

The final goal, of which an ethnographer should never lose sight, is ... to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world.

(Malinowski 1922, p. 25)

In ethnography ... , there has been a growing concern for allowing the voices of the people to be less filtered through the outside ethnographer.

(Heider 1976, p. 1)

Tomorrow, ... the dreams of Vertov and Flaherty will be combined into a mechanical "cine-eye-ear" which will be such a "participant camera" that it will pass automatically into the hands of those who were, up to now, always in front of it. Then the anthropologist will no longer monopolize the observation of things. Instead, both he and his culture will be recorded. In this way, ethnographic film will help us "share" anthropology.

(Rouch 1975, p. 98)

## Chapter I: Introduction

### A) Prelude.

A lizard was on a branch, high up on a tree. The lizard was approximately 12 inches (30 centimeters) long. It was perfectly still. As the texture and color of the lizard's skin looked quite similar to the bark of the branch, I found that I needed to become completely still in order to perceive the shape of the lizard, to differentiate it from the branch.

The lizard was facing away from me. It seemed to be looking off into the distance. It was the kind of lizard, known as Oona in Tamil, that has what looks like a crown on its head. As I watched it, I wondered, "What is it watching? What is it looking for?" The lizard's stillness, and what seemed to me to be its sense of concentration, surprised me. And just by watching it, I joined, I assimilated and entered into, that same state.

After some moments, I looked away, and so left the lizard and its state of being. I was glad that this lizard had appeared to me, and that my consciousness had, to some extent, been able to partake of its state of being. The lizard's appearance made me feel that perhaps I belonged in this place.

I was standing on the side of a country road, waiting for a bus. Leafy trees abounded on both sides of the paved road. I had just visited the village of Vellambi, in the far south of south India's Western Ghats mountain range. I had met people who live in the village, including Velmurugan, and his mother, Rajammal, and they had invited me to return. I was searching for a village for my fieldwork, and in time I would indeed choose their place. Vellambi would be my fieldwork base for 21 months.

Perception of a thing can lead to identification with, and imitation of, that thing. This is what I experienced with this lizard, and it is also one of the processes I observed in relation to children's songs/chants/dances/games, language learning, and videoconferencing, in the course of the research project reported upon in this dissertation. The lizard's state, to my perception, was absolutely still, and that was where I joined it. The balance of this dissertation is mostly about people joining each other in movement and sound, and indeed it is especially through movement and sound that humans teach and learn with each other. But when it comes to beings being together, the essential question is not whether there is movement or stillness, sound or silence: the essential question is whether or not the beings come to share a common state.

This dissertation introduces *ethnographic videoconferencing*. To make this introduction, a case study is presented, which serves as a test case. I needed rich content for this test case. I chose verbal arts because I have loved various forms of storytelling and theater from childhood, having been born into an raised by an arts family in midtown Manhattan, New York City. I chose Folklore as an academic discipline because it provides such excellent approaches for studying the verbal arts of traditional cultures. I chose children's songs/chants/dances/games in part because this was one of the few genres of verbal arts that my rudimentary Tamil language ability would allow me to follow and document properly. Also, children's songs/chants/dances/games serve as a wonderful gateway and introduction to the language, verbal arts, and other aspects of a culture. I chose India because it was on the other side of the globe and features mountainous forest-jungles with oceans nearby, and because it has such rich living traditions of so many types of verbal arts. I chose south India because it is a tropical environment and culture, and because traces of matriarchy exist here (the tropics and matriarchy both being long-term interests of mine). I choose Tamil Nadu because of the story of Kannagi, which gives so much respect to the dignity and power of the individual, and to justice (Kannagi's story is told on pp. 69-70). I chose a tribal culture because I wanted to be in the midst of wilderness, away as far as possible from urban centers and mass media. It is in wilderness that much of humanity's quickly-dwindling resources of the forms and contents of traditional verbal arts still live. Perhaps I gravitated towards a tribal culture for

this test case because tribal people tend to have such rich cultures, so related to wondrous nature -- and I seem, in both my academic and creative work, to be drawn to juxtaposing aspects of nature and modernity.

Ethnographic videoconferencing is very related to artistic videoconferencing: artistic performances can be included in each type of event, although for slightly different purposes. I self-identify as both a practitioner of ethnographic videoconferencing, and as a videoconference artist. As a videoconference artist, I participate in videoconference events that are simply artistic events (including theatre, dance, music, and painting), and do not necessarily depend on particular age groups, or traditional genres and communities, for content.

### B) Overview of the Research Project.

The research project upon which this dissertation is based brought together via videoconference two Tamil groups with whom I had been physically-present for extended periods. The videoconferences provided opportunities for demonstrations and discussions of (primarily Tamil) children's verbal arts and language learning.

During my three years (1999-2001) of Ph.D. coursework at the University of Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia, I occasionally attended -- as a volunteer teacher, and also as a student -- the Sunday morning Tamil language and culture classes of a local Tamil association (the Tamil Association of the Greater Delaware Valley). These classes were primarily for children of Tamil people who had emigrated to the USA and had settled in a section of the Philadelphia area.

Then, in India, in a forest area (the southern end of the Western Ghats mountain range) in Tamil Nadu's Kanyakumari district, I engaged in 21 months (March 2003 to December 2004) of ethnographic fieldwork with Tamil people there. These people happened to be members of the Kani community; the Kani are classified as tribal people. Among the Kani people, I observed children's songs/chants/dances/games, with an eye toward how playing such activities might assist in teaching and learning spoken language (these Kani people speak a dialect of Tamil which features many Malayalam words).

Following this fieldwork, I helped to organize two videoconferences. Actually, the first of these videoconferences occurred two months before the end of the fieldwork period (October 2004); and the second occurred ten months after the end of the fieldwork period (October 2005). These two events temporarily brought together the two, very different, Tamil groups that I had come to know. For these events, the Tamil people in the Philadelphia area came to a

videoconference room at the University of Pennsylvania; and the Tamil people in Tamil Nadu (accompanied by me) came to a similar room in Chennai, the state capital.

Among the purposes of these two events were: 1) To share data from the fieldwork area; and 2) to facilitate a cultural exchange between children in the two groups. In this dissertation, these videoconferences are being called instances of ethnographic videoconferencing. Ethnographic videoconferencing is conceived of as a development in the evolution of ethnographic use of technology, especially growing out of ethnographic photography, and ethnographic film and video. The 2004 and 2005 Chennai-Philadelphia videoconferences, as well as being educational and cultural experiences, were also artistic experiences for all involved, as together we were creating -- through our body movements and sounds, and camera and mixing decisions -- the combined audio and video that we were each seeing and hearing, and were also sending out as a live webcast.

Finally, as an addendum to the dissertation-project proper, I and some Tamil children participated -- again from a videoconference room in Chennai, and relating to the same subject matter -- in segments of two international university-based, 12-hour videoconferences, called Megaconferences. I did this with children in Chennai who live in beachside sea-fishing communities, near which

I was staying. These Tamil children knew versions of some of the same songs/chants/dances/games that the Tamil children in the mountain area knew.

The first of these Megaconference events (on 1 December 2005) involved a two-way, 25-minute videoconference segment with students and teachers at a school in Pennsylvania (USA). The second event (on 18 May 2006) involved a four-way, 25-minute videoconference segment with students and teachers at three schools: we in Chennai were joined by children (and others) in schools in Pennsylvania (USA), Minnesota (USA), and Omagh, Northern Ireland. In the course of this event, children at these other sites performed some songs/chants/dances/games similar to those of the Tamil children. It was while preparing for this May 2006 videoconference that I produced a final formulation of the play-based language exercise routines that are among the fruits of this research project (please see pp. 393-408).

### C) The Project's Research Questions.

This research project can be thought of as having been composed of two components: 1) the study of children's songs/chants/dances/games in relation to language learning; and 2) the post-fieldwork ethnographic videoconferences.



In regard to the research project's first element (play and language): I began the fieldwork with the hypothesis that the playing of children's songs/chants/dances/games might facilitate the learning of spoken language and aspects of taken-for-granted social behavior. Thus, the primary research question here was: In what ways might the playing of children's songs/chants/dances/games facilitate such learning? As mentioned above -- regarding languages other than my mother tongue, English -- I have throughout my life been an especially slow language learner. Thus, a motivation driving this project has been to discover, and help to construct, methods of language learning that might be helpful to me as a language learner.

In regard to the research project's second element (videoconferencing): The research questions here included: 1) What did conducting these social-technological experiments involve? 2) What is "ethnographic videoconferencing," and what needs does it fulfill? 3) What are some successful methods in a videoconference of facilitating communication in general, and of teaching and learning language in particular?

## D) How The Project Came to Be.

### 1) My Background

This research project began quite some time ago.

I grew up in New York City, raised by parents involved with the arts. In my teen years, I developed an interest in theater, and developing from that, storytelling. As a New York University B.A. and M.A. student, I did Independent Studies with professional storyteller Laura Simms. During those years (the 1980s and 1990s), I also periodically did office and video work for Ms. Simms. Children's songs/chants/dances/games can perhaps just barely be considered a part of the field of storytelling, if the term, storytelling, is defined in a very broad manner, such as *the relating of a series of events*. (A narrow academic definition of storytelling is, the "prose" -- that is, the relatively unstylized -- telling of folktales.) While I have been involved for many years with the study of the general field of storytelling and feel at home in it, when I began this research project I was relatively-speaking a novice in the study of children's songs/chants/dances/games. In taking up this field of study, I was following the example of Roger Abrahams, who in the early part of his academic career extensively collected and wrote about children's play activities (1962, 1963a, 1963b, 1966).

It was as a teenager that I first experienced the urge to explore a culture somewhere on the other side of the world, preferably in or near a jungle. During my college years, I settled on India, due to the richness of the forms and contents of its storytelling traditions. While attending Oberlin College in Ohio, I spent a summer on the Kentucky farm of David Buck, an Oberlin graduate who translates Tamil poetry. As I worked on the farm, I began to study Tamil language and culture. I read the Tamil story, *Silappathikaram (The Epic of the Anklet)*, in English translation.<sup>1</sup> This is a central story of the Tamil people.

Thereafter, back in New York City, I occasionally attended the Saturday morning Tamil language and culture classes at the Bowne Street Temple in Queens. These classes were primarily attended by children of Tamil people who had emigrated to the USA. I also gave some presentations relating to Tamil culture at functions of the New York Tamil Sangam.<sup>2</sup>

In the course of my M.A. studies, I visited Tamil Nadu for the first time in 1988. My studies at this time centered on *Silappathikaram (The Epic of the Anklet)*. As a method of conducting research about the story, in 1989 I walked in the footsteps of Kannagi, the story's heroine, following the route she is said to have

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<sup>1</sup> The first translation I read was the one by Alain Danielou, which is splendidly poetic. A more prosaic translation is by R. Parthasarathy. The story of *Silappathikaram* is told and discussed on pp. 69-70 of this dissertation.

<sup>2</sup> Sangam is a Tamil word, literally meaning, an assembly of poets. However, it has come to refer to assemblies of Tamil people in general.

taken approximately 1,400 years ago: from Poompuhar on the East Coast, to the central city of Madurai, a distance of approximately 160 miles. Even with my basic Tamil language ability, along the route I was able to interview many people about the story. In Chennai in 1991, I self-published a booklet, which was in essence a travel journal, about this walk: “Tamil Nadu’s *Silappathikaram (The Epic of the Anklet): Ancient Story and Modern Identity.*”<sup>1</sup> In 2002, 13 years after completing the first half of the walk, I completed the Kannagi Walk, walking westward from Madurai to my fieldwork site in the Western Ghats mountains, an additional approximately 140 miles.<sup>2</sup> I did this Madurai-to-the-mountains walk in part as a prelude to the fieldwork described in this dissertation.

During my second visit to Tamil Nadu (in 1991), I became aware of a wonderful Tamil storyteller in Chennai, the capital of Tamil Nadu: Subbu Arumugam, a practitioner of *Villupattu (Bow Song)*, a professional folk genre of performance and ritual which can be classified as epic-chanting. I immediately recognized in Subbu a great storyteller -- and in *Villupattu*, a great storytelling tradition -- even though I could not follow very much of his often very rapid in-performance speech.

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<sup>1</sup> The one-thousand copies of “Tamil Nadu’s *Silappathikaram (Epic of the Anklet): Ancient Story and Modern Identity*” that were printed in Chennai in 1991 are long gone, but the text remains accessible, at <http://www.storytellingandvideoconferencing.com/18.html> .

<sup>2</sup> There are numerous points of view regarding exactly where Kannagi went in the Western Ghats mountains. Thus, I refer to the entire Western Mountain Range in Tamil Nadu as the Kannagi Mountains.

Throughout much of the 1980s and 1990s, I lived in Lower Manhattan and worked as a video professional there. Performing artists would hire me and my video business partner to videotape their plays, dance performances, etc. We often did this work with a single camera, in the course of an actual performance, with audience members present. This was before the time of camcorders. In those days, the video camera and the recorder were two separate items, connected by a cable, and were much heavier and bulkier than similar equipment is today. In any event, I brought to my Ph.D. process a good deal of professional experience in documentary video.

As I am also a writer, director, and performer, during those years I also staged a number of storytelling, theater, and performance art events, some of which involved the onstage use of video and computer equipment, and the electronic imagery this technology can create (Miller 2003).

In the late 1990s, I began to teach, first at St. John's U., and then at Fordham U. (both in NYC). Among the courses I taught were *Expository Writing*, *Writing about Literature*, *The Modern Short Story*, *American Drama*, and *Introduction to Speech Communication*. It was also around this time that I began a Ph.D. The Ph.D. program I entered was in Folklore, at the University of Pennsylvania (which we fondly refer to as "Penn"), in nearby Philadelphia. During my three years of

coursework, I had a dorm room on the Penn campus, although I also maintained a home in NYC.

When I began at Penn, I was planning to do my dissertation about Subbu Arumugam and *Villupattu*. However, I eventually realized that my Tamil language ability would not yet be sufficient for this task, so I determined to dedicate my Ph.D. work in part to improving my Tamil language ability. I realized that one way that I could do this and still work with verbal arts would be to conduct research regarding children's songs/chants/dances/games. In this way, I felt -- accurately as it turned out -- that I would be able to engage in the process of learning the spoken language alongside children who were playing songs and games as they were also learning the language. I also felt that to understand Tamil culture from its roots -- and to find the most vibrant traditional verbal arts practices -- I should conduct this research in the countryside. Thus, I choose to go as far away as possible from the urban centre of Chennai for the fieldwork. (Chapter III provides further discussion about my fieldwork village and population.)

I feel very much at home in the field of videoconferencing. A videoconference is a communication event in which the participants can send-and-receive audio-and-video to-and-from each other. My interest in videoconferencing has grown organically out of my lifelong interests in and love of theater, storytelling, and

community discussion. To me, a videoconference is simply an extended meeting, a multi-site meeting, whether for artistic, rational-critical (as Habermas would call it), or other types of communication. Beginning in the early 1990s, in New York City, I began to work with videoconferencing as a medium for both multi-site meetings and multi-site performances -- in relation to entities of New York University and the American Museum of Natural History, and independently.

Thus, by the late 1990s, even before enrolling at Penn in Philadelphia, in NYC I had helped to facilitate numerous videoconferences, some utilizing gadgets that enabled videoconferencing over regular telephone lines, and some utilizing more elaborate equipment and connections. In the course of earning my M.A. at NYU's Gallatin School of Individualized Study, I took courses in the Interactive Telecommunications Program of NYU, in the School of the Arts; while at ITP I studied and practiced videoconferencing. During this time I also participated in videoconferences as a member of NYU's Interactive Performance Group.

Once at Penn, I founded and led the *Graduate Student Videoconference Series*,

which produced four events in 2000-1, and two events in 2001-2.<sup>1</sup> In the course of my Ph.D. coursework, I took a number of courses at Penn's School for Communication. Although I did not find professors who were academic experts in videoconferencing at NYU or at Penn, both universities provided wonderfully stimulating environments within which I could study, conduct experiments in, and write about videoconferencing. At Penn, I worked part-time for Dr. Jay Treat, the School of Arts and Sciences' Director of Instructional Computing. One of my duties in this position was to assist Penn professors with their videoconferences, and I learned a great deal on the job. Thus, my two self-designed end-of-fieldwork videoconferences provided opportunities for me to apply and extend the

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<sup>1</sup> *Graduate Student Videoconference Series* (based at Penn):

2000-1 season:

- 1) "The 1970s: A discussion of the fluid epistemological building code, the cultural DNA, underlying the construction of much of the epoch's phenomena," distant presenter: Prof. Stephen Paul Miller, St. John's U. (Staten Island, NY, campus), 3 November 2000.
- 2) "Liveness in mediated performance," distant moderator: Prof. Toni Sant, Performance Studies Dept., NYU, 1 December 2000. (*Continued.*)
- 3) "Roles of listener-sponsors in the Pacifica radio network," distant moderator: Adrienne Lauby (North Bay for KPFA), at San Francisco City College, 19 April 2001.
- 4) "Virtual performance and archiving," distant moderator: Prof. Toni Sant, Performance Studies Dept., NYU, 20 April 2001.

2001-2 season: Videoconferencing with members of Aboriginal Peoples:

- 1) "A discussion of culture old and new, with Warlpiri people of Yuendumu," distant moderator, Robin Japanangka Granites (Tanami Videoconferencing Network, and Warlpiri Media Association), Yuendumu, Northern Territories, Australia, 2 March 2002.
- 2) "Domestic Violence in Indigenous Communities," distant moderator, Margaret Haylock (Women's Justice Network), Brisbane, Australia, 16 April 2002.



videoconferencing theory and methodology that I had been developing for a number of years.

From the very beginning of my involvement with videoconferencing, I as a director developed a particular format for videoconferencing, in which all parties see the same screen-configuration. This single-screen mix (which is discussed in Chapter VI) makes it possible to record, and/or to send out as a webcast, a representation of the complete audio-video relationship that the videoconference partners are having.

As the above might imply, it is natural to me to be a designer and director, as well as a scholar, of videoconferencing. The two post-fieldwork videoconferences were technological-sociological experiments that I designed and conducted in order to generate data for analysis in this dissertation.

## 2) What I Learned at Penn Folklore.

A primary function of this Introduction is to discuss the theoretical frameworks and approaches of this dissertation, and below I begin doing so in earnest.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a major paradigm shift in the perception of communication swept the academic world (Carey, 1989; Fiske, 1982; Meyerhoff, 2006). Previously, communication had largely been seen as the sending of a message from a sender to one or more receivers: this was known as the *transmission* model (Chandler, 1995). This is the paradigm of print and television, and of mass communication in general. The new paradigm, which was known as the *constructionist* model, held that communication involves a relationship, and that the communication act is not complete until the receiving party acknowledges to the sender that he or she (the receiver) has received something, and gives some indication to the sender regarding how he or she feels or thinks about what has been received. In this paradigm, the sender and receiver are engaged in an ongoing feedback loop (Gruba and Lynch, 1997).

One aspect of the new paradigm was what has come to be known as the *Socio-linguistic Moment*. This intellectual movement -- which was composed of developments in a number of disciplines, including Linguistics, Anthropology, Folklore, Sociology, and Education -- called for scholars to pay attention to how people actually communicate, rather than to continue to focus on abstract, idealized models of how they should or could communicate. It happens that Penn was a leading site at which the *Socio-linguistic Moment* occurred. Among the contributors to the phenomenon were Erving Goffman (Sociology), William

Labov (Linguistics), and Dell Hymes (Folklore, Anthropology, and Education) and numerous other members of Penn Folklore.

A core of this dissertation is the application of aspects of the scholarship that composed the *Socio-linguistic Moment* -- such theoretical frameworks as *Conversation Analysis*, *Interaction Analysis* (especially as developed by Erving Goffman), and the *Performance-centered approach to folklore* -- to electronically-mediated communication, specifically interactive telecommunication, and most specifically videoconferencing. Two goals of this application are: to analyze the back-and-forth interaction in videoconferences, and to design videoconferences so as to enable fluid and comfortable back-and-forth interaction.

One important offspring of the *Socio-linguistic Moment* that informs this dissertation is the field of *Language Socialization* (Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986a; Garrett and Baquedano-Lopez, 2002). *Language Socialization* concerns how children are socialized to use language; and how children are acculturated into society -- that is, how taken-for-granted social behavior is taught to children through language.

The dissertation also attempts to apply to electronic expression, communication, and display, the concepts of festival, festiveness, and festivity that have been developed in the disciplines of Folklore and Anthropology (Abrahams and

Bauman, 1978; Falassi, 1987; Turner, 1982). It seems to me that there is something inherently festive about electronic communication, and perhaps about electricity itself.

I arrived at Penn Folklore with a relatively unsophisticated appreciation of storytelling. At Penn Folklore I was exposed to the study of numerous genres of verbal arts to which I had previously given little thought. Having arrived with my mind especially on epic-chanting, my interests expanded towards cultural grass roots activities, towards women's and children's verbal arts, such as women's laments and children's songs/chants/dances/games. I was also exposed to an intellectual apparatus for perceiving verbal arts events: the *Performance-centered approach to folklore*.

The *Performance-centered approach to folklore* began to emerge in the 1960s, and crystallized in the 1970s. The existing approach to storytelling had been focused on the stories themselves, viewing them as items to be collected, analyzed, and classified. The *Performance-centered approach* questioned the basic tenets of text-centered folklore research, for it relativized text, declaring that words are only one part of a storytelling event. "The verbal text was now recognized as only a partial record of a larger aesthetic transaction" (Fine 1984, p. 10). The *Performance-centered approach* claimed that verbal art is best understood as something that occurs as a dynamic communicative event (Ben-

Amos, 1972). A genre of verbal art is here seen as being produced in and by a particular social situation, and type of relationship. In addition to the words and the storyline, now every other conceivable aspect of the performer's vocal and physical presentation needed to be considered (including the performer's voice's tone, pitch, rhythm, and pacing; and body language), as well as his/her interactions with audience members, and audience members' interactions with each other (Abrahams 1977; Arewa and Dundes 1964; Bauman 1977; Ben-Amos and Goldstein 1975; Dundes 1964; Georges 1969; Goldstein 1964; Paredes and Bauman 1972).

The *Performance-centered approach to folklore* -- which has been a primary Penn Folklore perspective -- has influenced all of academia to pay more attention to the give-and-take nature of communication. Similarly to the way in which the *Performance-centered approach to folklore* brings out the conversational and process nature of folklore activity, in ethnographic videoconferencing data collection is also a conversation, a social process. It is not a coincidence that ethnographic videoconferencing has been conceived of in the Penn Folklore environment, following 40 years of Penn Folklore thinking.

This dissertation applies a number of the threads of Penn Folklore in addition to the *Performance-centered approach to folklore* (Dan Ben-Amos, Roger Abrahams), including applications of recording technology (Kenny Goldstein), the

study of play (Roger Abrahams, Brian Sutton-Smith, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Anna Beresin), and the *Ethnography of Speaking* (Dell Hymes).

As is discussed in Chapters IV and V, three elements that I found in the children's songs/chants/dances/games that I collected that I posit are helpful for language learning are: 1) repetition with variation; 2) the simultaneous saying and physical-enacting of words; and 3) question-and-answer routines.

According to Roman Jakobson, the first of these elements -- repetition with variation -- is one of the primary components of verbal arts (he uses the term, *parallelism*, to refer to this type of practice) (1960, 1966, 1968). The study of verbal arts in everyday language (Abrahams, 2005; Bauman and Briggs, 1990) is part of the field of the *Ethnography of Speaking* (also known as, *Ways of Speaking*) (Hymes, 1962) -- which is a subset of the *Ethnography of Communication* (Gumperz and Hymes, 1972), which in turn is a subset of the afore-mentioned *Socio-linguistic Moment*.

The study of the second of these elements -- the simultaneous saying and physical-enacting of words -- is also an aspect of the *Sociolinguistic Moment*. Prior to the 60s, very little academic attention was paid to the physical behavior of speakers. The presence of two physicality-oriented pioneering scholars on the Penn campus stimulated thought about the body in communication. These

scholars were Ray Birdwhistell, who studied *kinesics* (the study of body motion patterns in communication) (1970), and Adam Kendon, who studies gesture (1983). These two thinkers have deeply influenced Penn Folklore, although neither were based in the Folklore Dept.: Birdwhistell was in Penn's Communication School, and Kendon is an independent researcher who has worked with various scholars and entities at Penn.

The third of these elements, question-and-answer routines, is studied in numerous sociolinguistic fields, including *Conversation Analysis* (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, 1974). My discovery of *Conversation Analysis* was one of the great joys of my Penn Folklore graduate student experience. Delving into *Conversation Analysis* has raised my awareness of the ways participants in conversations often speak at the same time, complete each other's sentences, and are often in the process of "galumphing" -- losing balance and regaining it as they transgress, repair, and negotiate conversational procedures.<sup>1</sup> *Conversation Analysis* has also led me to think about how conversational participants alternate in the speaker's role, and, regardless of who might be speaking at the moment, the way participants in a conversation are constantly giving feedback to each

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<sup>1</sup> The word, "galumphing" -- a blend of "galloping" and "triumphantly" -- was coined by Lewis Carroll, who used it in his nonsense poem, *Jabberwocky*. "Galumph" sounds a bit like "harrumph" (an expression of disdain, disbelief, protest, or dismissal; a huff, grunt, or snort), and seems to imply degrees of exuberance, playfulness, and awkwardness.

other (through body posture and positioning, facial expressions, non-verbal sounds, etc.).

I have found that I truly love the back-and-forth of conversation. This back-and-forth-ness is a primary thing I love about storytelling. I am sure that one reason I gravitated towards the study of children's songs/chants/dances/games is that these activities often tend to involve back-and-forth communication between participants. In my study and development of language learning techniques, I have focused on back-and-forth activities.

In the classroom, both as student and professor, I do my best to facilitate conversation. I tend to feel that if someone is talking for more than ten minutes without eliciting comments and questions from others, an opportunity for active learning by the listeners is being lost. Thus, this dissertation is finally largely about the study and promotion of give-and-take, back-and-forth exchanges in communication in general, and more specifically, in children's songs/chants/dances/games, in language learning, and in videoconferencing.

I was well-prepared to absorb the *Performance-centered approach to folklore* when I arrived at Penn Folklore, for, as mentioned above, I had originally learned about storytelling from Laura Simms, who similarly stresses above all the interactive nature of the storytelling event -- how the teller needs to also always



be a listener, to the audience members, as well as to the weather and whatever else might be in the environment.

Regarding videoconferencing, Roger Abrahams challenged me to enable videoconferencing situations that can be just as chaotic, multi-textured, flexible, and spontaneous as meetings between those physically-present. The order of the day: videoconference environments in which people can break and play with the rules of proper conversation, just as they can in physically-present conversations. He also advised against people's images always being reduced -- both in the sense of size, and in the sense of seemingly being trapped, plastered on two-dimensional screens. This latter point encouraged me to utilize full body images moving three-dimensionally in videoconferences.

Roger Abrahams, Dan Ben-Amos, and other Folklore scholars of their generation came of age during the 1960s, which was for many a period of rebellion against television and other forms of mass media. It seems that Folklore scholars of this generation often tend to see television as a great enemy of folklore. I share the resentment against one-way mediums such as television, but what set me apart at Penn Folklore was that I arrived with a fervent belief that videoconferencing provides an antidote to the passive and thus de-humanizing aspects of television; that videoconferencing presents an opportunity for (synchronous electronically-mediated) conversational self- and community expression.

My sense is that from the moment I raised the subject of videoconferencing in the Penn Folklore environment, Roger Abrahams and Dan Ben-Amos saw in the medium the potential for the group interaction upon which Penn Folklore's perception of folk activity is based. From the moment I learned of it (in 1998), I have felt that Dan Ben-Amos' definition of folklore as "artistic communication in small groups" (1972) was made-to-order to apply to videoconferencing. However, it may be that the primary reason I was accepted as a doctoral student at Penn Folklore was that it was clear that I was imbued with a great love for a particular traditional culture (Tamil Nadu), and for verbal arts in general.

Before embarking on my Ph.D. career, I had already lived in Tamil Nadu, and had already discovered there what can be called an epic-chanting tradition (*Villupattu*). My intellectual development at Penn included my taking a directed reading with Roger Abrahams about the performance of epic. This brought women's lament practices to my attention, as I discovered the body of literature and thought that posits that epic to some extent consists of men's, and the state's, appropriation and transformation of elements of women's lament practices (Holst-Warhaft 1992, p. 10; Miller 2001; Weinbaum 2001, p. 28). Later, when children's songs/chants/dances/games came to my attention, I realized that much culture is based on the aesthetic patterns people first learn in such play.

Another component of my Penn Folklore experience involved my discovery of the academic field, *Indigenous Media*, which can be said to have come into existence with the publication of *Through Navajo Eyes: An Exploration in Film Communication and Anthropology* (Worth and Adair, 1972). One of the leaders of this project, Sol Worth, taught at Penn's Communication School throughout much of the 1960s and 1970s, and was an early developer of the field of *Visual Anthropology* (please see pp. 432-3). The *Through Navajo Eyes* project sought to determine how aspects of traditional Navajo culture might be expressed in filmmaking by Navajo individuals. *Indigenous Media* considers what happens when indigenous people themselves use media to record and transmit. In this tradition, Eric Michaels' subsequent work with Warlpiri and other aboriginal people of Australia, is a major element of the background of this dissertation (Michaels, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1991a, 1991b, 1994). (Please see the section on *Indigenous Media* in Chapter VI of the current work, pp. 423-7.)

It was members of the Warlpiri people who, led by Robin Japanangka Granites and others, in 1992 formed the Tanami Network, the world's first tribal-based global videoconferencing network (Hodges 1996; Hinkson 1999, 2002; Young 1995). I and others at Penn held a videoconference with members of this group, as part of the 2001-2 *Graduate Student Videoconference Series*. This was before my fieldwork with Kani tribal people in south India: Robin's call for tribal people around the world to join the Tanami Videoconferencing Network

encouraged me to help to involve south Indian tribal people in videoconferencing. An important component of this dissertation involves the question of how the two post-fieldwork Chennai-Philadelphia videoconferences I facilitated affected the south Indian tribal people who participated in these events: and also how these people shaped these videoconferences (both topics are discussed in Chapter VI).

In introducing and exploring the term, ethnographic videoconferencing, this dissertation extends the concepts of ethnographic photography, and ethnographic film and video, to the realm of interactive telecommunication. In the 1999-2000 academic year, I curated a series of ethnographic films and videos at Penn. I did this to familiarize myself with the traditions of ethnographic film and video, as a preparation for developing ethnographic videoconferencing.

The dissertation touches upon the concept of *living museums* (museums in which objects and practices that are used in everyday life are demonstrated for and explained to visitors) (Reeves 1998) -- with videoconferencing suggested as a centerpiece of such museums. The community cultural development model that is presented is in a *business and arts* mode. The model includes cultural tourism, and stresses the need for interested community members to receive training for, and be employed in, management positions in such ventures. Working on this research project has involved looking closely at the ethnographer's role in the fieldwork situation, and acknowledging not only that she or he affects the people

and cultures under study, but that the work of ethnography is a creative collaboration by the visiting scholar and the people of the culture under study (Clifford and Marcus, 1986).

In its consideration of public spheres, the dissertation is guided by Jurgen Habermas' *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962). Emile Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) has helped to frame the dissertation's discussion of communication technology as ritual apparatus which enables members of communities to come into contact with each other and celebrate their ideals. This in turn has led to the dissertation's discussion of *teletopia* (a kind of utopia), a concept pointed to by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's *Phenomenon of Man* (1965).

In the course of discussing how verbal play might be involved with the language acquisition process, the dissertation considers numerous possible functions of play, focusing on Brian Sutton-Smith's theory of *adaptive potentiation*, which points out that play gives children practice in mental flexibility (Sutton-Smith, 1997). My fieldwork experience has prompted me to extend Roman Jakobson's claim that repetition with variation is a key aspect of verbal arts, to posit that such repetition can also be a key element of the language acquisition process (Jakobson, 1960).

To return to the subject of Penn Folklore:

My years at Penn Folklore have coincided with much discussion -- both at Penn, and also through the American Folklore Society -- regarding the state of Folklore Studies at Penn and in academia in general. As this discussion has formed a major backdrop of my Ph.D. career, this Introduction would not be complete without some discussion of the current state of Penn Folklore, and the questions, "Why has Penn Folklore fallen on difficult times?," and "How can the discipline of Folklore succeed in universities in general?"

The history of Penn Folklore could well be a dissertation unto itself. Already one article about the formation of Penn Folklore has been published (Rosina Miller 2005). Here I focus on what has happened from Penn Folklore's highpoint in the late 1970s, when there were approximately 12 professors in the Folklore Dept., to the present. Ever since the late 1970s, when professors have shifted to other universities, retired, or passed away, the tendency of the University has been to not replace them. Penn Folklore was reduced to a Program in 1999 (which meant that the professors needed to be based in other disciplines' Departments). The admission of new Ph.D. students was stopped in 2004. The Center for Folklore and Ethnography, which was founded as an attachment to Penn Folklore in 1999, was closed in 2007. It seems that Penn Folklore could be a single generation phenomena. Roger Abrahams was one of the founders of

Penn Folklore, and Dan Ben-Amos has also been on the scene from the 1960s onward: it seems that these two gentlemen might be two of the final professors of the current incarnation of Penn Folklore.

Numberous factors have led to the current state of affairs. To begin with, Folklore is often perceived as a hybrid (Literature, Anthropology, etc.) and fringe discipline. The Humanities in general have been downsized in the past twenty years, and small disciplines have suffered most. There has been a growing sense that, for those who will not be professional scholars, education should be practical and should lead directly to professional employment. Penn Folklore has been slow to include professional applications of Folklore Studies in its curriculum. For example, there has been little academic study of and training in public, vocational, and professional applications of Folklore studies -- despite the fact that so many Ph.D. graduates of Penn Folklore have gone on to careers in public folklore organizations, including those that involve museums and festivals.

There has also been a dwindling of Folklore's traditional subject matter. While folk practices of communication, of culture creation and development, continue to thrive wherever people live, the performance of many genres of traditional folklore -- such as the singing of ballads, and the telling of folktales -- is growing thinner in the present-day world. The northeast USA is one of the most quickly-developing regions of the world: thus, here especially, there has been a

diminishing of traditional folklore to study. The folklore of immigrant groups is available for study: but such folklore tends to be very self-conscious, and is once removed from how it was practiced in its original context.

The USA Folk Music scene reached its high point in the 1960s and 1970s. The study and performance of this and other contemporary music scenes were important parts of what made Penn Folklore an exciting place. Roger Abrahams, for example, in addition to his fieldwork with African-American cultures, also studied the ballad-singing of white people in the Appalachian Mountains, and he himself was a singer in this tradition, performing and giving lectures at Folk Music festivals throughout much of the 1960s. As the revival of Folk Music has diminished, so has Penn Folklore. A major figure of Penn Folklore, Kenneth Goldstein, was a music producer who produced numerous recordings of African-American blues singers: blues music has also been less prominent in recent years, giving way to new genres such as rap.

In recent years, Penn Folklore professors and students have been doing less work with performance and performers, and more with belief systems and written texts. This has moved Penn Folklore away from its roots. Another factor in Penn Folklore's dwindling may have been, for some time, a certain cautiousness of some Folklore professors to include new types of folklore in their field, such as



types of popular culture. Such exclusionary practices may also have contributed to the rise of Cultural Studies.

It may be that, living in the shadow of the *Performance-centered approach to folklore*, some subsequent generations of students may have found it difficult to modify or build upon this approach, or to develop new approaches. And yet, I recall Roger Abrahams saying in class one day that he believed the best work in Folklore was yet to be done.

Perhaps related to its emphasis on international students and subject matter, and on Folklore theory, Penn Folklore came to lose more and more of its connections with local communities. These losses could have been countered by reaching out more to folk communities, on and off campus. But for too long, Penn Folklore did very little interacting with local individuals or groups. For example, there has been very little involvement with Penn's African-American neighbors. During the years around 2000, Penn Theater Dept. faculty member Dr. William Yalowitz worked with members of a nearby African-American community on a play about how some community members had been evicted and relocated some years before: Penn Folklore was not involved.

Penn Folklore Program faculty member Dr. Mary Hufford has in recent years done her very best to reach out to, and forge relationships with, scholars and

students in other disciplines, especially around the concept of ethnography, especially in relation to immigrant communities. In 2005 and 2006, a course relating to Liberian emigrants was taught -- first by Folklore graduate student Meltem Turkoz, then by Mary Hufford. And in 2007, Mary Hufford co-taught courses with Center for Folklore and Ethnography affiliate Dr. Yoonhee Kang that have involved studying and working with Indonesian residents of the Philadelphia area.

The relationship with the School of Education has dwindled, especially after Kenny Goldstein died, and Fred Erickson left the School of Education. The very interesting practice of using ethnography to help shape and enrich peoples' education processes (Ghose 2007) has not occurred very much at Penn Folklore in recent years. In the 1970s and 1980s, Roger Abrahams crusaded for the implementation of Folklore perspectives in the elementary school classroom, particularly in relation to African-American dialects being learned and used by teachers. By the time I arrived on the scene, however, he had seemingly withdrawn from such activism, perhaps having become discouraged about interacting with educational bureaucracies.

To the best of my knowledge, there has been no relationship with Penn's Wharton Business School, whose students most certainly would be interested

collaborating on such projects as marketing folk crafts, and developing cultural tourism.

Dan Ben-Amos has throughout his career stressed that Folklore scholars should concentrate on “pure” research -- that is, they should: 1) affect the people under study as little as possible; 2) not apply what is gathered to projects in education, theater, business or any other discipline; and 3) not seek to facilitate public presentations of folklore. It must be remembered that many Folklorists of Dan Ben-Amos' generation are very aware of the abuses of folklore made by the Nazis of mid-twentieth century Germany, and that these scholars are determined to avoid any such further abuse. Dan Ben-Amos has also expressed the concern that public presentation of folklore can have a stultifying effect on the intellectual examination of the material, due to social pressure to avoid offending anyone.

However, the emphasis on unapplied academic research and analysis has limited the horizons of Penn Folklore. The University of Pennsylvania has, especially over the last decade, been making a concerted effort to search for ways to make its Humanities scholarship of practical and immediate use to the university and its neighboring communities. Penn Folklore could have done much more than it did to assist this effort. The University of Pennsylvania was founded by Benjamin Franklin, an eminently practical person who passionately and steadfastly believed in the application of analytical thinking to concrete

projects to improve everyday life for members of the public. He very much believed in entrepreneurial partnerships between researchers, business people, and providers of government services.

The founders of Penn Folklore did their initial fieldwork around the time that portable audio equipment first became available. Kenny Goldstein, was, as mentioned, a professional record producer. The leading faculty members of Penn Folklore were well-established -- and in some cases were past the stages in their careers when they were focusing on fieldwork -- by the time portable video recording equipment became available in the 1980s.

Thus, my introduction of videoconferencing to the Penn Folklore scene was, I believe, a bit of a shock. Although folk communities have been videoconferencing since at least 1992 (Hinkson 1999, 2002; Hodges 1996; Young 1995; and pp. 422 and 489 of the current work), and members of diaspora communities around the world have been videoconferencing over the Internet for years, videoconferencing is not yet a mature medium. Those who do not do it may have mixed feelings -- including admiration, disdain, and jealousy -- towards those who do. To develop videoconferencing in a Folklore scholarship context, to develop ethnographic videoconferencing, a Folklore scholar at times needs to participate in the videoconferences him or herself. An advantage of such participation is that one's interviewing techniques can then be studied closely,

especially if a recording is made. A disadvantage is that one may be open to accusations of self-promotion.

There was at Penn Folklore some resistance to considering electronically-mediated interactivity seriously -- as a means of collecting and discussing folklore, and also as a medium by which people might practice and develop their folk arts traditions. I often admitted that in many ways interactive telecommunication is not as "good" as physically-present interactivity: it is simply a different kind of interaction, and should not be seen as a replacement for physically-present communication. However, I feel I often ran into the sort of anti-electronic-mediation sentiment when it comes to culture that has been a trademark of many folklore scholars in recent years. This anti-electronic-mediation attitude -- in an age in which such communication is a rapidly-expanding way through which many people live their lives -- has helped to marginalize the discipline of Folklore. It would seem to be a much more fruitful approach to seek to discover how folklore is occurring through electronic-mediated communication, than to consider such communication to be beyond or inimical to the field.

Roger Abrahams' idea that culture is the *formulaic use of conventional units* of behavior, thought, and language -- like Alan Dundes' definition of folklore as the processing of any experience that people may have in common -- are approaches that do not involve dividing the population into the folk and the non-

folk. My own inclination is towards the relatively new discipline -- or interdisciplinary field -- of Storytelling Studies, which also is not based on class divisions. My work with videoconferencing falls within the discipline of Communication, in the subfield of Interactive Telecommunication. While I will always remain dearly fond of the discipline of Folklore, and will always be delighted and honored to be identified as a Folklorist, it does seem to me that the class baggage inherent to the term, folklore, is at times distracting from what I want to study, and from the ways I want to study it.

Alternatives to the term, "folklore," include "vernacular culture" and "ethnography" (the study of ethnic groups). These approaches can be taken up within such disciplines as Sociology, Anthropology, Cultural Studies, and Popular Culture Studies, as well as Folklore. One thing that Folklore, especially Penn Folklore, has had to offer has been the study of the ways that culture is collectively created and maintained. The *Performance-centered approach to folklore* stresses the collaborative, interactive, and participatory nature of culture, and of social events in particular. This view of culture is very rewarding, and I hope that it continues to be adopted by thinkers throughout academia, and beyond.

As possibly one of the final individuals to earn a Ph.D. from Penn Folklore, at least in its current incarnation, I greatly regret that I, to date, have not been able to do more to invigorate Penn Folklore. Among my meager achievements in this

area are that I got local Tamil emigrants involved to some extent, by hosting a Tamil storytelling event at Penn some years ago, and of course by inviting members of the Philadelphia-area Tamil community to attend and participate in the October 2004 and 2005 Chennai-Philadelphia videoconferences.

There has been talk about developing a Public Folklore M.A. program at Penn, with the help of the many Penn Folklore Ph.D. graduates who work in this field. It seems that Penn might continue its undergraduate Folklore major and/or minor. I certainly hope that Penn Folklore will revive and evolve at the University of Pennsylvania, but regardless, Penn Folklore has done a great deal of good in this world, and this contribution needs to be understood and acknowledged. Penn Folklore's current fallow state in no way indicates that its work has been of little value, or in vain. On the contrary, it may be that there is less of a need for Penn Folklore now because its message has been so well disseminated to other disciplines, and in many cases, adopted by those other disciplines. For example, the ideas of taking oral histories from people, seeking to understand the everyday experiences of people, and studying history and society from the bottom up, are approaches developed by Penn Folklore that are now commonplace in the discipline of History.

Penn Folklore is a state of mind -- a wonderful state of mind! And this is why this dissertation is in part dedicated to the people and thinking of Penn Folklore. A

major reason I have been looking forward to completing this dissertation and receiving a Ph.D. from Penn Folklore is that doing so would mean that I would be able to join a very exclusive club: the approximately 300 Penn Folklore Ph.D. graduates. Formally or informally, the members of this group might in the years might well collaborate in producing television series, developing a speakers' bureau, etc.

Today the American Folklore Society remains vital. It is a meeting place for folklorists in academia, and academically-trained public folklorists. While there is presently only one Folklore department in the USA (at Indiana University), and it seems that only this Department and Penn's Folklore Program can award Ph.D.s fully in Folklore, there are numerous Folklore Programs that can award Folklore M.A.s, and Folklore-related Ph.D.s.<sup>1</sup>

Here are five suggestions regarding how the discipline of Folklore can thrive in universities. In addition to continuing the discipline's classic approach -- extended physically-present ethnographic fieldwork with participant observation -- the discipline needs to

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<sup>1</sup> USA Folklore Programs include those at the University of California, Berkeley; University of Wisconsin; University of Missouri; University of North Carolina; and Utah State University. For a complete list, please see <http://cfs.osu.edu/resources/default.cfm> .



- 1) Utilize the latest technology for data-collection, data-sharing, and discussion. This may mean working with university audio-video and information technology people, and applying folklore communication processes to the design of interactive telecommunication.
- 2) Embrace Applied Folklore -- teach about it, and give training in it. (Applied Folklore involves collaborative approaches to subject matter, combining Folklore's perspectives with those of such disciplines as Anthropology, Education, Linguistics, Communication, Theater, History, Business, etc.)
- 3) Embrace Public Folklore -- teach about it, and give training in it. (Public Folklore involves presenting folklore to the public in contexts such as museums, tourism, and festivals featuring performances by folk artists.)
- 4) Take seriously Dan Ben-Amos' (1972) and Alan Dundes' (1978) reformist definitions of folklore: that folklore is artistic communication in small groups; and the processing of any common experience by any two or more people.
- 5) Make itself useful to the university and entities within it, and to the neighboring communities, by helping them to collect and present their own folklore. Every university project that involves neighboring communities could have Folklore participation.

#### E) Theoretical Approaches, and Areas of Scholarship.

The theoretical approaches, paradigms, and areas of scholarship, which animate this dissertation include the following. In this list, for each approach, founders and/or leaders of the approach may be named, and at least one seminal or review-of-the-field writing is referenced:

*The Performance-centered Approach to Folklore:* Roger Abrahams, Dan Ben-Amos, Americo Paredes, Richard Bauman (Bauman, 1977).

*Ethnography of Speaking:* Dell Hymes (Hymes, 1962).

*Socio-kinetics:* Ray Birdwhistell, Adam Kendon (Birdwhistell, 1970; Kendon, 1983).

*Play as Adaptive Potentiation:* Brian-Sutton Smith's idea that a major function of play is to practice and increase mental flexibility (1997).

*Language Acquisition through shaping one's inherent abilities:* Noam Chomsky's idea that the human mind has a built-in general sense of grammar, which he calls, a Universal Grammar (Chomsky, 1959).

*Language Socialization:* Bambi Schieffelin and Elinor Ochs (Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986a, 1986b; Garrett and Baquedano-Lopez, 2002).

*The Teaching-and-learning of Second Languages* (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

*Mirror Neurons:* the theory that when humans see movement, we tend to automatically enact that movement in our minds and bodies. This would be a

major way by which a child would learn correct ways to behave physically in play and generally as a member of a community. Giacomo Rizzolatti (Ramachandran, 2006).

*Conversation Analysis*: Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson (Goodwin and Heritage, 1990; Sidnell 2007).

*Multi-vocality*: Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (Bakhtin 1981).

*Interaction Analysis*: Erving Goffman (Goffman, 1959).

*Interactive Telecommunication*: Marshall McLuhan (McLuhan 1964).

*Interaction Analysis as applied to Interactive Telecommunication* (Baron, 2002 [concerning e-mail]; Humphreys, 2005 [concerning cellphones]; McMillan, 2002; Meyrowitz 1985).

*Community and Participatory Video* (Lunch and Lunch, 2006; White, 2003).

*Ethnographic Photography, Film, and Video* (Heider, 2006).

*Indigenous Media*: Sol Worth, Eric Michaels, and Faye Ginsberg (Ginsberg, 1992; Michaels, 1994; Worth and Adair, 1972).

*Advocate-activist-salvage-entrepreneurial Anthropology and Folklore*:

Daniel Mayberry-Lewis<sup>1</sup> (Hale, 2001).

*The Right to Communicate* (The MacBride Report, UNESCO, 1980).

*The Public Sphere*: Jurgen Habermas (Habermas, 1962).

*The Digital Divide* (Drori, 2007).

*Multi-sited Fieldwork*: George Marcus (Marcus, 1995).

*Diaspora Analysis*: Arjun Appadurai (Appadurai, 1990).

*The Interrelatedness of Linguistic, Cultural, and Biological Diversity*: Luisa Maffi (Maffi, 2005).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Mayberry-Lewis is the founder of a leading organization and journal in the field, *Cultural Survival*, <http://www.cs.org> .

<sup>2</sup> Luisa Maffi is the founder a leading organization in the field, *Terra Lingua*, <http://www.terralingua.org> .

Two ways that Folklorists and Anthropologists have approached digital media have been: 1) as a database in which material may be stored; and 2) as a means by which folk activities may be performed. An example of the first approach can be seen in this definition of hypermedia: “The production of ethnographic research in a new format which can combine the traditional technologies of text and image into a hybrid computer-based document” (Anderson 1999; also see Howard 1988). Actually, an evolution in the perception and use of documents, of texts, is occurring in general in the world today: from print, to multi-media, and finally, to texts that include links to, and thus provide access to, living authors and community-resource-persons with whom one may converse (in mediated or un-mediated fashions), perhaps for a fee. Thus, the function of writers and librarians is expanding to include helping researchers to communicate directly -- ultimately including via videoconference -- with interested individual scholars and community-resource-persons, and communities of same.

This dissertation focuses mostly on the second of the above-mentioned approaches: considering technology as a means by which folk activities may be performed. What this work is meant to point toward, and what it is largely motivated by, is the application of micro-behavioral approaches such as *Interaction Analysis* (as developed by Erving Goffman) and *Conversation Analysis* to the study and design of videoconference communication. Much scholarly work relating to interactive telecommunication has been primarily

macro-sociological, such as, “The Anthropology of Online Communities” (Wilson and Peterson 2002). However, the micro-study of behavior and performance is also occurring. As Sally McMillan writes:

Researchers are actively engaged in scholarship that explores how people interact through media, the nature of interactive content, and how individuals interface with the computers and telecommunications tools that host interactive communication. (2002, p. 162)

#### F) Definitions of Terms.

The children’s play activities discussed in this dissertation are somewhat clumsily referred to as “songs/chants/dances/games.” This has been done to emphasize that, 1) these four processes naturally form a group when it comes to children’s play activities, 2) the collected activities contain various aspects of these different processes, and 3) seeking to divide the activities according to these processes would be futile. The term is meant to raise consciousness that play includes both art and games (Huizinga 1949), and that the activities’ various speaking and singing styles, and body movements, should be taken into account.

*African-Indo-Pacific* is used herein to refer to a region and a people. *Negrito* and *Australoid* are terms that have often been used to refer to the dark-skinned, wide-nosed, kinky-haired, short-statured people who populate much of southeast Asia.

I prefer the term, African-Indo-Pacific, which communicates that these people constitute a single extended kinship group. It is now generally-accepted in academia that modern humans came into being somewhat over 100,000 years ago, in Africa and perhaps also elsewhere in the African-Indo-Pacific region (Cavalli-Sforza et al,1995). Members of this group traveled by land and sea, eastward and westward in the African-Indo-Pacific region. These were the first human migrations.

All participants in an *interactive telecommunication* event can transmit, as well as receive, data to and from each other. Such technology is also known as *write-and-read* technology. The telephone is an example of interactive telecommunication. *Mass communication*, on the other hand, to date has generally involved equipping members of the public with *read-only* technology. One type of interactive telecommunication is *videoconferencing*. A videoconference is an interactive form of *video-mediated communication*.

“Tele” is a Greek word that when used as a prefix connotes, “from a distance.” Thus, for example, the term, “television,” is a combination of “from a distance” and “seeing.” *Teletorium* has come into fashion in the information technology world seemingly as a play on the word, “auditorium.” “Auditorium” means, a meeting place that people come to in order to hear others (“audio”). “Teletorium” then means, a meeting place people come to in order to be with others from a

distance. Teletoriums are generally equipped with videoconference technology and at least one large screen.

*Tele-presence* means, presence from a distance. People can be considered to be present to each other to the degree that they can interact with each other in immediate and ongoing fashions (a visual image, especially a 3-dimensional one, helps to increase a sense of presence).

*Teletopia* is a play on the word, “utopia.” A teletopia is an ideal society that enables full human expression and communication, at least in part through interactive telecommunication.

In this dissertation, *Folklore*, the academic field, is capitalized. This term is used interchangeably with *Folklore Studies*. When the actual activity of the folk -- that is, their *folklore* -- is referred to, the word is not capitalized.

A longstanding definition of the folk that this dissertation mostly adheres to is that the folk are rural, oral-centric, and of low social-economic class.

Folklore here is mostly defined as traditional expressive culture. Two recent definitions of folklore that also come into play are that it is “artistic communication



in small groups” (Ben-Amos 1972), and that it is that which develops between any two or more people who have any experience in common (Dundes 1978).

This dissertation keeps in mind that Folklore is a subfield within Cultural Anthropology. Cultural Anthropology includes consideration of kinship, economic, and other social structures -- matters which Folklore only tends to consider on a special case basis.

The discipline of Folklore tends to emphasize observing, documenting, and analyzing folk processes of production, communication, and performance. The discipline has traditionally focused approximately three-fifths on performance, one-fifth on material culture, and one-fifth on beliefs.<sup>1</sup> Whatever theory comes into play grows out of the attention paid to the folklore itself. Cultural Anthropology, on the other hand, tends to stress discovering or constructing theories of how the society and culture works as a system.

The term Folklife seems to refer especially to folklore that develops in relation to vocations, and to physical folklore.

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<sup>1</sup> Regina Bendix, 1999, personal communication.

#### F) Some of the Project's Limitations.

The following should be kept in mind in regard to the “south Indian” children’s songs/chants/dances/games: The 14 activities were collected from a state-border area, and thus include words from two languages: Tamil and Malayalam. There are no activities from south India’s other two major languages, Kannada and Telegu. The 14 activities presented herein represent a tiny fraction of the songs/chants/dances/games of south Indian children. However, there are variations of these activities all over south India. The most that the dissertation can hope to claim is that it presents examples of the major types of these activities.

Recommendations for further research include:

Just as there are motif and tale-type indexes of elements of folktales, indexes of elements of children’s songs/chants/dances/games could be developed.

There could be comparisons between the 14 songs/chants/dances/games collected for this dissertation and those throughout the state (Tamil Nadu), national region (south India), nation (India), global regions (Southeast Asia; the African-Indo-Pacific area), and the world; and among tribal people (of India and elsewhere).

The dialect of Tamil spoken by the Kani People with whom I did fieldwork is known as Kani Pasai, which can be translated as Kani Speech. Kani Pasai is an oral colloquial mix of Tamil, Malayalam, Sanskrit, English, and possibly elements of African and Australian aboriginal languages (Agesthalingom 1976). The vocabulary and grammar of the Kani children's songs/chants/dances/games could be compared with the language of Kani everyday conversational speech, and of adult verbal arts and rituals, to test the hypothesis that some of the patterns of the children's songs/chants/dances/games re-appear in these other verbal realms.

The printed verbal texts of the songs/chants/dances/games presented in this dissertation are for the most part phonetically-accurate representations of the spoken language of the children who were playing the activities. There is a need for linguistic scholarship (in English) that would explore the distinctions between the Kani spoken dialect, local dialects of spoken Tamil, standard spoken Tamil, and literary Tamil (aspects of literary Tamil are incorporated into spoken Tamil to achieve a more formal tone). Each region of Tamil Nadu features a slightly different oral version of spoken Tamil, with versions differing in terms of such factors as accent, grammar, and vocabulary.

#### H) Some Thoughts about the Project.

This dissertation was written in two places: Chennai (Tamil Nadu, India) and Philadelphia (Pennsylvania, United States of America). This is appropriate, as the research for the dissertation was conducted in these two states (Tamil Nadu and Pennsylvania); and the two end-of-fieldwork videoconferences were conducted between sites in these two cities (Chennai and Philadelphia).

This dissertation concerns a wide range of subjects, including south Indian tribal people, people of Tamil descent living in the USA, children's songs/chants/dances/games, language learning, videoconferencing for art and education, public folklore, and public spheres. It seems that the action of this dissertation largely lies in how the various aspects of it speak to, and comment upon, each other.

Regarding the title of this dissertation: All of the 14 play activities presented were collected from the Kani children of Vellambi, Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu. Thus, the title could read, songs/chants/dances/games of "Kani Children." However, I decided against this for two reasons: One, very few people who would read the title, would know who the Kani people are. And two, it turned out that variations of all of the collected activities are known to children throughout Tamil Nadu. Some were also known to the Tamil people in Philadelphia, and

I did not want to exclude them from the title, as the children in Philadelphia contributed a number of activities in the videoconferences.

Thus, I considered, "Tamil Children." However, there are many Malayalam words in the Kani activities, as the Kani people live on both sides of the border that separates Tamil Nadu (Tamil language) and Kerala (Malayalam language), and it seems that much of the old culture of these people is in Malayalam. Prior to 1957, what is now Tamil Nadu's Kanyakumari district was primarily a Malayalam speaking area. Therefore, it did not seem correct to exclude Malayalam from the title. For all of these reasons, I settled on "South Indian Children."

Finally, on a personal note: The subject of language-learning is very close to my heart. This is because I love to speak and to understand speech, but aside from English, I have throughout my life been a very slow language learner, regarding: Latin in grade school, French in high school, Spanish throughout my life in New York City, and, of course, Tamil. This slowness of mine has caused me great frustration, for I do not like to feel isolated from people in whose midst I am living. It was, then, in the spirit of trying to help myself as well as others, that I decided that developing methods of language learning should be a central theme of my Penn Folklore dissertation.

I) Chapters of the Dissertation.

Chapter II concerns the cultures and locations involved with this dissertation.

Chapter III concerns my fieldwork methodology.

Chapters IV, V, and VI are each composed of a *Background section*, and an *Original Data* section:

Chapter IV concerns children's songs/chants/dances/games.

Chapter V concerns language-learning processes, and how they may be assisted by and otherwise related to children's songs/chants/dances/games.

Chapter VI concerns videoconferencing, especially what occurred when the collected songs/chants/dances/games were shared in the two post-fieldwork videoconferences (and in the additional two Megaconference videoconference-segments).

Chapter VII is conclusions.

Chapter VIII is an epilogue.