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## ■ REPORT ON THE 2009 CONFERENCE OF THE POPULAR CULTURE ASSOCIATION AND THE AMERICAN CULTURE ASSOCIATION

The joint conference of the Popular Culture Association (PCA) and the American Culture Association (ACA) (their 39<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> annual conferences respectively) was held in New Orleans from April 8-11, 2009, in the New Orleans Marriot Hotel. The city does not appear to have fully recovered from the effects of hurricane Katrina, as there were boarded up buildings not far from the conference hotel, but it was nice to walk around the French Quarter. This was a very large conference for those used to linguistics conferences, with hundreds of sessions – looking at the schedule now I see that there were more than 35 concurrent sessions in some time slots. The quantity of papers presumably is responsible for what one might see as a disadvantage of the conference, the early start and late end of the day in terms of sessions, beginning at 8 a.m. three out of the four days of the conference, including on Saturday), and finishing at 10 p.m. three days -- it takes considerable motivation to stay at sessions until 10 p.m. and be back the next morning at 8 a.m. (In 2008 my paper was in one of the 8 a.m. Saturday sessions, and I would have preferred a later session as it would have been more likely to have attracted a larger audience).

Many different fields were treated, as can be seen from the titles of some of the sessions: *Latin American Literature & Culture I*, *Appalachian Studies*, *Jack London's Life & Work I: California and the Ocean*, *Travel & Tourism I: Local Cuisine for the Tourist*, *Cemeteries & Gravemarkers IV*, *Special Session: Hate Speech*, *Southern Literature & Culture IX: Reflections and Medium*, *Mystery and Detective Fiction IX: Historical Perspectives*, *Circus & Circus Culture I*, *Motorcycling Culture and Myth I: Reasons for Riding*, *Sports V: Baseball I*, *Fat Studies IV: Tight Fit: The Mental and Physical Experiences of Being Fat*. I did not attend any of the above-mentioned sessions, but it is interesting to know that there were such sessions (I had not even known that there was a field called Fat Studies until I saw the program for the 2008 conference). Three sessions were on *Disasters & Culture*, a particularly appropriate topic in New Orleans, one might think, and indeed one of these sessions was on *Mediating Katrina*. There were also various social events, two of which I attended, the PCA/ACA Annual Reception and the Philosophy & Popular Culture Philosophical Walk. The latter is actually a pub crawl, which perhaps could be considered a “philosophical walk”, and it may be a regular event at this conference, as I also went on such an excursion at the 2008 conference in San Francisco.

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Of course one could only attend a fraction of the sessions and talks on offer. Two of the sessions that I went to were in the *Philosophy & Popular Culture* area, the first being *Philosophy and the Comics*, which began with "The Disruptions of Zippy the Pinhead" by Ellen Grabiner. *Zippy* is arguably one of the most philosophical cartoons around, so it is not surprising that it was treated in such a session. Perhaps less expected objects of study for philosophers (at least for those who are not much involved in the field of popular culture) are old Warner Brothers television cartoons such as *Roadrunner*, which was a major topic of the talk by Izar Lunacek, "The Comic Object in the Golden Age of the Theatrical Cartoon". The second philosophy session that I attended was *Philosophy and Cinema, II*, and included a paper by Taylor Hughey with the imposing title "*Curb Your Enthusiasm*, Hermeneutics, and the Hidden in the Familiar". The television show *South Park* might seem to be an obvious topic in a conference on popular culture, though perhaps not in a session on philosophy, but it made an appearance in the first paper of the session, "O My God, They Killed Babies: A Look into Swift's 'Modest Proposal' and *South Park*" by Greg Dedrick.

Linguistics sessions at the conference went under the heading *Language Attitudes & Popular Linguistics*. I attended only one of these sessions, the second one, *Border Crossings*, at which I presented my own paper ("Vecturism & Sociolinguistics"). The two other talks given in this session were "Frederick, MD: The Hispanic Press and the Hispanics in the Press" by Agnes Ragone and "*PSYCH*, You thought this show was in English!" by James G. Mitchell. After this session I had lunch in a nearby restaurant with some of the other linguistics people, including Patricia Donaher, the organizer of the linguistics sessions.

In the session *Libraries, Archives, Museums, & Popular Research I: Image: Analysis and Control* there was a talk on one of the most unusual subjects I have ever heard discussed in a conference, "Dressing your Ice Age Giant Ground Sloth" by Kendra Greene. It was about what happened after clothes were put on a replica of the prehistoric sloth *Megalonyx jeffersonii* in the University of Iowa Museum of Natural History; in fact, a variety of clothes have been worn by this sloth. The other papers in this session were about how librarians are represented, by themselves or by others, and included "The Image of the Librarian in Advertising" by Katherin Dodds.

Games, at least computer games, are an important part of contemporary popular culture, and so it is not surprising that this conference had sessions devoted to them. At the session that I attended, *Game Studies I: Crossing Media Boundaries*, David Dubin presented his paper "On the Expressive Content of Games".

There were some sessions on *Eastern European Studies*. I attended a paper delivered in one of these sessions, "Communist Summer Camp: Getting away from it all in the GDR at Camp Mitschurin" by Catherine Plum. Another East European session, which I did not attend, included the paper "Cultural Effects of Artistic-activistic Works Aimed at Promotion of Women's and Minorities' Rights, Belgrade, Serbia 2003-2007" by Jelena Veljic.

The PCA would like there to be a popular culture association in Australia, and, as in 2008, I was present at a meeting for Australian attendees of the conference which was held by John Bratzel, the executive director of the PCA, aimed at furthering this goal.

This conference, like many other conferences, had a room for book displays, in there which was something I do not recall having seen outside of PCA/ACA conferences,

a “Paper Table”, to which presenters could donate their papers to be sold to raise money for the PCA/ACA Endowment (which supports work on popular and American culture).

Based on my experiences in 2009 and 2008, I would recommend attending the annual PCA/ACA conferences. There are sessions for many interests, so one will probably find something appealing. As far as I can tell, the papers are not peer reviewed (at least those for the linguistics sessions do not seem to be) and there is no conference proceedings, but one could submit a paper to the journals of the associations involved, *The Journal of Popular Culture* and *The Journal of American Culture*. The 2010 and 2011 conferences will be in St. Louis and San Antonio respectively.