a fence, / Oh! the Lord gave me a soul / But forgot to give me common sense*” (Langley et al. 1989:153).³⁰

Singin’ as if Sententiously (Pre-CD)

Consider just one American showbiz sector as a contrived case in point: Tin Pan Alley, whose history—infrastructural, superstructural, legalistic, and lyrical—warrants serious attention. The ethnic dimensions of interwar commercial swing are too intricate to pursue here; but its poetics and politics—“shifting contours of rangy melody” fashioned into an alternative mainstream aesthetic—have been illuminated by Philip Furia:

The sensuous, vernacular ease . . . evolved from the Alley hybrid of sentimental ballad, . . . ragtime “coon” song, [and] . . . the growing popularity of the blues. Songs . . . were published, recorded, and plugged over radio—a vehicle for “popularizing” songs that quickly displaced older Alley methods [sheet music, piano rolls, singing waiters in “resort” saloons]. Such “standardization” meant that . . . “there is no way to tell, from listening to a song by Irving Berlin or . . . his contemporaries [most of them immigrants, many Jewish], whether it was written for vaudeville, musical comedy, the movies, or simply composed for radio play and possible recording.”

The perfect “voice” for wittily turned lyrics . . . balance[d] non-chalance and sophistication, slang and elegance . . . ; lyricists usually tried to keep that voice androgynous, for the simple reason that a song stood a better chance of becoming popular if it could be performed and recorded by both male and female vocalists. [1992:42–47, citing Hamm 1979]

It was a *gybird* (Russian for “hybrid”) *genre* (French for “gender” and “genre”) to be sure (Bakhtin 1981:425)! Yet it was oh-so-down-to-earth—excepting drag performers who sent up the androgyny imperative by chirping its rare exceptions: “I . . . feel pretty . . . , enjoy being a girl,” and so on.³¹

Tin Pan tunes toed a formulaic line: “saying I love you in thirty-two bars.” I propose to designate their gifted lyrics *commonsense sententiousness set to song*—“capable of grasping the vast multifariousness of life in the world” in “a potpourri of disparate notions” (Geertz 1983:91). Alley *WeltanSCHAUung* boils down to and bubbles up in plucky resolve, deeply resigned shrugs, or practical savvy: “You’ve Got to Ac-cent-tchu-ate the Positive,” “Just One of Those Things,” “Diamonds Are a Girl’s Best Friend.” This “whole cast of mind” can *sound* optimistic (“Things Are Looking Up”) but usually feels “blue” (although *singing* about it): “Am I *Blue*?” “*Blues* in the Night,” “I Got a Right to Sing the *Blues*,” “The Birth of the *Blues*.” And any Alley optimism may be feigned (“Keep Your Sunny Side Up,” “Be a Clown”)—always laughin’ a little, cryin’ a little, lettin’ the world go by a little.

There are, I hasten to add, downsides to this “brassy colloquial style” (Furia 1992:29)—especially when judged from trends in political correctness.³² Lyrics could be sexist (“Bess, You Is My Woman Now”), although sometimes not (“You Can’t Get a Man with a Gun”). They were often egregiously racist (“All Coons Look Alike to Me” and hundreds more) but not always; as Furia observes,

Some . . . barely sound like “coon” songs at all; only if one listens carefully to the . . . words of the verse (or sees the original sheet music, adorned with grotesque racist caricatures) does their heritage emerge. Yet their vernacular idiom, their comic touches, their passionate flair breathed fresh air into Tin Pan Alley. “Hello, Ma Baby” (1899), for example, refreshes the standard telephone greeting by “ragging”—reversing—the verbal accent against the musical beat: not the normal “*Hel-lo*” but “*Hel-lo*, my baby.” Equally refreshed are the cliches of romance when they are couched in . . . wry slang . . . unthinkable in a sentimental ballad. [1992:28–29]

Moreover, though often racist and sometimes sexist, Tin Pan Alley deserves congratulating for an aversion to “classist” prejudice, which is archly mocked

(“Puttin’ on the Ritz”). Yes, such snobbery as existed in Tin Pan Alley was largely reverse. “Puttin’ on” the Ritz, among other airs and postures, became a mainstay of “standards” that displayed (or pretended to) everyday slogans of personal resilience, so to overthrow the hoity-toity.

A list of attributes of Alley ethos (with illustrative songs thrown in) might run as follows:

Down and out (“Brother, Can You Spare a Dime,” “Ten Cents a Dance”)
 Lonely (“I Ain’t Got Nobody,” “I’m Through with Love”)
 Lonely and soused (“One for My Baby”)
 Lonely and resurgent (“The Man That Got Away”)
 Archaically hortatory (“Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes”)
 Alliterative (“Bye-Bye Blackbird,” “Chattanooga Choo-Choo”)
 Ultra-alliterative (“Begin the Beguine”)
 Fetishistic (“I Love a Piano”)
 Caveated (“It Ain’t Necessarily So”)
 As-if regional (“When That Midnight Choo-Choo Leaves for Alabam”)
 Truly provincial and fantasizing (“New York, New York . . . if you can make it there . . .,” “Manhattan . . . into an isle of joy”)
 Interarts (“That Opera Rag,” “Hooray for Hollywood,” “Lullaby of Broadway”)
 Intermusic (“Play a Simple Melody / Musical Rag . . .”)
 Inframusical (“Say It with Music”)
 Vague (“Somebody Loves Me”)
 Calculating (“I Found a Million Dollar Baby in a Five and Ten Cent Store”)
 “Veiled” (“You Do Something to Me,” “Let’s Do It”)
 Metonymic (“Side by Side”)
 Metaphoric (“Life Is Just a Bowl of Cherries”)
 Subjective (“I Wish I Were in Love Again”)—AND SUBJUNCTIVE!
 Objective (“It Had to Be You”)
 Hyperbolic (“Too Marvelous for Words,” “Love Is a Many Splendored Thing,” “I’ll Build a Stairway to Paradise”)
 Understated (rare) (“You’re Getting to Be a Habit with Me”)
 Maussian (“Something’s Gotta Give”)
 Marxist (“Lydia the Tattooed Lady”)
 All of the above, except “Marxist” (“There’s No Business like Show Business”)³³

Evidently, like other such “systems” (stretching the point), Tin Pan Alley could be iconoclastic, wry, and parodic. But what did its ragged refrains contest? They obviously “othered” pious sentimentalism of unsyncopated surge—that sweet melodiousness that Tin Pan tunesmiths and rhymesters liked to jive and razz. Yet Alleyists did more than just “diss” genres of song story (e.g., “After the Ball”) that they aimed to render obsolete. Also tweaked were the very tactics their own new style paraded (“Makin’ Whoopee,” “I Feel a Song Coming On”). At its best, this little bit of showbiz—again, commonsense sententiousness set to song, I call it—stumbled into generous irony, what Kenneth Burke once called “humble irony” or “true irony”: an irony that does not feel “superior to the enemy” but is “based upon a sense of fundamental kinship with the enemy, . . . *indebted*” (1962:514).³⁴

So! If “Tin Pan culture” could be truly humbly “ironic” in Burke’s usage, might the same hold true for other brands and elsewhere? If *not*, then “I don’t

care . . . ”; indeed, if not, “let’s call the whole thing [namely, this essay’s half hopes for truly humble irony across cultures] off.” If *so*, then Geertz’s case for “common sense as a (defoundational) cultural system,” among others, is strengthened. Assuming the latter, more upbeat, possibility, I now pursue Tin Pan Alley’s global aftermaths—or one of them anyway.

The Same Showbiz? Rushdie’s/Mordden’s/Mine . . . (I. A.)

In Dorothy’s intro to “Ding, Dong,” Harburg embarked on a pyrotechnic display of A-A-A rhymes (*the wind began to switch / the house to pitch*; until at length we meet *the witch / a-thumbin’ for a hitch*; and *what happened then was rich . . .*), a series in which, as with a vaudeville barker’s alliterations, we cheer each new rhyme as a sort of gymnastic triumph [without, I’d add, a glitch].

—Salman Rushdie, *The Wizard of Oz*

If we are to believe Salman Rushdie’s lively little book, *The Wizard of Oz* (1992b), he first saw that 1939 American movie of movies in Bombay (India) long about 1956—soon before penning his initial short story, “Over the Rainbow.” A couple of years earlier, I—Rushdie’s senior by a year—first saw in Rome (Georgia, USA) *A Star Is Born* (1954), in what decades later was exposed as a studio-mutilated release of George Cukor’s original. My compatriot contemporaries may recall that Judy Garland’s breakthrough musical of 1939 recirculated little in its homeland; after less than boffo box office, it was banished to markets even more backwater than Georgia—that is, foreign ones. Born both too late and too early, U.S. moviegoers of my vintage encountered Garland’s next-to-swan song musical of 1954—a remade melancholy ode to showbiz—before ever witnessing her initial “emergence” into the freshness of stardom that only a transitory escape to Oz could convey. (Some years after 1954, the 1939 classic began recycling on TV—too late and manifestly too little, or small. As I write, a digitalized restoration is back on the big screen, pending its video resurrection timed, no doubt, to promote HDTV.)

Comparatively and culturally, then, my generation’s “native” spectating of Garland (a quintessential showbiz legend) occurred in reverse sequence (first *A Star Is Born*, then *The Wizard of Oz*) from showbiz history’s actual happening. Not so Rushdie’s. As a ten year old, the future author of *Midnight’s Children* (1980), *The Satanic Verses* (1989), and so on witnessed “innocently” what his *Oz* book recalls as an incomparably fresh Garland’s “hymn to Elsewhere”—a song that inspired his first story and was later appropriated to his theme of exile (the very condition this gifted novelist today so famously personifies). Pre-adolescent moviegoers in mid-1950s America experienced instead Garland’s utterly seasoned (yet no less inspired) “Man That Got Away”—Ira Gershwin’s last out-and-out hit lyric. At the time (still 1954) of CinemaScope’s dawning, this number became the most elaborate technological “take” in the history of human performance—an utterly *intimate* song shot in the ultimately *spectacular* medium.³⁵ (Spectacular intimacy has been key to Hollywood showbiz since its inception, circa 1911, in what was then “Holly[hyphen]Wood”).

I know not whether or when *A Star Is Born* (Garland's version came after the Janet Gaynor "original" [1937] and before the Streisand rehash [1976], and all derived from the nonsinging *What Price Hollywood* [1932]) opened in Bombay. Perhaps Rushdie had already emigrated and caught it in London; or he may have missed it altogether. But that's show business: shifty. Regardless, Rushdie claims he started down the green-tile road of writing Sufi Islam-offending works (including Menippean satire, a routinely convention-shattering genre) after an epiphanal encounter with U.S. merchandise.³⁶ Or so he narrates in his British Film Institute (BFI) volume, garlanded with photos (both color and black and white), stills, publicity shots, and freeze-frames from video viewings—festoons of our hypertext age.

It is a captivating little book, if a bit salacious for classroom consumption by old-fashioned standards. I, for one, would blush to assign the following:

It is necessary that I speak about my cousin Gail, and her habit of moaning loudly while making love. My cousin Gail—let me be frank—is the love of my life, and even now that we have parted I can't forget the pleasure I derived from her noisiness. I hasten to add that except for this volubility there was nothing abnormal about our lovemaking, nothing, if I may put it thus, *fictional*. Yet it satisfied me deeply, especially when she cried out at the moment of penetration, "Home boy! Home, baby—you've come home!" One day, however, I came home to find her in the arms of a hairy escapee from a caveman movie. [1992b:61]

Part 2 of Rushdie's *petit livre* ("At the Auction of the Ruby Slippers") brims with buzz—brilliant, perhaps, but nowadays predictable. Yes, Rushdie busily, buzzily inscribes sexual release through once avant-garde-seeming devices—toys, gender bendings, and "digitalizations"—with dashes of drugs for good measure. The book's last line—"Did I mention my love for my cousin Toto?"—may be playing catch-up innuendo with randy rumors, rather puerile, about "Rosebud" in *Citizen Kane* (1941) (Hearst's pet name for Marion Davies's private parts?). However, my quirky hunch here is hard to reconcile with Rushdie's line early in part 1, where he is still writing in as-if remembrance of being ten: "*I couldn't stand Toto. I still can't*" (1992b:17). Truly, this is a mysterious little book.

Ironically, it has since turned out, there was little buzz in *The New Yorker* version of this same book. I say *ironically* because Rushdie's piece appeared (May 11, 1992) just six months before Tina Brown, self-appointed queen of buzz, took charge at *The New Yorker*; she would hardly have been phased by cousin Gail (or even Toto), so construed, screwed, and flaunted. But in Rushdie's "older *New Yorker*" piece, we find (instead of his BFI version's showily cynical part 2) a suspiciously sentimental tail for the only part included:

In the place from which I began, after all, I watched the film from the child's—Dorothy's—point of view. I experienced, with her, the frustration of being brushed aside by Uncle Henry and Auntie Em. . . . Even the shock of discovering that the wizard was a humbug was a shock I felt as a child, a shock to the child's faith in adults. . . .

Now, as I look at the movie again, I have become the fallible adult. Now I am a member of the tribe of imperfect parents who cannot listen to their children's voices. I, who no longer have a father, have become a father instead. Now it is my fate to be unable to satisfy the longings of a child. And this is the last and most terrible lesson of the film: that there is one final, unexpected rite of passage. In the end, ceasing to be children, we all become magicians without magic, exposed conjurers, with only our simple humanity to get us through.

We are the humbugs now. [1992a:103]

Personally, I like this wrap-up: sentimentality isn't all bad, is it? (A father wants to know.) But my point is that the BFI volume lacks it; substituted for admirably expressed (I feel) *regrets de parenté* are scenes of screwing cousin Gail.

I stoop to speculation: Perhaps Rushdie devised an "unexpurgated version" to rebuff the then-dowdy (he might have felt) bastion of literate propriety. Regardless, by the time his book gained international circulation, *The New Yorker* had mutated into a genre equally open to salaciousness. Toto's (and Tina's) revenge? This, too, as mentioned earlier, is show business: pushing, always pushing, that envelope of embarrassment.

To repeat, I'm only speculating and really don't know (more showbiz!). Yet textual evidence persuades me that *The New Yorker* version came *after* the BFI one: (1) quotations in the magazine are accurate, those in the book often not; (2) certain mots justes—for example, the Wicked Witch as "hydrophobic"—do not appear in the book (who would want to delete them?); and (3) *Wizzovawizz* (correct in *The New Yorker*) is misspelled *Wizzavawizz* in the book.³⁷ To have composed the book second would make Rushdie's tricky work trickier still—worthy of the wizard (or a wily assemblager), so to speak.

Have I mentioned that I really don't know? Yet I do *feel* that there is worth in Rushdie's more gingerly commentary, especially his fleet attention to Garland's vocalizing when he seeks to correct a simplistic gloss on the movie:

Anybody who has swallowed the scriptwriters' notion that this is a film about the superiority of "home" over "away," that the "moral" of *The Wizard of Oz* is as sickly-sweet ["sentimental" in *The New Yorker*] as an embroidered sampler—"East, West, home's best"—would do well to listen to the yearning in Judy Garland's voice, as her face tilts up towards the skies. What she expresses here, what she embodies with the purity of an archetype, is the human dream of *leaving*, a dream at least as powerful as its countervailing dream of roots. At the heart of *The Wizard of Oz* is a great tension between these two dreams; but as the music swells and that big, clean voice flies into the anguished longings of the song, can anyone doubt which message is the stronger? [1992b:23]

Rushdie here rhetorically doubts that anyone can doubt the priorities he hears; yet I shall do so momentarily. Rushdie then goes on to argue that something in this cultural form—this film—is unarguable:

In its most potent emotional moment, this is unarguably a film about the joys of going away, of leaving the greyness and entering the color, of making a new life in the "place where there isn't any trouble" [corrected in *The New Yorker* to "place where you won't get into any trouble"]. "Over the Rainbow" is, or ought to be, the

anthem of the world's migrants, all those who go in search of the place where "the dreams that you dare to dream really do come true." It is a celebration of Escape, a grand paean to the Uprooted Self, a hymn—the hymn—to Elsewhere. [1992b:23]

Perhaps—but certainly, I shall argue, not unarguably!

Rushdie's broadly thematic rendering seems salient to the fate of a showbiz perennial in diverse sectors: (1) its eventual reception as a children's classic, (2) its place at the top of movie musical arts, (3) its centrality to marketing ongoing reappropriations in popular culture, (4) its status in gay iconology, and (5) its centrality to hybrid genres of commodified fantasy. Such cults, enterprises, "communities," and enthusiasms join Rushdie in dreaming of escape (versus exile) elsewhere (versus everywhere); they prefer routes over roots, to pinch an auditory pun.³⁸

But ought something as culturally complex as sung song be patly appropriated, even for causes (some of them worthy indeed) associated with (1) a meditative exile's hope (in *The New Yorker*), (2) generations of movie-mad children's delight, (3) a Hollywood genre's promotional zenith, (4) a sexual preference's politics of identity, (5) a commercial nation's mythology, or (6) a banished satirist's buzz (in the BFI volume)? Setting aside these important concerns, an alternative (comparative-interpretive) question beckons: Has Rushdie listened attentively enough to Garland, as he narratively reimagines her (when he was ten)? Or, to load the critical dice, does Rushdie remember hearing Garland's voice (in Bombay) as *more* innocent than it by then sounded "elsewhere" (e.g., in *A Star Is Born*) or even than it had sounded in 1939, when she first sang the bloody ballad?

I am only asking. Yet doing so reminds me of another listener, one who also wrote about Judy Garland in *The New Yorker*—just two short years before Rushdie, who fails, however (in either version of his *Oz*) to cite him. Ethan Mordden's works engage diverse music and drama from Broadway, opera, movie land, the recording industry, and more.³⁹ Well known to Mordden are "scenes" keen on the *The Wizard of Oz*: (1) Hollywood studios, (2) Manhattan advertisers, (3) gay communities, (4) cross-generational marketing magnates, and (5) popular music revivalists. But in 1990 Mordden managed to address Garland's *aura*—this distinctive apotheosis of certain showbiz potential—without subjecting her voice, or her, to special interest agendas.

Mordden's "I Got a Song" (1990a) graces the final flowering of an earlier *New Yorker*, before that rag, too, went definitively buzzy. His essay inscribes heard song and witnessed performance with exemplary exactitude, worth emulating:

Garland is ageless. That she will ever become a curio or an antique seems unlikely, . . . partly because of her extraordinary singing style, so individual yet so uneccentric. . . . Garland happened onto a scene—the American movie musical—that had not quite decided what was reputable in its musical style. The movies, never having recovered from their origin as inexpensive recreation for workers and immigrants, eternally sought redemption in Broadway stars, venerable novels, eminent writers—and opera. [1990a:112–118]

It takes exceeding attentiveness to specifics of hybrid genres, spectacles, and styles to convey the power of transgressive “monstrosity”:

How do we account for the stupendous performance of “Broadway Rhythm” that [Garland] presented on the radio on October 26, 1935, just eleven days after her Metro contract was legally ratified? . . . The Nacio Herb Brown–Arthur Freed song is about the intoxicating power of American show biz, about how the whole nation participates in the elemental vigor of our music. . . . In 1935, of course, Garland was not perceived as an emblem of show-biz culture; she was perceived as young. . . . But she was the only kid who sang with the timbre and temperament of an adult. [Mordden 1990a:118–119]

Mordden figures her breakthrough came three years before “Over the Rainbow”—not from a “big, clean” voice but from its contaminated plurality and variety:

In June, 1936, she tackled “Stompin’ at the Savoy” and “Swing, Mr. Charlie.” . . . On this innocent-looking Decca black-label 78, two innocuous tuneful melodies take on status as calls to arms in the war to replace Mr. Mendelssohn with Mr. Charlie. Note the allusion to the black world view: swing is part black, and Garland contains multitudes. That smile in the voice—well, one would simply be born with that. But where did she get the wonderful broadening on “band” in

How my heart is singin’

While the *band* is swingin’,

which virtually sites the Savoy for us—ballroom, orchestra, dancing host, and all? Who taught her the metropolitanized rural drawl of her “Mistuh Chahlie”? It sounds seditious. [1990a:120]

This background (back sound?) can help us reread the grain of Garland’s “Rainbow” and its movie—whose contradictions and reversals seem almost “cultural,” even “dialectical.” Hear now how Mordden—quite the ethnographer, I would say—listens and sees:

By 1939 and “the Wizard of Oz,” Metro had put Garland over as a major star and personality. Oddly, the studio reversed itself on Garland’s musical identity in “The Wizard.” After all that insistence on swing, suddenly she is singing soft and square: “Over the Rainbow,” and some patter on the death of the Wicked Witch of the East and the charms of the Emerald City. At casting time, she was to have played out another of her sweet-or-hot swingdowns, like the “I like opera” / “I like swing” challenge number she performs with Betty Jaynes in “Babes in Arms.” On the “Wizard” casting sheet, Garland is listed as “An Orphan in Kansas who sings jazz” and Jaynes as “The Princess of Oz, who sings opera.” Jaynes’ character never made it into the shooting script. [1990a:120]

Mordden implies (or nearly—I am “reading-in” willingly) that something seditious emerges even in Garland’s “soft and square” Dorothy. This aspect of her voice joins its other “multitudes” and may add ambiguous resonance in the *Wizard*’s home/elsewhere: “See Garland’s delighted enthusiasm at being the heroine of a place where the natives are three feet high and squeak, or watch her very nearly break up at Bert Lahr’s bully spoof seventy seconds or so into his first

scene. She isn't uprooted in Oz. She isn't even a tourist. She's just extraordinarily welcome" (Mordden 1990a:125). Mordden savors the film's deceptive messages and irresolvable dilemmas: "Consider the irony: at home, she cannot get what she wants; in Oz, she can get what she wants, but what she wants is to get home" (1990a:126). What, then, becomes of Rushdie's *elsewhere* in this plot or in its "hymn"? Just as Garland's signature number folds back into her voice's prior incarnations, so *The Wizard of Oz* portends successive turns of a life in showbiz. As Mordden exclaims, "What an all-encompassing role for Garland to play on her emergence as a movie star! This, clearly, is what launched her as a permanent citizen of American culture" (1990a:126).

That Garland's launching in turn launched Rushdie on an out-of-synch career—toward global renown, seemingly permanent exile, and excruciatingly ambivalent ties to Islam—is a telling twist of "showbiz as a cross-cultural system." Accordingly, Mordden's style of relistening goes beyond recollecting a first hearing; he helps us experience ever anew "Over the Rainbow," among other showbiz standards. "Listen . . . again," insists Mordden: "It's not a dirge. It's a wish that comes true" (1990a:128). I think Mordden means true *in and as the song*. As he later observes, accurately and with affect, "Garland's biography is songs"—which is to say, the life *is* showbiz:

If Garland's gift is to reintroduce us to the very purpose of our [American] popular music, to teach us what exhilaration lies under our noses, then, surely, the recognition of that gift should involve her hitting it big in show biz. . . .

By proxy, she takes us all to stardom, showing us the self-esteem you develop from performing as well as Judy Garland performs. [1990a:138, 137]

But—an anthropologist wants to know—can such stunning effects cross cultures, and might Mordden's reading help us interpret them "systematically"? Possibly. Rushdie may have responded to Garland less as a hymnodist to elsewhere than as a proxy showing him his way to self-esteem—performing satirical prose that, like her voice, "contains multitudes."

But I may well be guilty here of ethnocentrism (or jingoism) and anachronism to boot. Like Rushdie, Mordden is (I assume) near my age; and both Mordden and I (still assuming) carry U.S. passports. Our *national* generation, having experienced *A Star Is Born* first, inclines to detect worldly wizenedness even in Garland's trademark song—the one Rushdie remembers (or pretends to remember) as clear and strong: an anthem. For adult Rushdie-in-exile, that explicit culmination of *The Wizard of Oz* ("There's no place like home") conveys implicitly: "There's no place like elsewhere." But notice the ambiguity: his translation may mean either "Elsewhere is better than here" or "Elsewhere does not exist (elsewhere is better than anywhere)."

That irony stipulated, I add that "There's no place like home" is similarly ambiguous. Listen again, as Mordden might, to "There's no place like home, there's no place like home, there's no place like home." And try to hear in Garland's "commonsense" speaking a resonant echo of her singing: it may start to sound as plenitudinous as Rushdie's pluralist prose—and as alienated.⁴⁰

Methodological Coda, with Clowning Conclusion (Finis)

There is more than one way to skin showbiz as a cross-cultural “system” (make that “genre”). One could triangulate select cases—say, *ludruk* (proletarian drama) in Java (Peacock 1987), commercial magic in India (Siegel 1991), and stage revues in imperialist Japan (Robertson 1995). One would simultaneously disclose meanings at play in transgressive performances *and* their interpretations: (1) rites of modernization in Peacock’s ethnography, (2) marketed illusionism in Siegel’s apprenticeship, and (3) gender-bending theatricality in Robertson’s critique. As with any approach, there are drawbacks: contrastive hermeneutics often neglects temporal process and can make each case seem self-contained. By way of corrective, one could try covering connected “performats”: add to Peacock on *ludruk*, say, Sumarsam (1995) on *gamelan*, Keeler (1987) and Mrazek (1999) on *wayang* (shadow puppet theater), and Pemberton (1994) on Javanese political theater; or explore intersections of Java/Bali, India, and Japan over odd eras and epistemes—for example, Indonesia’s early “Hinduization,” its Islamic and colonialist transformations, its theosophical and philological enterprises, its occupation by Japan, or its nationalist and postcolonialist twists, turns, and devastations. One’s reading can attempt to crisscross some such circumstances (see Boon 1990), but intricacies of “hybrid histories” may swamp interpretation. Limited triangulation à la Geertz affords a practicable approach, one more immune to the impossible lure of overall understanding. That is why his slant on “cultural systems” arguably qualifies as a “standard” (in a sense here drawn from popular song).

Other sorts of showbiz sleuth engage in “cultural studies” of gender, race, class, and sexual preference. Showbiz and gender lead straight (or curviciously) to burlesque; showbiz and race forefront “blackface” and its jammin’ after-maths; any high/low distinctions bring in class; and sundry genres affect cross-dressing, which figures in diverse identities, including “gay.” (Showbiz, an ideal type, always infringes on other “systems”; nothing cultural is ever discrete.) These, too, are feasible projects, with exciting results and prospects.⁴¹ However, standard denunciations of racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia often bypass (“like ships in the night,” a commonsense adage has it) ironies of comparative practice. Too-snug convictions of identity (or hybridity!) wind up reinforcing new clichés (Boon 1990: ch. 7, 1998, 1999).⁴²

I desire mixed modes as well: neither cultural interpretation (localized comparisons, triangulated) nor cultural studies (globalized critique, routing prejudice)—or perhaps some of both and then some. The present essay has thus encountered and enacted showbiz situations both critically and apologetically (per the opening epigraph) by tuning in capitalist processes engulfing us all. It tries to display how “the show business” (1) *shifts* across eras, as periodicized; (2) *slides* among media that multiply; and (3) *straddles* worlds themselves wavering (e.g., nations, diasporas, home life). My shifting, sliding, and straddling segments traffic in commodified genres of dictionary definitions, circus exhibitions, and exilic commemorations—showbiz all and seriously so.

Certain “cultural systems”—neither localized, quite, nor globalized, exactly (nor for that matter altogether systematic)—crisscross each other and cultures as well (whether Rushdie’s, Mordden’s, yours, or mine). To telegraph that message—and to harmonize “one last time” circus and song, Garland and Geertz, knowledge and show—I close with a lasting coincidence of generic blur: Tin Pan Alley devolved in part from Barnum’s celebrated style of enterprise. Just listen:

Nat . . . Austin was a singing clown, for before the advent of vaudeville, the phonograph, movies, radio, and television, it was the circus clown who introduced America’s popular music. Such tunes as “Turkey in the Straw” . . . and “The Man on the Flying Trapeze” were sold in the circus tent. Indeed vaudeville was founded by a former singing clown, Tony Pastor. . . . The last of the singing clowns was William Burke (1845–1906), a headliner with Barnum and Bailey in the 1880s, whose daughter Billie played Glinda the Good Witch in *The Wizard of Oz*. Singing clowns often led the crowd in a singalong. . . . Other . . . greats were . . . Chas. Abbott, “Shakespearean jester” . . . and Dan Rice, nicknamed “the Boss” long before Bruce Springsteen. [Culhane 1990:74]⁴³

Yes siree! Ladies and gentlemen, and you plebeian customers, too, “singing clowns” lived figuratively on, even in New Jersey (Springsteen’s native land). Tin Pan Alley—cross-culturally constituted (e.g., Russian Jews) and otherwise cross-culturally received (e.g., Rushdie’s reviews)—was but one brand of display earlier promoted by Phineas Taylor Barnum. Moreover, everyday commercial culture may merit contemplating in a winking way here derived in part from Clifford James Geertz. In cosmopolitan showbiz and comparative interpretation alike, American “composers” have occasionally led the global crowd.

And non-Americans have too; consider an alternative coincidence from 1887:

Who will sing a song for us, a morning song, so sunny, so light, so fledged that it will *not* chase away the blues but invite them instead to join in the singing and dancing. . . . Is that your pleasure, my impatient friends? Well then, who would not like to please you? [Nietzsche 1974:348]

Yep. In *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft (The Gay Science)*, Nietzsche, too—an Emerson enthusiast, who loved to read Mark Twain (out loud!)—joined our figurative caveating chorus of singing clowns *sur-viving*—transnationally.⁴⁴

Indeed, and *really* concluding this time, an Iranian Ayatollah arguably augmented Salman Rushdie’s celebrity-*cum*-notoriety, but an American starlet (apparently) inspired him to compose works authorizing multiple voices of doubt. By proxy he takes us all to exile. The same, “of course,” could be sung of Barnum’s always ambiguous “show business.” Gosh and golly, a wizzova-cross-cultural-biz it iz!

Notes

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1. Interpretation of tourism and travel has coalesced around MacCannell (1989, 1992). For subtle insights about authenticity, see works by Price and Price (1992) and Denning (1996) and sources cited in Boon 1999:288 n. 51, 291 n. 10.

2. On Barnum, see especially Harris 1973 and Kunhardt 1995. One successor to Barnum in making humbug and faith the heart of America's commercial culture was L. Frank Baum (see Leach 1993). Barnum's significance for anthropology figures in Boon 1999:17, 117, 129–131.

3. Such exhibits have been extensively addressed in cultural studies of racism, sexism, and homophobia; see cogent treatments in Apter and Pietz 1993 and Gilman 1985.

4. For an overview of sources on Harlem and other New York districts, see Douglas 1995.

5. "Demimondes" hook up with established capital and not just in Paris: for recent cases from America's music scene, see Lanza 1994; for earlier ones, see Burrows and Wallace 1999.

6. Brantlinger (1983) presents pros and cons of seeing mass culture as "decay"; see also Narremore and Brantlinger 1991.

7. This hunch is hatched in Boon 1999: chs. 6, 12, 13.

8. Malinowski (1935) explores fully Trobriand "meaning-as-use"; on Wittgenstein, see Monk 1990. On profuse signifiacnce hitched to diverse language games (including Boasian ones), see Boon 1997, 1998, 1999: ch. 6. See also Kristeva 1980.

9. To celebrate dictionary circularity, read Kenner 1974. "Vivian Darkbloom" decodes readily in my next paragraph.

10. On reticulations of commodity *fétiche* as idea and practice, see Apter and Pietz 1993. Or sniff and slurp Sears's new line of "Fetish" lip covers, body gels, phone soaps, and "fat boy" mascaras—worth an essay. Again, "fetish" is fetishized (exponentially) in both theory and the marketplace. Which outruns which?

11. Issues of desire per Deleuze (1993), de Certeau (1984), and so on—along with issues of culture as symbolically *constituted* (Sahlins 1976)—are revisited in Boon 1999:170–173, *passim*. To encounter Žižek reencountering Lacan, try Žižek 1991; on Bataille, see Botting and Wilson 1998.

12. On show windows (commodities behind glass) and capitalist desire, see Leach 1993, a brilliant study of U.S. business culture. On ambivalence about everyday American "consumer rites," see Schmidt 1995. On *Showboat*, see Kreuger 1977 or recent studies of Kern's masterwork's revivals.

13. On gambling as a motive force in ritual, exchange, and social transgression, see Bataille 1997, Caillois 1979, and Mauss 1990. In talks at Emory University and the University of Illinois, I connected showbiz to capitalism's "thrilling liquidity" by screening a 1930 film short, starring Ethel Merman—in Reno, tossing dice, about to get divorced, and singing about it. Luckily, the couple patched things up.

14. A notion of "culture-as-paradox" is directed toward renewed ideas of hybridity in Boon 1998.

15. Related issues can be reviewed by leafing back through the run of *Cultural Anthropology* or another favorite journal. On values of “everydayness,” see Abrahams 1986 and de Certeau 1984; on rethinking high/low distinctions in arts and ethnography, see Levine 1988, Marcus and Myers 1995, Seabrook 1999, Turner and Bruner 1986, and Varnedoe and Gopnik 1991.

16. The secondary literature on Geertz’s work, most recently Ortner 1999, is too extensive to consider here; see also Boon 1982:108, 137–147.

17. The 11 sources in the order listed are Geertz 1983: ch. 2, 1980, 1983: ch. 7, 1983: ch. 6, 1963a, 1983: part 3, 1963b, 1973: ch. 9, 1973: ch. 1, 1987, and 1995. More recent essays are just appearing (Geertz 2000).

18. W. B. Gallie (1968) on “essentially contestable” is cited in Geertz 1973:29; the notion is amplified in Boon 1977:185.

19. Proust’s *Pastiches et melanges* (1919) teaches us to read by imitating style; this tactic pervades Proust (e.g., 1984), hardly postmodern! *Pasticcio* refers as well to an 18th-century operatic art that has flourished less since (see Mackay 1994).

20. I adapt a notion of “actioning” from Burke 1966, in which “symbolic action” becomes a way to read.

21. My outburst stems from the coincidence of the *OED* with Geertz (1973: ch. 15); see Boon 1977:31–34. On different Freudian and Nabokovian senses of *uncanny*—a recognizable experience in everyday life and reading—see Boon 1999: chs. 4, 6. Cockfights were presented as “entertainment” as far back as ancient Greece at the foot of the Acropolis.

22. On Burke’s “symbolic action” as “processive writing,” see Boon 1999:3–9, 285 n. 5, n. 6, 291 n. 28.

23. I intend “gosh and gollyness” as a conspicuous Americanism; Ruth Benedict, too, liked her cultures so in-credible that we can only, or nearly, believe (in) them (see Boon 1990:190).

24. On philosophies of exaggeration in truth, see Boon 1999:xiv, 7–9, 87, 128, 179–182.

25. On “rereading” as a simulacrum of cultural processes, see Boon 1999: ch. 1, *passim*.

26. Geertz has broached the “deeper” side of showy social life: Bali’s cockfights (1973: ch. 15) and theatrical statecraft in Bali (1980) and in Java, Europe, Morocco, and U.S. elections (1983: ch. 6). He salutes Diderot’s *théâtre*, with its homage to *le genre sérieux*, in an opening epigraph (1983:vii). He addresses popular culture in Java (cassettes, high school variety shows, some tourism)—perhaps reluctantly (1990). How to take apparent superficiality seriously (and playfully), whether or not steeped in political tragedy, remains a challenge.

27. Nonethicized religion and undogmatic rites are venerable topics in anthropology, as in Radin’s (1972) work on trickster figures. One way to tackle nonmoralistic practices is by interpreting habits of laughter—a profoundly complicated bodily (and spiritual) activity. (I have play on this venerable and vexed topic in progress [or should I say regress?].)

28. *Local Knowledge* (Geertz 1983) could also be titled *Colloquial Reason* and/or *Vernacular Wisdom*. The “Common Sense” essay and “Ideology as a Cultural System” (1973: ch. 8) are to my mind two of Geertz’s plums.

29. In a work first published in 1958 as *Les jeux and les hommes*, Caillois generalizes,

The star symbolizes success personified, victory and recompense for the crushing and sordid inertia of daily life. . . . One also imagines such a career to be somewhat suspicious, impure, or irregular. The residue of envy underlying admiration does not fail to see in it a triumph compounded of ambition, intrigue, impudence, and publicity. [1979:122–123; see also 22, 193–195]

This key study stresses games of chance (*alea*) and vertigo (*ilinx*) as well.

30. This fragment of lyric was devised by Harold Arlen to replace dialogue in *The Wizard of Oz* that led into “If I Only Had a Brain. . . .” See “The Same Showbiz?” below.

31. I focus here on Tin Pan Alley titles—not tunes, harmonics, or counterpoint. For more musical “borderlands,” see Boon 1999:9–16, 286; a provocative fact for anthropology is that Lévi-Strauss (1988: ch. 1) memorized Offenbach.

32. This designation may—better than “political correctness”—highlight tendencies of recent critical discourse to claim for itself the moral high ground.

33. Some of my examples (e.g., “Love Is a Many Splendored Thing”) overspill chronological boundaries of “Tin Pan Alley” proper; still, they either anticipated or hearken back to (albeit more “syrupily”) that edgier tradition.

34. On Burke’s “humble irony”—so different from Swiftian irony—see Boon 1999:3–4.

35. The *unbelievable* (true) complexity of “retaking” (refilming and rerecording) this number, just as CinemaScope emerged into dominance, is conveyed in detail in Haver 1988:124–130.

36. On Menippean satire, an ancient form of multivocal, transcultural parody, see indexes in Boon 1982, 1990, 1999. Rushdie’s copious style resembles Dutch colonialist “Multatuli” (Edward Dowes Dekker), early Romantic Jean Paul, and others.

For repercussions of the 1989 *fatwa* (death sentence for blasphemy) imposed by Khomeini on Rushdie, see the coverage in Fischer and Abedi 1990 and Kramer 1991. Recent twists in this story—a reputed repeal and then a reissue, with Rushdie out of and then back in hiding—make it all like a movie or a genre recombining movie and novel (a fact I note with considerable sympathy). See also Fowler 2000 and Rosen 2000:192–194.

37. To keep the versions straight, I carefully recorded in red ink in the book all differences from the *New Yorker* version (that is true); I plan to post these *variata* on a website in the near future or in a cyber-“somewhere over the . . .” (that is humbug). My “pre/post-Tina Brown” construction does not capture subtler upheavals in recent *New Yorker* culture (see Mehta 1998).

38. This pun is pinched from Clifford 1997: title, *passim*.

39. Mordden’s many books and musicalities (1988, 1990b) are but tokened in my references.

40. Not just Garland’s singing but *the* song she sang would have sounded more abundantly contradictory than even Mordden suggests had the “rainbow bridge” sequence been included in the movie as once planned. There *rainbow* became *moonbow*; its tune was hummed as well as orchestrated in both diegetic and nondiegetic renditions—most strikingly when “the rainbow music is playing softly on the soundtrack with, possibly, the witch’s theme in counter melody to give it menace” (Langley et al. 1989:150).

41. Some sources on topics mentioned include Allen 1991, Levine 1988, Lott 1993, and Rogin 1994; see also Goodwin 1992. No such topic—gender, race, and so on—is isolable. Showbiz always mixes conspicuously: for example, showbiz and religion (evangelism, rock spirituals, Jim Baker and Tammy Faye); showbiz and law (Court

TV); showbiz and art (Toulouse-Lautrec at the café concerts, Picasso's music revue collages); showbiz and literature (Oscar Wilde's never-ending aftermath). Yes, showbiz "systems" reveal "impurity" through and through. See also Charney and Schwartz 1995.

42. Whether "systems" are any more fixable than, say, "genres"—and whether either systems or genres "blur" (lapse out of fundamental focus) or "crystallize" (acquire form out of fundamental fuzziness)—remains a vexed issue in theorizing culture and "hybridity." I personally tend to opt for "basic" blur (heteroglossia), with form as precipitate. But resolving the matter seems an unlikely prospect; and leaving it open may help such approaches as Geertz's and Schneider's (1980) remain in mutually productive aggravation—each with the other, not unsympathetically. I thank an anonymous reviewer for this journal for raising the issue of Schneider and Geertz.

43. Billie Burke was also Flo Ziegfeld's ex; an homage to circus-style sing-alongs animates the populist bus trip in Capra's *It Happened One Night* (1934), on which see Cavell 1981.

44. On Nietzsche's habits of comparative reading (a process he likened to singing and composing), see Boon 1999:265, 301 n. 18.

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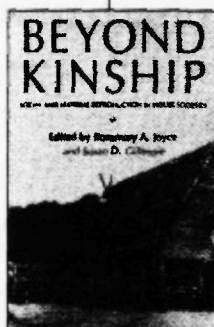
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