"There's Not Much to Talk about When You're Taking Pictures of Houses": The Poetics of Vernacular Spaces

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Some years ago, I found myself touring the city of Cincinnati with a friend and as we drove through one particular neighborhood she identified it in a twofold fashion: it was a "hillbilly" neighborhood and it was dangerous—one being the product of another. While I was dismayed by my friend's characterization, since she was a recent transplant to the city herself, I understood her remark to be drawn from received wisdom, a term used loosely in this context. What intrigued me more as a student of material culture and vernacular architecture was what I actually saw: significantly different uses of urban spaces. I wanted to find out for myself what was going on, and so at my first opportunity I began doing fieldwork in which a series of encounters led me to Charlie Kraft, a self-identified urban Appalachian.

The term "urban Appalachian" is not without its problems, and I use it particularly, and deferentially, here. Found mostly in sociological literature and applications, it is part of the efforts of sociologists like Phillip Obermiller and William Philliber to focus attention on what they and others have termed an "invisible minority," the semi-migratory populations of such cities as Cincinnati, where individuals and families from West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, and Kentucky move into urban contexts for various amounts of time. Some stay for a short while, making enough money in order to return to what they consider to be home; others make a home in the city. Many of those who stay for longer periods of time still reference a place outside the city as "home," though for some this may be as ambiguous an assertion of identity as "my people are hill people."

Charlie Kraft identifies himself as an Appalachian, sometimes as an urban Appalachian, which may in part be attributed to his wife Sandra (known as Sam to most) working at the Urban Appalachian Identity Center, an organization focusing on such basic necessities as clothing and child

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care. My first few forays into the Krafts' neighborhood, known as Camp Washington by them and by members of the general population of the city, were a bit overwhelming: so many people talking, shouting, laughing amidst so much stuff—cars, car parts, lawn furniture, lawn ornaments (though there is no lawn to speak of in the neighborhood), appliances, pets. I felt my very first job was to try to translate what they knew as order—for everyone I met could live perfectly well amidst all the sounds and sights—into a language of order that I could communicate to others.

The first part of this essay is dedicated to just such an enterprise, the results of many visits to the Kraft household to take its measurements, to take inventory of its contents, and to take part in the conversations and happenings of the place. It is an ethnography of a space. The second part of the essay could be understood as an autoethnography of the same space. Like much of what we study, fortune is negotiable. When, on the day I had set aside to photograph Charlie Kraft's house, I had some equipment difficulties, Charlie offered to do the job for me: he would videotape the house and send me the results.

The result, for the reader, is a chance to examine two different records of the same space, one by me and one by Charlie Kraft, the latter of course presented here through the lens of my examination. The aesthetic that governs the making of his home is the same that governs the making of the video: there is always a high level of interaction, and there is a constant overlapping of spaces and events. The two are really dimensions of the same aesthetic, whose intent is to always extend outwards, to see as continuous fields of community, and activity, what others might regard as distinct: bedrooms and living rooms, videotaping and holding a phone conversation.

A Place beyond the Signs

To get to Sam and Charlie Kraft's place, I took a series of expressways that cut back and forth between Ohio and Kentucky, traversing the Ohio River as they went: Interstate 275 crossed the Ohio into Kentucky above where the river bends almost a hundred and eighty degrees to project that state into its neighbor and assure the intertwining of regional economies; Interstate 471, with its ending golden superstructure that bridges the river's moat directly into downtown, cloverleafed me briefly onto Route 50, which kept me just a few blocks from the river and well above the traffic of downtown below; Interstate 75 headed north through what used to be neighborhoods which held families like Charlie Kraft's until the expressway's construction in the fifties. In a sense, the expressway was one long bridge

between Charlie and Sam's place in Camp Washington, and my place, which they reckon to be near Mount Washington. They were delighted with the confusion that caused me. Camp Washington is urban Appalachian and poor, they told me; Mount Washington is suburban and rich.

Those who have traveled extensively on expressways will know what I mean when I say that they are no place. Unlike the coeval federal routes, built simultaneously as part of the National Defense Highway System—which bear traces of locality if only because of stops that force one to be in a place, to look at it, to think through it by having to navigate through a small town—expressways pick you up from one place and deliver you to another. Your only significant interaction is with the roadway itself and its extensive systems of signs. They are, in effect, bridges of monumental proportions, designed to get you from one place to another, with no threat of any ensuing place.

The German philosopher Martin Heidegger once noted that a bridge is a thing of its own kind, able to gather other things, places together. These places are not already there before the bridge but come into existence by virtue of it: "Before the bridge stands, there are of course many spots along the stream that can be occupied by something" (1977:332). Put most simply, places only become places in relationship to other places. As Heidegger suggests, the ancient Greeks recognized that a boundary is not a limit, the point at which something stops, but that from which something begins its essential unfolding. Thus a bridge is the place at which place begins to become "place." We travel and know dialectically and simultaneously. This is the essence of the bridge.

In bringing forth the idea of place, a bridge depends upon the multiple senses of place, its multilocality. The principal distance extends from my place to the other's place. In this case it is not insignificant that I should leave from a house out in the suburbs of Cincinnati and travel four major expressways and cross the Ohio River twice in order to arrive at the Kraft's house in what used to be Cincinnati's West End but is now shot through with expressways. (See Figure 1.)

But spaces and places are not simply cities and houses and they are not simply inhabited. They are imagined. As Gaston Bachelard suggests, "a house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability. We are constantly re-imagining its reality: to distinguish all these images would be to describe the soul of the house; it would mean developing a veritable psychology of the house" (1969:17). It is not only architectural space,the built environment, which includes the shell enclosing space as well as those objects which project into that space, which fill it and en-

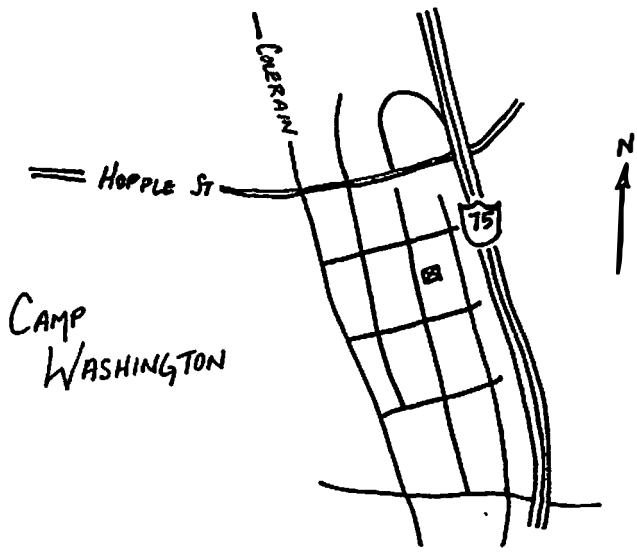

Figure 1. Map of Camp Washington

rich it, but also lived space, which holds the imaginations that manipulate and are manipulated by the built environment and the objects that fill it. Space, here, reveals social action; culture is a manifestation of in-dwelling.

Lived space is emphasized over architectural space for a particular reason in this neighborhood. For many, enclosed spaces remain fairly fixed. They cannot afford owning, let alone building and designing, their own home, which leaves them outside conventional studies of vernacular architecture (cf. Glassie 1975; Upton and Vlach 1986; Bourdier and AlSayyad 1989; Noble 1992) and architectural space (cf. Alexander 1964; Preziosi 1979; Hale 1994). The lived spaces of Cincinnati's West End resemble much of the urban Northeast; their row houses date back a hundred years and reflect a different world and a different outlook onto that world from that of the current occupants, who are thus three-times removed from the spaces in which they live: Their houses were built by strangers; they were built a century ago; and they were built using design principles that never took them into account. The bourgeois aesthetic of the nineteenth century was one of science, science that promises to arrive at ultimate and universal truths (cf. Ribcysnki 1986). In a similar study, Alice Gray Read notes that "In these cities, this great displacement of architectural author-

ship to designers outside the community has modified the meaning of house and home.... The house is anonymous and mute. Only when it is touched by an owner, lived in, and made over inside and out does it begin to bear the identity of its occupants" (1986:192).

The houses of Camp Washington, inhabited now by urban Appalachians, are transformed. Their forms which were once designed to provide for what city planners hoped would be the modern city—one which was functional and encouraged its inhabitants to be functional (productive) members of the community, of which the house was symbol—are now inhabited by occupants whose place within the hierarchy as it has unfolded is at the opposite end of the historical operation that the house was supposed to perform.

In her ethnography of another Appalachian place, Kathleen Stewart foregrounds the delicate balancing act that ethnography must be when it operates as cultural critique through a site that is already full of signs. Indeed, in a sign of our own times, she turns to signs themselves, strewn about the landscape "where there is both a constant proliferation of expressive signs in all their density, texture, and force and a constant naturalization of 'the world as it is' as signs are written into the very nature of things" (1996:20). It is a nerve-wracking task and her ethnography captures the febrile nature of a landscape which has been repeatedly plundered and left to recover on its own. The goal of this essay is to add to the complexities of place and voice that Stewart highlights in her work the complexity of identity, which is simply, from one perspective, the continuous and necessary fusing of place and voice. What I hope to achieve, in keeping with an emphasis on the social construction of our world and our place in it, is an understanding of inhabitation and the necessary imagination that accompanies it, for the space on the side of the road (or, as is the case here, the space the road runs over) is an inhabited one.

Signs and Designs of a Place: A Record of a Place by the Ethnographer

The exit ramp lands me in Camp Washington, one of the many neighborhoods identified as Urban Appalachian. The intersection, which is quite extensive and busy and is blocked to the neighborhood itself by a grass and concrete median, displays signs all pointing left: up one of Cincinnati's seven hills, up to hospitals, universities, parks, and historical districts. I turn right and must fight my way back to the few streets that now compose the Camp Washington area, nestled as it is against the eight-lane interstate. Because of their proximity, the neighborhood buildings offer ideal surfaces for advertising goods and services to expressway drivers. Entire

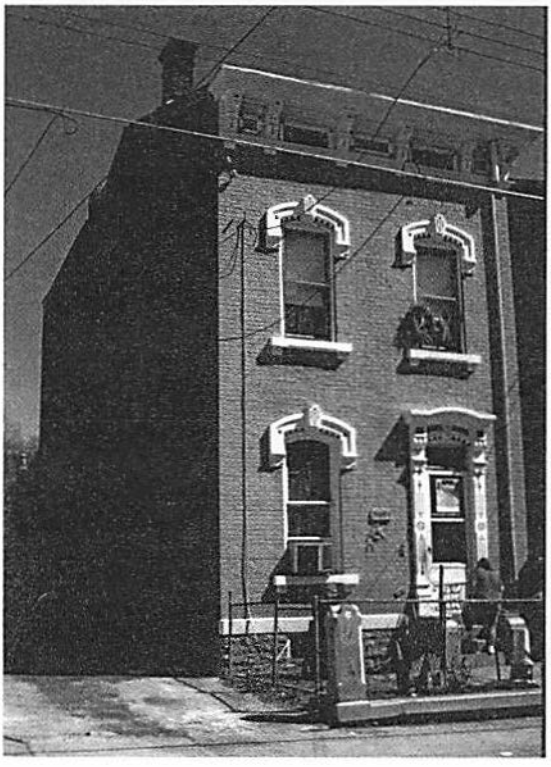

Figure 2: The Kraft home: Exterior

houses constitute colorful billboards for fast food restaurants or pawn shops. Within the neighborhood itself, houses front directly onto narrow streets. Some of the houses are clearly abandoned and have been for some time. With others, it is more difficult to tell. Furniture is strewn about along the sidewalks, as are children's toys.

Resting halfway along the block is Sam and Charlie Kraft's house. It stands apart both literally — it is detached — and by virtue of the amount of decoration and ornament extending from it. It is painted a slate blue with white trim marking out molding around doors and windows, with symbolic ornaments cut into keystones above the openings as well as along the sides. Italianate brackets three stories up denote the beginnings of a shallowly pitched roof just above more ornamentation that runs along the

fascia. From a second-story window hangs a now very-brown Christmas wreath. Below, between the front door on the right and the single front window on the left bang a pair of cast-iron birds, a horseshoe, a hand indicating a vee, and a wooden plaque cursively inscribed with "The Krafts." The yard is populated with barrels, planters, assorted tools and a truck bed leaning against the house.

I walk up the front steps and rap lightly on the storm door, able to look directly into the front room of the house which is also the Kraft's bedroom. Each time I visit, the heavy, wooden front door is always open, leaving only the flimsy, aluminum storm door to mark the boundary between inside and outside.

Inside, description becomes virtually impossible. I can think of no method that could even begin to be adequate to the task. Granted every space is a complex myriad of ideas and objects. To the eye of a stranger, a Shaker bedroom appears bare. Yet with even the minimal acquaintance of Shaker ideology, the room blossoms richly, its beauty consisting of well-made, plain-to-the-eye bureaus, tables, and beds. But my first encounter with the Kraft home proved a contrast in any number of ways. The room was loaded with so many items that to inventory them here would be literally impossible, as an inventory would in all likelihood reveal close to a thousand items in the front room alone. Squarely in the middle of the room and projecting from the wall opposite the door is a king-size bed. Extending its length a few feet more are some of the kitchen cabinetry that Charlie has promised Sam will one day be installed, as well as a computer desk folded closed and some milk crates containing miscellaneous items—during one visit they were filled with single-serving packages of spaghetti that Charlie had been given by a local grocer and intended to distribute. Behind the front door there is a six-foot cabinet as well as another in the corner next to the front window. Another tall cabinet holds a television set and VCR with additional storage below. There is also a dresser which is as brimming with stuff as is the mantel, a table, an old radio cabinet, some shelves, and most of the floor.

When I first walked into the room, Sam greeted me and then said simply, "My husband is a pack rat. . . . I cleared this space [indicating a five by two foot stretch of floor in front of the television near her side of the bed] just a few days ago and look . . . he's already got it piled three feet deep." Charlie came in later from helping a neighbor with his car, dressed in jeans and a long night shirt. His first question to me was "Do you have kids?" When I answered no, he asked if I liked candy. It was when I haltingly replied yes—because I didn't understand the nature of the questions—that I

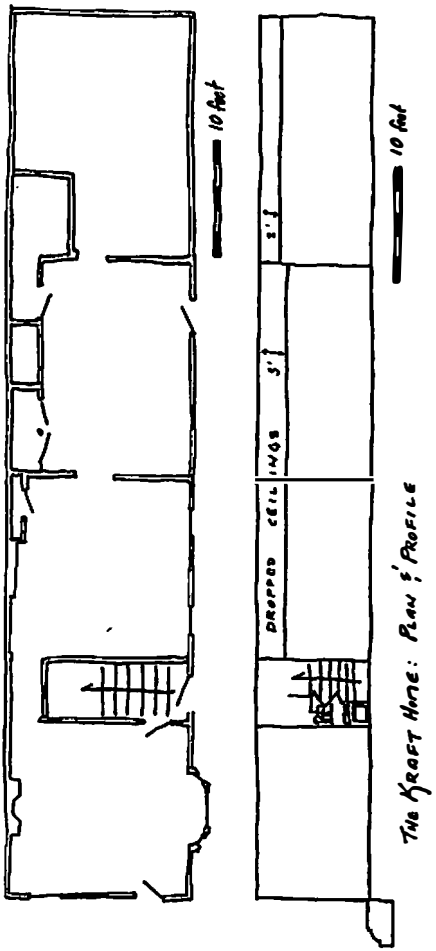

Figure 3: The Kraft home: Plan and profile

first glimpsed the room's nature. Charlie disappeared momentarily into the room's only closet, one he had formed out of part of the building's stairwell to the second floor, and then ducked his head into a few of the rooms cabinets. When he turned to me his arms were loaded with boxes and bags of candy which he placed in my lap. This was hello for Charlie Kraft.

The rest of the house resembles the front room. Through a small pas-

sage that runs under the stairway is Diz's room (their son), which contains as many bureaus and shelves as theirs and has at least five televisions, one of which is hooked up to a Nintendo and another to some kind of computer. The next room belongs to Sam's sister, Del. It is a little more sparsely furnished. A chest of drawers stands in a corner, just behind a nightstand next to the room's king-size mattress which lies on the floor. Along one wall is a long bureau with a television and a VCR on it as well as what strikes me as the most extensive collection of videotapes I've ever seen. On the far wall is a washer and dryer and nearby is an outside door that never gets used. The kitchen and the basement mirror the rest of the house, varying only in content. (See Figures 2 and 3.)

As we always do, we return to the front room, truly the first room of the house. One enters and is entertained here. Charlie and Sam live and sleep in the room. Family and friends visit in the room. The most prized possessions are housed here: the family photographs over the bed and the only two things that Charlie says were actually bought, the television and the eight millimeter camcorder. The room also contains several framed pictures above the fireplace; never used, it contains a set of small shelves with plants and miscellaneous items. There is a small portable stereo, a weight-loss machine, a window air-conditioner or two, a police scanner, an electric typewriter, a car battery, several boxes of clothing to be given away, a number of pictures of John Wayne, several collections of bottles, glasses, and vases, a few jars of candy, and a five-foot putter with a brass horse's head for a handle. (The last was custom-made for Charlie.)

What becomes apparent to even the casual observer is the multi-vocal nature of these objects, since such objects are a focus of interaction. We may more commonly call these objects "conversation pieces," but these objects are owned not only because they provoke dialogue with their owner, who in some fashion is always their creator, but because they easily extend outward to provoke dialogue with others. That these memory projects, as Jean-Paul Sartre calls them, are not necessarily designed to fix the accounts which they anchor, is revealed in the nature of the collection of objects found in the Kraft's home. Rather, they display the myriad possibilities of fiction, as the root of the word reveals, "to form." The object's form unfolds a narrative form, or more simply, one transforms the other. The object provides the instance for the story and the story illuminates the object:

> *Charlie Kraft:* Now see we're in a situation like I told you. This family up here . . . [points to a photograph on the wall at the head of the bed] . . . we made it. Every one of us made it good. On our own. We come from poor,

poor neighborhood. Now my momma and daddy, God bless them, they give us the necessities. A place to live, a place to get [. . .], a place to eat. He didn't uh, he only worked all his life my daddy. And my mother was right there to clean the clothes and all this and everything. Took care of us. But every one of us . . . I think one out of the bunch, one out of the bunch I'm pretty sure, finished high school. But everyone of 'em got good jobs. Everyone of 'em owns their own home. Now, their kids off of them is going backwards. They're going back to wanting stuff for nothing. They always whatcha gimme gimme gimme, just like that kid that was here . . . Cha-cha. [Cha-cha is the nickname of one of Charlie's sons.]

Sam Kraft: [From across the room where she has been playing with their grandson Anthony] And who made him that way?

CK: Laughs. She says it's our fault. You know why I blame us? We didn't have nothing. So we want to give them what we can. And to me, that's what's wrong with the world. I hate to say it, cuz I one of them. We give our kids too much, cause we didn't have it. You wanted to have something you didn't have, you know what I'm saying? That be like your daddy . . . say your daddy, when he growed up, he growed up in a hard life . . . now he had made it a little better than the rest of them that he could give you things he didn't have that he wanted you to have and you come and ask and he gives them to you. This is normal . . . what do you call it? how would you put it?. . . this is life as it really is. Because if I can give you something, that I didn't have, and it ain't gonna hurt me to do it, you'll get it. That's how I figure it.

Charlie Kraft adds a dimension to collecting: in addition to providing for interaction, for dialogue, the collectible is the interaction, an unspoken discourse that passes from one set of hands to another. This was revealed in my first meeting with him, in his gift of candy. Discursive tokens come in all shapes and sizes and Charlie Kraft has invested in participation in all manner of interaction. The photographs available in the main room of the house, for example, are prominently display on the wall opposite the front door, and are easily invoked, powerful symbols of continuity in both time and space.

Following Charlie Kraft, the nature of his collecting becomes readily apparent, and it is not the herntetic universe or token pieces of the world that allow the collector a measure of control he does not normally possess (cf. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1989). Those arguments that regard such actions or objects as empowering in the same way that their agents or owners are disempowered miss the nature and performance of Charlie's radio scanner, the prints that hang above the fireplace, or the collection of old medicine bottles. True, they are there because they have value in other contexts: the prints are signed; the medicine bottles capture an aspect of this country's

craze with any kind of past it can acquire. But it is also true that Charlie esteems the wood frames that surround the prints and the smallness and color of the glass of the bottles.

Thus it is important to keep in mind Charlie's place in all this. Walter Benjamin, unpacking his library, observed that "one thing should be noted: the phenomenon of collecting loses its meaning as it loses its personal owner" (1968:67). As a way to begin wrapping up this discussion of lived spaces, I would like to turn to an item in the front room that I think is an emblem of the room, the house, and the aesthetic that informs the composition of each.

The front room is the only room in the house without a dropped ceiling, retaining its original height of ten feet. Hanging from a plaster-of-paris rosette is a ceiling fan; from it, a chandelier. When Charlie first gave me a tour of the house, after I had explained I was interested in how he and his family lived in the house, he took a great delight in showing me all the architectural nuances of the building. There are as many interesting details inside the house as out, and they all add to the overall splendor of the structure, perhaps highlighted in its current vernacular form, emphasizing as it does richness and attention to many things simultaneously. Thus, it was the rosette that was first called to my attention. Its elaborate design signs a kind of eloquence which Charlie considers important. Later, when revealing the improvements he had made, Charlie emphasized the fan, noting how hot it gets in the city during the summer. As together we began to peel away various layers of items and meanings, either by looking at photographs or by moving physically things to get to other things (like the tin sign that leans inside the fireplace behind the shelves), he lowered our attention to the chandelier, which he regards as a thing of beauty in itself. But it is also important that he found it on a curbside over in Mount Washington. "Can you believe someone threw this away?" he asks. "It's worth three, four hundred dollars."

He has with considerable aplomb attached it to the ceiling fan, creating an overall drop from the ceiling which is quite remarkable. But that is not all. It is not enough to extend an already rich architectural space with a functional item, and then to continue the extension with an item of both beauty and value; the extension must include some outreach to a community, be it the family, the neighborhood, the Appalachian diaspora (my word not Charlie's), or a past. In this case, it is the first. Hanging from the chandelier is a mobile that consists of three characters, each standing for a member of the immediate family: Charlie, Sam, and their son, Diz. The banana, the pickle, and the hot dog hang at about head level, and are thus squarely positioned in the middle of the room. (See Figure 4.)

The rosette-fan-chandelier-mobile is like a mandala in the middle of the larger composition over a portal. The difference between the medieval cathedral and the front room of the Kraft home is that in the latter, the portal is also place. One does not pierce through surfaces in order to discover reality or truth; instead, you find yourself in an open-ended dialogue. (The shift in pronouns is not a casual one. I can be a "one" in a cathedral, in a Pei building or in many a home which fulfills the original promise of the nineteenth-century row house the Krafts inhabit, but I cannot be a "one" in their home.) In terms of the materials that make up this space—which we understand to be both vernacular and sacred, as much as any of the cathedrals were—it is an open-ended dialogue as well. Indeed, since most of its materials have been selectively recycled, as opposed to the more unconscious recycling that most of us do, the room as it is now constructed is purposively dialogic.

Perhaps this is the intersection of place and identity: Charlie Kraft as collector meets Charlie Kraft as Urban Appalachian. Both fill their home with conventional objects, but with a difference. The form and contents of the home as place reflect the form and contents of the activity that occurs within it, the goals and roles of the actors. This narrative detailing belies the simultaneity of all of these events, which was at first overwhelming. Who or what should I pay attention to? What's important here? I didn't begin to unravel the knot that these questions proposed until I could hold a conversation in the front room. By myself, measuring walls and other surfaces, I could easily map out the architectural space, even material space, but I could not understand the lived space. I had misperceived the nature of its grammar, the aesthetic that informed it. I was looking for causes when I should have been listening to its voices.

Once I understood how all the voices could fill the house at the same time, I understood how so many objects could fill it as well. And then, as I began to be able to talk in the interior space, and as I watched the storm door swing open and closed while the heavy front door remained always open, I began also to understand the relation of inside to outside, how the intention of the interior was to extend itself always outwards. But never as one gesture, always as many gestures.

Signing Place: The Recording of a Place for the Ethnographer

As I mentioned at the beginning of this essay, fortune is negotiable. When, on the day I had set aside to measure and record the dimensions of Charlie and Sam Kraft's house, the wide angle lens I had brought with me proved insufficient for the task, I was sure—after having discovered that forty-five

Figure 4: Charlie Kraft's rosette-ceiling fan-chandelier-mobile

minutes of a tape side was unusable as well—that the project was ill-fated. Measuring their home had been a fairly straightforward if timeconsuming task; its eventual transcription would not be a problem. But as I attempted to sketch the details of their home, the task seemed insurmountable. How could I capture the richness of the material which, literally, surrounded

me, pressed in on me, crowded and jostled me? That was where the static field of my wide-angle lens had shown its deficiency. Charlie Kraft saw my dilemma and proffered a solution: he could videotape the house for me with his eight-millimeter camcorder, which he noted, would not even require the flash I had been using, such was its sensitivity to light. It took a moment or two to realize the magnitude in the shift of possibilities. What more could a cultural worker hope for? Here was the dreamed-of smaller loop: the culture working within itself to produce documentation for others.

I am not sure what to call the eventual product of this particular enterprise. It does not seem to be a cultural performance as we usually understand the term, since those usually involve public displays of a larger and more organized nature than what occurs here: "performance usually suggests an aesthetically marked and heightened mode of communication, framed in a special way and put on display for an audience" (Bauman 1989:262). But it is a performance of a kind, one culturally informed, as well as negotiated, with the screen's edges beckoning us to wonder, if only a moment, about the nature of framing and the dialogue that occurs between people on the ground as fieldwork proceeds.

While the goal of this essay is to examine how our identities and place intermingle, the matter is both particular and peculiar here. Charlie Kraft considered he was doing me a favor, providing me with an invaluable service in aid of my study as he understood it—that understanding itself taking place across time and places as our conversations returned to the matter. When Charlie asked what I wanted pictures of, I replied that he should just take his camera and walk around the house and tell me about things and let it go at that. (I had in mind a kind of guided tour, with Charlie acting as a curator of a museum of his own life in progress.) I wanted to impose as few prescriptions as possible. The fifty-two minute videotape offers an inversion of the usual record that develops between fieldworker and performer. Instead of my coming away and constructing a record of what happened, Charlie Kraft has done it. To be sure, it is a product of our interaction. It demonstrates not only what Charlie thinks I wanted to see, but also what he thinks I should see.

Except for one cut, the tape is seamless, running continuously no matter what occurs within or without. In an hour, we proceed from the front room of the house to the outside then to the second and third rooms of the house as well as the kitchen and bathroom before returning to the front room again. The cut, where the camera was turned off before being moved, occurs between the outside footage and when we resume inside moving through the narrow passage that leads into their son Diz's bedroom. The

following outline is exceedingly approximate, but as a written record it begins to indicate sequence as well as relative proportions of time spent.

Time Elapsed Content of Sequence or Shot

0:00 Tape begins television and police scanner on in the background; eventually the visual image settles down and focuses on the rosette-ceiling fan-chandelier-mobile. Pans to pictures, photographs, and telephone.
4:30 Detailed shots of family photos
5:46 Telephone rings; tape continues.
8:21 Goes outside.
10:50 Shot of van.
13:26 Two minutes of architectural detail followed by two shots of the street lamp.
17:00 Camera is set down; Charlie Kraft goes inside.18:51Cut to master bedroom, where tour of the rest of the house begins.
31:35 Charlie Kraft pours coffee but the tape continues to roll.
43:36 Sets camera down and picks it up again until finding the right spot to set it down and he strikes a pose on screen.
47:16 Picks up the camera again and records more of the master bedroom.
51:37 Tape ends.

Charlie Kraft starts with the television in the front room, and then pans around, tilting up to take in the rosette-fan-chandelier-mobile. Included in the pans of the front room are shots of photographs and pictures on the walls as well as a zoom in on a mirror to reveal Charlie's own reflection. Suddenly, the telephone rings and Charlie answers it, but keeps the camera going, balancing it on one shoulder as he holds the phone to his opposite ear. The result is a cockeyed view of the fireplace wall. After hanging up the phone, he again records the rosette-fan-chandelier-mobile, the television, and then adds the ceiling molding in the bay window.

Outside, the camera skirmishes around on various parts of the house's exterior. Charlie Kraft notes, "We're outside now by the way. I meant to talk, but I forgot. I'm sorry." He focuses on a strange van that is parked down the street, saying "I had to get me a picture of that." There are lots of detail shots of trim as well as of a wine press, and then he notes,

> This is all that front door [. . .] that you wanted me to take a picture of and look at. I don't know. I ain't talkin too much cuz there's not much to talk about . . . when you're taking pictures of houses.
>
> But this is all the work you wanted . . . to look at.

> There's some more of it right there. It looks like the spear of . . . Atlantis. That's what it looks like to me. And it goes to the next one and up on the main ones. It's got like umbrellas and everyone's like that.

Then Charlie puts the camera down on a van, levels it and checks the line of sight with his hand; he goes through the gate and poses in front of the house, pointing to himself. He goes into the house for a while and comes back out with his lemonade that we've seen in previous shots of the front room. When he walks to the camera this time, he turns it off and we suddenly leap, through the edit, into the passage to his son's room. In the room, we see the fan, televisions, the computer in corner before backing into the room occupied by Sam's sister, where he details objects on the tops of bureaus and tables, including her collection of videotapes, the washer and dryer, and her bedside table. At the antipode of the house, in the kitchen, we get a quick survey of the stove, microwave, and refrigerator with cereal boxes on top before looking back down the length of the house: from the kitchen through Dell's room into Diz's room.

Walking back through the house, Charlie stops in Diz's room to pour himself a cup of coffee (it's where the coffee maker is) and simply puts the camera down and lets it run before returning to the front room. He walks back into the passage to tape his golf clubs and his collection of plumbing supplies, and then returns to the front room, where he shoots the alcove wall (always with the TV in some part of the shot). Characteristically by now, while in the front room we are shown again the rosette-fan-chandelier-mobile. We look out to the street from behind the storm door. Then Charlie Kraft puts the camera down and aims it at the wall of pictures above the bed. (The television becomes noticeable again with the lull in active visual movement.) Then there are more shots of the pictures above the fireplace and the objects on the mantel. Of the TV and the VCR and the calendar. About the last he notes, "You didn't see this when you were here. It's called a forever Appalachian calendar. You can use it forever. It'll never wear out."

There is also the side table with its electric typewriter and Anthony's picture on it. There is a shot of the front door and TV from this corner of the room. Charlie sets the camera down and crosses the room to get his coffee, striking a momentary muscle pose; he steps to the front door and drinks his coffee and lets the camera run for about 5 minutes. The police scanner crackles every so often. When he takes the camera up again, there are more shots of the shelves in front of the fireplace, more shots of picture

Figure 5: "I had to get me a picture of that."

Figure 6: Charlie Kraft, self-portrait.

wall—he closes the front door to reduce the glare on the pictures—before we end where we started, looking at the television.

A cursory inventory of the tape reveals that a full half of it is preoccupied with the front room. About the same amount of time is spent outside as with all the other rooms of the house, excepting the front room. Though I had requested that Charlie talk as much as possible, there is little commentary. The first comment addresses the matter and arrives at the first major juncture in the tape, the transition from inside to outside: "We're outside now by the way. I meant to talk but I forgot. I'm sorry." That there is a tension between audience and performer, though the former is absent, is evidenced by the comments that follow, where Charlie Kraft talks about what he wants to see and what he thinks I want to see. In regards to a van parked along the street he notes, "I had to get me a picture of that." Later while shooting the prominent architectural details that draw the eye to the house he states, "This is all that front door stuff that you wanted me to take a picture of and look at. I don't know. I ain't talking too much because there's not much to talk about when you're taking pictures of houses."

Two content matters seem particularly important to Charlie, for he returns to them very purposively: the outdoor security light and the combination ceiling fan, chandelier, mobile that hangs from a rosette in the front room. The security light, perhaps because of its slender shape that makes it difficult to discern but also because it is a particularly important achievement for Charlie is shown twice and receives a deictic articulation as well to reinforce the visual image. "That's my light," he says with a tinge of pride and delight, but continuing to roam with the camera. A few moments later he returns emphasizing again, "That's my light up there."

The light was fabricated from salvaged parts, except for the photoelectric cell which Charlie purchased. It looks much like any street light and is in fact hung at about the same height, perhaps eighteen feet from the ground. It need never be turned off, much like the regular city lights along the street, and so it provides the same security. In other words, it stands for the kind of institutional attention that Appalachians are wont not to receive. The spaces that Charlie sets about recording reflect this central fact of being Appalachian, to be able to offer help to others in need. Charlie collects goods that would otherwise go to waste, like day-old breads or other expired products, and distributes them among the community.

We have then, arrived at the structuring principles that guide the design and disposition of the house that is being recorded. The room's collection mirrors a central fact of being Appalachian for Charlie Kraft: in the urban environment of Cincinnati, Appalachians are subject to the usual

labels that the "other" of American culture incurs: lazy, dumb, violent. As a result of either being ignored or misperceived by the kinds of institutions that predominate in an urban environment, Appalachians have always extended themselves beyond their homes and their families. Aesthetic dispositions reflect and refract founding ethical dispositions. Both are based on a principle of collecting which itself reflects and refracts through its objects other orders which it is both cognizant of and partly constituted by. The order of the house fully realizes the two aspects of dialogism (cf. Bakhtin 1978:181): there is the plurality of voices available in reference to any object or event as well as the multi-vocality of the objects themselves: the rosette-fan-chandelier-mobile speaks so forcefully because it contains so many voices: Mount Washington/Camp Washington, ideals of beauty, practicality, representation of the house's chief three occupants.

What of the record itself? Do the poetics that inform the structure of lived space extend into the videotape? What is the redundancy of essence that is "capable of dragging the mind back through the process of creation into confrontation with a particular individual's version of a particular culture's shaping of the universe" (Glassie 1989:87)? I have already discussed the selection and treatment of certain objects, but there is also the style of the videotape to be considered, which by its very looseness calls attention to itself.

Home movies remind us of one thing: the very difficulty of seeing, of ordering. In order to glean their contents, we discover again the work that goes into perceiving. Habit orders us; we rely upon conventions to get us through the ordinary. The mechanics involved in most filmic technique—as we see them in the theater or on television—assure us a smooth passage from one vision to another, but this vision is not easily recapitulated when we take the means of production upon ourselves. The well-rounded lighting and smooth segues suddenly reveal themselves as difficult tasks. It is only then that we recognize the importance of style, how hard we work to maintain it, how it informs us and is informed by us. Style is the meaning of meaning, the structurality of structure, the redundancy within a code that makes it possible to predict the order of elements that flow within it; it indexes the relationship of representation to knowledge.

In Charlie Kraft's video, as in his home, there is a continuity of clements, a high level of interaction. In the front room on any given Saturday afternoon, there are likely to be several adults and a few children holding at least three to four conversations as well as the television being on with the sound up and the police scanner informing anyone and everyone what's going on in the city of Cincinnati. In the video there are no stops and

starts, apart from the one, because neither the world nor the house is ordered in distinct units. Perhaps the continuity of activity is best demonstrated when the telephone rings early in the video and Charlie does not stop the tape to answer the phone but simply balances phone on one shoulder and camera on the other, letting the latter run, revealing a slightly cocked view of the fireplace. Later, the camera is set down for a moment next to the coffee maker while Charlie pours himself another cup of coffee. In the mean time, there are endless zooms and pans and tilts, recording both items in isolation as well as the larger milieu in which they reside.

The single most revealing and delightful moment in the entire video occurs outside, when Charlie puts the camera down on the van, carefully levels and aligns it, and then walks back toward the house. In a slightly awkward, but still proud gesture, he turns to the camera, smooths the nightshirt be is wearing and points to himself, as if to say, "This is me, Charlie Kraft, maker of this video, maker of this home. I am signaling to you both my own importance as well as the importance I place on talking with you." He then turns back towards the house, enters and is gone for some time until he returns to remove the camera from its perch.

Clearly-Lettered Signs

In this exploration of contiguities, I hope to have shown that the ordered doing that makes up the Kraft household—which I consider here to be made up of items, their arrangement, people, and the way they go about the business of living—extends to the ordered doing of its own recording by a member of that household. In addition, the performance/audience dynamic is itself structured by the aesthetic that informs all the rest; that is, the nature of Charlie Kraft's ordered doing is to extend outwards, to see as continuous fields of community and activity what others might regard as distinct—e.g. living rooms and bedrooms, videotaping and holding a phone conversation.

Recently, Henry Glassie has called many of us back to first principles, when he notes that "we call buildings 'vernacular' because they embody values alien to those cherished in the academy" (1999:230). In a recent ethnography of Appalachia, A Space on the Side of the Road, Kathleen Stewart conveyed well the ongoing displacement of the people who occupy a land too often imagined by others as wasted, fouled, or otherwise worthless. But she did so, I felt, clinging too closely to our own preferred stylistics: the snapshot, as seen in the constant refrains of "imagine" and "picture," has come to stand in for observation of American scenes (cf. Baudrillard 1988; Dorst 1989). To Stewart's snapshots, this essay adds an

aborted inventory and an indigenous video recording in an attempt to expand our understanding of Appalachians as a disparate and diverse group as well as to expand the possibilities for the ethnography of place.

Indeed, as I hope to have shown in this meditation on the nature of habit and inhabitation, the sort of impoverishment of lived experience that occurs within a paradigm such as "habitus"(cf. Bourdieu 1977) can be countered by the more careful examinations that ethnographies of place demand. Reiteration does not necessarily mean a kind of absolute redundancy nor does it necessarily possess the quality of "unthought" (nor are its agents, its embodiments, "unthinking"). Instead, reiteration, such as Charlie Kraft's careful disposition of objects within his home and himself within the world, can be characterized by a richness, a richness that can only exist along a continuum of consciousness, not one necessarily buried within the unconscious.

In turn, I have taken the greater challenge to be understanding of the nature of place, which is, as has been remarked, the nature of order. As I glide along the expressway, its clearly lettered signs channeling me along the correct path, reason would seem a clear guide. But what reason would store photographs in the character cage of an electric typewriter? The answer comes simply in the front room of this house whose street literally bears no sign: history. Benjamin asks, "For what else is this collection but a disorder to which habit has accommodated itself to such an extent that it can appear as order?" (1968:60). I know my way because I have traveled it before; I do not need a street sign to tell me which is Sidney, nor an address to reveal which house is Sam and Charlie's. But though I inhabit this path, it does not become invisible to me. Its existence alternates between being a part of me and interacting with me. Every so often as I walked up the steps to the front door I was reminded of the first time I walked up those steps, which were both the same and then different, and the sum of all the times in-between. In doing so, I did not confront the mutual impenetrability of domains, the impossibility of ever "getting inside." Instead, as we physically move ourselves into and within the domain of another, we begin to understand the highly active and interactive workings of inhabitation.

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NOTES

Over the last ten to fifteen years, the twinned ideas of space and place have become the focus of intense scholarly interest. Once taken as a given that researchers of the human endeavor should travel to a place to study the people who moved about the landscape,

we have come to be as interested in how people imagine themselves in the landscapes within which they live and work, that is how they emplace themselves, which is an act as Edward Casey points out, very close to embody (1996:34). Instead of assuming the horizons of a place, ethnographies of place seek to elicit those horizons through close study of narratives, descriptions, images, and other cultural forms. The anthropology of space and place, then, is not all that unlike other cultural anthropologies, except with a different focus—and even, then, it cannot help but overlap other areas of interest, as Feld and Basso observe, like identity or power (1996:3-6).

This formulation of the relationship of places, of what can be imagined, is somewhat distinct from Yi-Fu Tuan's pairing of space and place. In Tuan's view, it is space and place that "require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for the location to be transformed into place" (1977:6). In the classical pairing of the two, the village is place and the bush beyond is space. Recent ethnographies of space/place have focused on how people inhabit and imagine what has been nominally considered space reveal that space itself is not unmapped nor unknown (cf. Feld and Basso 1996; Jackson 1995; Pocius 1991). All spaces are potential places, and in fact are places, but perhaps not within our own cognitive realm. In the spaces of a city, or practically any landscape for that matter, what is space for us is place for another. Heidegger's observation is that space is actually the product of the dialectical imagining of places: "The bridge is a location. As such a thing, it allows a space into which earth and heaven, divinities and mortals are admitted" (1977:333).

Heidegger suggests that bridges are horizons that gather to us things, places, and the people that occupy them. But it is impossible to gather just one place: "The space allowed by the bridge contains many places variously near or far from this bridge. These places, however, may be treated as [. . .] positions between which there lies a measurable distance" (1977:333).

Cities across North America witness this process which is called "running down" when the "other" moves in or "gentrifying" when they are moved out.

The house has always been both a product of discourse and a producer of discourse (cf. Rybczynski 1986), and examinations of occupations, regardless of fit, reveal the nature of such discursive sites. Those who occupy preexisting spaces are not fortunate enough to project those spaces into the world and must thus project upon material surfaces the complex web of ideas that each of us bears with us and is born by. Neither the material nor the mental is superordinate. Instead, they interact in a truly significant fashion. The job of the interlocutor is to tread the bridge carefully as his or her mind trundles back and forth between places, trying to discern mind in material.

Kathy Neustadt's hermeneutical considerations based on field experience are extremely interesting and suggestive (cf. 1994), and I find that my experience with the Krafts in Cincinnati offered me, if not similar experiences, then similar conclusions to Neustadt's "lingualistics." Like other considerations of consumption (cf. Kilgour 1990), Neustadt foregrounds the relativity of ideas of "inside" and "outside" that have plagued reconsiderations of the ethnographic enterprise over the last fifteen years. I found much

the same in my own experience in Camp Washington and offer up a complementary image of occupation, or what Heidegger figures as "in-dwelling." In this metaphor, we are always in the process of occupying, or inhabiting if you prefer, ourselves. Over and against closed notions of identity that always disadvantage the ethnographer who can never "get inside," this notion of occupation offers up that we are never truly inside ourselves but are always in the process of occupying ourselves—perhaps enriching again the dead metaphor the phrase alludes to.

At root, cultural performances are framed activity. Frames are culturally representative modes of ordering (cf. Goffman 1974). Acts are culturally representative modes of behavior. The two together reveal as well as constitute the nature of the intersection between ethics and aesthetics. Both are ordered doing. The difference between the two is what has been called "the fuzzy fringe of performance" (Briggs 1988:17), and sociolinguists have emphasized that performance as a qualitative descriptor would have little or no explanatory value if it were used to cover the entire spectrum of ordered doing (Hymes 1981:84; Bauman 1977:8). At what point aesthetics takes leave of ethics, if ever that is possible, must be situationally described and evaluated.

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