<u>Chapter VII: Conclusions</u>

In this concluding chapter, the concept of ethnographic videoconferencing is reviewed, and what it offers to the world is discussed. As this dissertation is being written in the discipline of Folklore, primary concerns here are to show that ethnographic videoconferencing has value to both Folklore (the academic discipline), and folklore (the activity that is studied in this discipline), that is, that ethnographic videoconferencing can be useful to both scholars and practitioners of folklore. An attempt is also made to show that videoconferencing in general offers an opportunity for a renaissance of locally-generated culture.

<u>A) Local Cultures are Endangered.</u>

The last generation in the history of the world to have grown-up without the pervasive presence of television and other mass media technologies is now in its late middle age. It seems that this could be the last generation in which culture is perceived as something primarily locally-produced and embodied by local elders. By twenty years from now, almost every member of this final local-oriented generation will be gone. But this dissertation maintains that we, the people of the world, should, as much as possible, not permit local cultures to pass away with

these individuals.  To the extent that we wish to document and learn the

traditional ways of local cultures, now is the time.  To the extent that nothing is

done, tens of thousands of years of human cultural development would be lost

forever.  There will not be another chance.

Thus, the next twenty years -- 2010-2030 (49as-69as)[1] -- are crucial ones in the

history of humanity.  Although humans will always develop folklore around any

experience they have in common (Dundes 1978), and although vernacular styles

of communication and production will always continue to develop in human

communities, most traditional genres of folklore arts are quickly disappearing

from the face of the earth.  For centuries, many urban, literary-centric people

have been worrying out loud that local cultures in general, and traditional verbal

arts in particular, have been disappearing.  And these arts have been

diminishing.  However, until recently it has been a slow and gradual process.

---

[1] This dissertation suggests that humanity has developed to the stage where it
might be able to seriously consider adopting a new global dating system: one
that measures time by using a collective human achievement, a developmental
milestone of humanity as a whole (rather than the birth of a particular group's
leader), as the pivotal moment.  One such pivotal moment occurred in 1961,
when humanity first broke the bounds of gravity.  We did this by sending a
person (Yuri Gagarin) into space.  For humanity to enter space for the first time is
similar to a child being able to sit up, stand, walk, or speak for the first time.  In
the proposed dating system: the present year is 49as, because we are in the
49th year after space was first reached ("as" stands for "*after space* was reached
by humans; and "bs" stands for "*before space* was reached by humans").

But now the end of traditional and local cultures on the planet is, in many cases, very much immediately approaching.  Language is a basic aspect of culture.  Of the 7,000 languages spoken in the world today, half are in danger of extinction (Wilford 2007).  One language is lost -- often through the death of its final speaker -- approximately every two weeks.[2]  Numerous organizations are dedicated to researching and documenting endangered languages, including:

1) The *Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages*,[3] directed by Gregory Anderson and David Harrison (2007), who have collaborated on "The Linguists" (2008), a documentary movie about researching endangered languages.[4]

2) National Geographic's *Enduring Voices Project: Documenting the World's Endangered Languages*.[5]

3) *The Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Project*, directed by Peter Austin, and based in the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.[6]

---

[2] http://www.nationalgeographic.com/mission/enduringvoices , accessed on 2 May 2010.
[3] http://www.livingtongues.org .
[4] http://thelinguists.com .
[5] http://www.nationalgeographic.com/mission/enduringvoices .
[6] http://www.hrelp.org .

4) *The World Oral Literature Project: Voices of Vanishing Worlds*, directed by Mark Turin, and based at University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.[7]

5) *The Endangered Languages Initiative*, directed by Catherine Fletcher.  The ELI includes a Global Map of Traditional Poetry, and is a project of the New York-based People's Poetry Gathering.[8]

6) The *Endangered Languages Alliance,* led by Linguists Daniel Kaufman and Juliette Blevins, and Poet Bob Holman.[9]

Languages generally are related to local nature.  Recognition of the inter-relatedness of culture, language, and place (geography, climate, etc.) has now been well-documented (Maffi 2005).[10]  Local nature, and the culture that has grown in the midst of it, often support and protect each other.

Much of the work of documenting endangered cultures is now being done by linguists.  For example, the editors and contributing authors of *Information Technology and Indigenous People* (2007) are for the most part in the field of teaching second languages.

---

[7] http://www.oralliterature.org .
[8] http://www.peoplespoetry.org .
[9] http://endangeredlanguagealliance.org/main .
[10] http://www.terralingua.org .

In the case of the Kani people, a part of the equation is that much of the group's old culture is stored and expressed in Kani Pasai, the group's oral dialect, which is a combination of Tamil, Malayalam, and possibly other languages. This dialect is known especially to the older generation. The Kani people live in Tamil Nadu (to the east) and Kerala (to the west), but the old culture is primarily in Malayalam, the language of Kerala. This means that young Kani people in Tamil Nadu, on the eastern side of the state border, are especially rapidly losing touch with their group's old culture. Such situations are common with tribal groups living in border areas around the world.

Isolated individuals who happen to still be bearers of local traditions do remain. They may still have the old culture in them for a number of possible reasons: They may be living at the edge of town, bordering a wilderness area. They may have a particular talent and interest in the old ways. Their parents -- who often have passed away some time ago -- may have been especially involved in the old ways, perhaps as social storytellers, perhaps as professional or semi-professional performers and/or ritual specialists.

In many traditional communities around the world, even in rural environments in "undeveloped" nations, most of the traditional verbal arts have already been lost. In many cases, a primary remaining way that members of traditional cultures can learn about their cultures' traditions is through the recordings and analytical

writings of scholars who have visited their communities and who have done ethnographic work there (Feld 2000).

The dwindling of the traditional and the local can be said to have begun with the beginning of writing.  The next great step was the introduction of printing (in the mid 1400s).  This was followed by the coming of the Industrial Revolution (in the late 1700s) -- which coincided with the conceptualizations of Folklore and folklore, conceptualizations which can be thought of as exercises in nostalgia.  Then came the ability to create electricity (in the late 1700s), which eventually enabled those great destroyers of folk culture: radio, cinema, and television.  The primary way that these media can be said to have adversely-affected folk culture was that they caused people to fall into a passive state of consumption.  With the advent of mass media, people have increasingly devalued the forms and contents of their local traditions -- including the traditional artistic uses of own voices and bodies -- and so, for the most part, lost interest in producing and sharing their own local and traditional cultures.

The introduction of audio cassette technology to rural communities around the world in the 1980s was another huge step in the process of electronic recordings replacing living performers -- but it also marked a beginning of relatively small-scale music producers being able to record and distribute local music (Manuel 1993).  The introduction of videocassettes, audio CDs, video CDs, and DVDs,

has likewise advanced electronically-mediated culture: all of the hardware and much of the content being produced far away by the wealthy and powerful, with just a small amount of local "grass-roots" production and distribution. "Globalization," as the term is generally used, refers to the spread of culture from institutions rooted in urban, industrial, media, and/or financial centers: such globalized culture is saturating the planet at a seemingly ever-accelerating pace.

The new technologies that enable members of the public to record and transmit -- including the computer, the Internet, and the mobile telephone -- have in recent years become available to large numbers of people.  A great question is: "To what degree will individuals and communities be able to globalize their own cultures with these new technologies?"  It seems that much of that which does not get digitized and globalized might simply disappear and cease to exist, leaving no record.  It is only by utilizing recording and transmitting technology -- and applying this technology to their group's traditions -- that people of traditional communities can rescue their cultures from powerlessness and extinction.  Electronic globalization of local traditional cultures makes this material available as topics of global conversation, and can enable members of these cultures to participant in the global conversation.

Local cultures are endangered in part because, all around the world, local cultures are under siege from without, and are being abandoned from within.  To

many people of local cultures, evidently, their local culture seems impotent, weak, and unattractive.

In the case of Vellambi, the Kani village in which I was based during my doctoral fieldwork, the forest wilderness on one side of the village still had a good deal of vitality. People could still walk into the forest and gather small amounts of forest products for personal use, such as edible and medicinal plants, honey, and small fish in the rivers. Wild pigs still come from the forest at night and eat the agricultural crops grown on the mountainsides adjacent to the village. This means that it still makes some sense for local people to respect, fear, and address the elements of the forest. Many of the traditional prayers, manthirams (ritual chants), and ceremonies are addressed to forest spirits, deities of various types, asking these deities, these forces of nature, for protection and mercy -- and this respect for the powers of the forest continues to grounded in reality.

However, what generally has occurred in forest areas around the world, especially in the past fifty years or so, is that the sources of livelihood have largely shifted from nature, from the wilderness, to human institutions based in urban centers. Today it is these institutions, these human-made entities, that have most of the aura of power and importance that the wilderness once had.[11]

---

[11] Barbara Verardo's article, "Forest People, Modern people: Modernity and Social Change among the Ho and Munda People of Jharkhand" (2003), helped to bring this type of analysis to my attention.

Among the institutions to which I am referring are India's National Government (based in New Delhi), and Tamil Nadu's State Government (based in Chennai), represented by Government schools (with their teachers), Police and Forest Officers, and numerous other officials.  There are all of the political parties, with their relentless attempts to persuade people to adopt their ideologies and follow their leaders.  There are the organized religions, including those originating in India, such as Orthodox Hinduism.  Orthodox Hinduism, with its emphasis on Sanskrit language, rituals, and deities, and temples, is a very different culture than what can be referred to as "small village" Hinduism, which often includes local deities (some related to elements of local nature, and to ancestors of local people), and whose primary form of worship is shamanism, often accompanied by ritual killing of chickens and other animals (which are then eaten).  Christianity also has a strong presence in Kanyakumari District, as does Islam.

Another dominating cultural factor is the Chennai cinema industry.  The people of Tamil Nadu have had a long and intense love affair with Tamil cinema, most especially its music and superheroes.  I have mentioned about how pictures of Rajnikant (a longtime superhero) and Vijay (a younger superhero) often appear on the wedding posters that many Kani people have printed to announce their weddings, which seem to imply that this cinema actor is the groom, or at least that he is invited to the wedding or that he is presiding over the wedding.  I have

also mentioned the pervasive presence of cinema music in Vellambi and its surroundings, both in everyday life (often via battery-operated FM radios), and at weddings (through professional sound-systems bought in for the occasion).

Then there are the big businesses, the plantations, such as the rubber plantation around which the town down the road from Vellambi is built.  And all of the businesses and consumer products mentioned and advertised on television and radio.

All of these huge and powerful governmental, commercial, educational, and cultural bureaucratic institutions bear down on traditional Kani life.  A leading architectural representation in Vellambi of these distant institutions is the concrete building.  In contrast, the architectural representation of traditional Kani culture is thatched huts, and "eru madams" (tree houses) (as discussed in Chapter II, pp. 101-2).

Governmental institutions regulate local life.  All of the above-mentioned institutions seek to influence local life; each tends to impart an ideology and a set of practices on local life.  It sometimes seems that it is not in the interests of any of these great institutions to encourage local traditions and culture.  People of local traditional cultures are often very practical-minded.  They see who and what has economic and social-political power, who is great, and they may align

themselves with that greatness, perhaps in the hope that they might receive some benefit from that great entity.

B) The Value of Cultural Diversity.

Some people might say, "So what if the traditions are lost?  Many of these traditions were based on superstitions, and were parts of constrictive cultural and social systems that many people born into traditional communities have done their best to escape."  While this may be true on certain levels, it is also true that there is a great deal of poetic, mystical, and practical value to aspects of traditional cultures.  And many of these aspects are stored and expressed in these cultures' oral verbal arts.

One rationalization for documenting, preserving, and developing traditional cultures is that the knowledge inherent in these cultures might be valuable to scholars in the future in their quest to understand all aspects of humanity and its development.  Humanity might especially benefit from traditional knowledge about nature, including the medicinal uses of plants.  Another rationalization is more beauty-oriented: it states that cultural development activities should be undertaken so that group members (and others) might -- in the present and in the future -- have the option of making art derived from the group's ancient traditions.

Incidentally, there is no such thing as cultural preservation: what is possible is cultural development, the applying of traditions to present-day conditions and challenges.

It is now scientifically established that biological diversity is healthy for a region. For example, bio-diverse vegetation helps to keep water and refreshed air in the area (Novacek 2001). This dissertation submits that it is similarly beneficial (to humanity as a whole) to sustain and develop cultural diversity.

For example, this dissertation submits that tribal cultures are resources to be developed, rather than to be discarded (through assimilation). There is a great deal of knowledge about nature, and about working with nature, in tribal cultures. These cultures tend to be utterly intertwined with nature, and express the point of view that people are a part of nature. Tribal cultures (including their languages) and natural wildernesses are mutually-supportive treasures, which need to be nurtured together. A growing body of literature links biological, cultural, and linguistic diversity (Maffi 2005). Some environmentalists have said that tribal people should be removed from forest areas, for the protection of those forest areas. However, from what I have witnessed in the course of my doctoral fieldwork, tribal people tend to live sustainably in forest areas, as they have for tens of thousands of years. They know how to harvest the wild and semi-wild

resources of the forest in such a way that the resources are never driven to extinction but can always regenerate.

The ingenuity of Kani Pasai (the Kani people's slang spoken language) is admirable. Like most dialects and languages, in many aspects Kani Pasai's rules are systematic, in other aspects irregular (Agesthialingom 1976). A language is like a forest: both grow in what may seem to be chaotic ways, but in fact they follow their own internal logics. The rich complexity of the Kani people's spoken language and verbal arts could not easily be recreated by modern individuals, any more than a wilderness area -- with its many interacting layers and levels of vegetation, animals, earth, water, etc. -- could easily be brought into being. Once lost, a culture -- including the indecipherable and seeming "nonsense" aspects of its language and verbal arts -- can never be reconstructed. We should consider very carefully before we permit traditional cultures, and the natural environments in which they live, to disappear. Traditional spoken verbal arts embody countless generations of development of what the group culture has felt is valuable to be passed down to the next generation -- in terms both of styles of speaking, and the content of the speech.

Cultural diversity yields a variety of perspectives, a variety of ways of solving problems and exploiting opportunities. A community -- including the earth's entire human community -- can only be said to be thinking at its fullest to the

degree that all of its members' points-of-view are being considered.  The very presence of multiple points of view stimulates analytical and creative thinking, and helps with problem-solving.

To begin with, each traditional culture has its own ways of acculturating infants into human society.  Children's songs/chants/dances/games teach children, through play, ways to think, speak, and behave -- ways to perceive, express, and interact.  It is hoped that this dissertation has shown that there is much informal educational value in children's traditional play.

As detailed in Chapter VI, three ways in which language-learning may occur through the playing of children's songs/chants/dances/games are: 1) repetition with variation, 2) physical enactment of words as they are spoken, and 3) question-and-answer routines.  The children's play discussed in this dissertation teaches that the association of things (things known to go together), as well as sounds of words (puns and rhymes), are valid justifications for claims of relevance, at least in play (please see "What Kind Of?," Activity 4, p. 252).  A related non-rational, or meta-logical, way of introducing a new subject, or changing the subject, in this children's play is: there is talk, and then suddenly the listener is touched (or is touched in a different way, or on a different place on the body).  That is, a media other than sound is suddenly used (as in "One Pot," Activity 2, p. 222; and "Monkey Jumping," Activity 8, p. 304-5).  Such methods of

associative, aesthetic, and "sideways" thinking -- which "break frame," as Erving Goffman might say (Goffman 1974) -- involve using criteria other than standard verbal logic by which to claim, ascertain, and judge relevance and continuity in thought and conversation.

If traditional ways of teaching thinking such as these might be lost, the people of the world might be left with modern educators' suggestions in these fields, and often such suggestions are narrow- and short-sighted.  Educational practices developed through modern institutions tend to embody the prejudices and ideologies of these institutions, and the cultures which have created them.  Traditional children's play, on the other hand as we have seen contains a great deal of associational thinking, frame-breaking, and seeming randomness and nonsense.  This promotes mental flexibility, openness, and practical ingenuity -- encouraging people to think *outside of the box* (Sutton-Smith 1997).  This dissertation submits that these elements in traditional children's verbal arts are good for children to think, and lead to thoughtfulness, ingenuity, and maturity -- for the individual and for the group.

Variants of many of the Kani children's play activities are known throughout Tamil Nadu, and the rest of south India.  But in most of those places, the children seem to know fewer of them, due to more exposure to radio and TV, cinema, and school.

One example of the usefulness of folk culture was illustrated by the Moken people, also known as the Sea Gypsies, in relation to the Tsunami which swept from Indonesia to India in December 2004. The Moken are a tribal people who traditionally have lived in coastal areas of Thailand and surrounding countries. When the sea level lowered, Moken people knew from their folk knowledge that this could be a pre-cursor to a tsunami, so they fled the beach areas, and also warned numerous foreigners to do the same. In this way, Moken folklore is credited with saving lives (Graceffo 2007).

But even in less dramatic ways, development of traditional cultures benefits humanity as a whole. I hope that the 2004 and 2005 Chennai-Philadelphia videoconferences, as presented in this dissertation, begin to demonstrate that the Kani people have a wealth of culture which it might benefit other people to be exposed to -- in terms of language play and teaching-and-learning techniques to begin with. The "Digital Divide" is often spoken of in terms of the oral-centric people in the countryside being impoverished. These events, however, demonstrate that people living in the countryside have much traditional culture to share with city-dwellers who may be literate, but who may also in some ways be culturally-impoverished.

C) Videoconferencing: A Way by Which Local Cultures Can be Developed, Shared, and Studied.

In the paragraphs above, I have sought to establish that 1) traditional verbal arts are in many cases approaching extinction, and 2) these traditional verbal arts are valuable.  To the degree that these arguments have validity, a next question might be: "Given that we would like to prevent the extinction of these local traditions, what general social conditions are needed for the nurturing of such traditions?"  One answer is that the general public would need to generate public opinion, so that the government would be encouraged to realize that it is in the best interest of its people, of itself, and of the nation, to support and help with the development of local cultures.

A question that then would remain would be a practical one: "What are some ways in which such help could be given?"  One possible answer is after-school programs for children of communities, so that they can be taught about their group heritage.  Another possible answer is annual or seasonal trips to areas of nature, where the children could learn about the relationship between nature and their group's culture.  Yet another possible answer is the development of "living museums" (exhibitions of objects that are still in everyday use) and multimedia cultural resource centers.  These facilities could have two levels: one for members of the community, and one for visitors (such as tourists, scholars, and

students).  Parts of the documentation and exhibition of local ways could be done by members of the community.

Young people in the community who have some interest and talent as collectors, presenters, players, or consumers of any sort of music or other aspects of culture, could be recruited to join such efforts of local cultural development. Technology that enables recording and interactive telecommunication needs to be put into the hands of these young people.  This is a somewhat unusual idea in the fields of Folklore and Anthropology, for a prevailing wisdom in these fields is that the visiting scholar should not pollute the people he is studying with the tools of modernity.  The idea is that this might confuse the people under study, and cause them to lose their identity.

However, today in 49as[12], it seems relatively safe to say that there are no longer any traditional oral-centric communities that are in danger of becoming polluted with modernity.  The pollution has already occurred!  At this stage in the evolution of human society, communities just about everywhere are inundated with literary and electronic messages.  This is very much the case with my fieldwork community in Tamil Nadu.  Schools -- with student attendance required by the Government -- have begun to teach literacy to young people of such communities.  And most of all, the pervasive presence of commercial radio,

---

[12] Please see p. 550.

television, and cinema has to a large degree helped to turn people of local communities into passive consumers of urban-based commercial culture.  It seems that the glamour of this media-delivered commercial culture cannot be matched by the forms and contents of the traditional local cultures.

The question then is not whether or not it is appropriate to "pollute" traditional cultures by exposing their members to electronic media: this has already occurred.  The question is whether or not to enable members of such communities to also have some experience as producers and directors of electronic media.

Jawaharl Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, recommended that each group in society should develop according to its own genius (Singh 1989).  Society's goal should not be for traditional cultures to assimilate into the general culture, but rather for members of these cultures to develop their traditional identities, and add to, enrich, and to some degree transform, the general culture.  One way of enabling such development could now involve putting recording, transmitting, and interactive telecommunication technology in the hands of people in traditional communities, and giving them training in how to use such technology to help globalise their own cultures.

We need to enable members of these communities to electronically present, discuss, and share their elders' ways. We need to invite, welcome, and enable members of traditional communities to join the global dialogue. Everything has gone electronic these days except local traditions. Local people need access to, and need to learn how to operate interactive (receive-and-transit) technology. The technology of which I speak is now available to the public, especially in the form of the tiny mobile interactive telecommunication computers known as "smart phones." However, it is only the more expensive models that have video recording, video streaming (to the Internet), and videoconference abilities. As has been the case for many years, in comparison with receive-only technology, interactive (and multimedia) technology tends to be more expensive and delicate, and requires more training to operate. A message that helping to enable members of traditional communities to use such technology in relation to their traditions, would be that society considers these traditions to be worth the electronic media treatment, that these traditions are significant, interesting, and important.

This approach would be supported by the recommendations of *Many Voices, One World*, often referred to as the *MacBride Report* (UNESCO, 1980), which presented the concept of *the Right to Communicate.* This is the idea that -- because almost everyone today is inundated from birth by electronic messages from entertainment companies, organized religions, governments, etc. -- it is a

fundamental human right of each individual on the planet to also be able to transmit their own electronic messages. This *Right* can be applied to nations, communities, and individuals. It is akin to the *Right to Free Speech* and the *Right to Assembly*.

Following this principle, whenever I do fieldwork, I train interested members of the community to use the electronic equipment, including the interactive telecommunication equipment, that I am using. It would strike me as unfair and exploitive to not do so. To neglect doing so, it seems to me, might demoralize local people, by exposing them to new technology that is beyond their reach. In a fieldwork situation, an exchange is occurring: members of a traditional community are sharing some of their traditions, and in return they should get something that they feel is valuable. Cash is one possibility, but education, including professional training -- for those who desire it -- can be a more valuable one. Such education can be in the outsider's language and technology, but community members can be encouraged to apply the new tools to the documentation and presentation of their own cultures.

It is inherent to the fieldwork process that the people under study are affected, transformed, by coming into contact with the fieldworker. Likewise, the fieldworker is affected by the people under study. When people mingle, to some degree they become like each other. Thus, it is inherent to fieldwork that to

some degree the fieldworker destroys that which he or she came to study, simply through this contact.  At the same time, the fieldworker can also raise consciousness among the people under study, and make them aware that their traditions are interesting and worthwhile, not something to be lightly thrown away. Providing the equipment and training in itself would be a strong statement of encouragement that the traditional culture is significant.

It is true that literacy and the ability to operate electronic equipment take people of traditional communities away from their oral-centric roots.  The very coming into contact with a scholar does this to some extent.  If one were to fully follow the principle of seeking to not affect people, one would not teach people of oral-centric cultures how to read and write.  India has decided against this approach, however, by moving people out of the deep forest, and by insisting that all children attend schools.

By putting recording and transmitting technology in the hands of local people who have interest in it, one is also helping them to become more literate -- possibly in the local dialect, which some members of the community will eventually develop an interest in writing down, even if the local dialect had hitherto only been a spoken language; in the state language (in this case, Tamil); in the national language (in this case, Hindi); and/or in the leading global *lingua franca* (presently English).  Using such technology may also help the people who use it

to learn how to read and write, as they transpose their traditional culture into the digital realm.

It has been argued that people who barely have enough to eat should not be bothered with computers, but this argument ignores the fact that once people have access to computers (and the Internet, and mobile telephones, etc) they may be inspired to do all sorts of things, including developing new ways of making a living and contributing to the larger society.

So this is my conclusion:  A way to save traditional cultures from oblivion, a way to help them survive and develop, is to put recording and interactive telecommunication equipment in the hands of members of traditional communities, and to enable and train community members to apply this technology to their cultures.

In many cases, it will be young people in the community who will be interested and able to learn how to use the new technology.  Let us encourage those young members of the traditional communities who are already relatively modernized and globalized to take the lead in helping to document, preserve, develop, and share their seniors' ways, their groups' identities.  In many cases, these young people might not know that much more about their community's traditional culture than outsiders might know, for many young people in the community have turned

away from the traditions. But these young people are well-positioned to draw the traditional culture out of the few elders who still have a thorough grasp of it. The elders will be inspired to remember and share the old culture when young ones from their community are in the forefront of the documentation effort.

The jewel in the crown of the afore-mentioned "living museums" and community cultural resource centers can be ethnographic videoconferencing facilities -- by which others can study the local culture, and by which local people can study other cultures. Positive aspects of videoconferencing include: local people can speak for themselves, and can help to compose and frame the images of themselves that are being presented to others. The process allows them to simultaneously observe and question those would observe and question them. Ethnographic videoconferencing can only be done as a cooperative collaboration among all concerned: all must agree to participate in a conversation together.

This model of collaborative Folklore research presented in this dissertation offers education and training opportunities to members of the fieldwork community. It involves the tourism and museum businesses, with members of the community being trained for management positions, as scholars, tour guides, museum interpreters, and so on. It enables members of a community to help share the community's traditions with outsiders, in such a way that members of the

community have a great deal of control regarding how they and their community are presented.

Those traditional people who wish to live as much as possible in natural environments without new technology, should of course be permitted to do so. But those who wish to engage with the mainstream, who wish to make a contribution to the general society, should be encouraged. Traditional peoples have a lot to offer the larger community.

Putting recording and transmitting technology into the hands of young tribal people so that they can record, share, and develop their traditional exotic culture would benefit everyone, including increasing self-esteem and literacy, and bridging the ancient oral and the modern electronic and literate. Where the action really is in a fieldwork situation such as the one portrayed in this dissertation, is not between the fieldworker and the elders, but between the already semi-modernized young people of the community, and their elders. If the fieldworker can work with those young people, and enlist them in the culture collection and presentation process, wonderful things can occur, including the young people gaining literacy skills.

First then, I posit that videoconferencing should be accessible to interested tribal people -- enabling them to share their exotic traditions, to derive income from the

presentation of their culture, and also to educate the general public about these traditions).

Then, I would generalize the point, to apply it to everyone -- individuals everywhere should be enabled to share their unique ways through videoconferencing.  I posit that such universal access and expression would benefit humanity and society as a whole.  As the sayings go: "Two heads are better than one," and "The more the merrier."

The thinking process of a community -- including a national or global community -- operates at its optimum level to the degree that all members of the community are able to speak and be heard in public spheres.  Problem-solving and opportunity-cultivating efforts can only be improved by the availability of additional perspectives and points of view.  Thus, I submit that, for the sake of the common good, it is not just the right, but it is also the responsibility of each individual to engage in conversational videoconference events.

Videoconference access should be extended to everyone on the planet, to individuals with their unique ways of thinking, to those in any community, to those with any sort of traditions and conventions of expression and communication. This would enable all of these people to participate in a global interactive telecommunication conversation.  This is the dream of teletopia.  It is also the

dream of democracy, of human expression and development, of fully functioning public spheres.  Some may feel that it might be in their best interests to keep other individuals or groups voiceless and isolated in public.  But this dissertation submits that it is best for society as a whole to, as much as is practical, organize and enable civic and artistic expression and sharing.  It is possible to go a long way towards overcoming the type of alienation known as loneliness, through everyone being able to videoconference and otherwise telecommunicate with other individuals and/or groups.  It is also possible to eradicate unemployment through this technology.  For once everyone would be able to telecommunicate, we could find helpful and useful things for people to do -- beginning with entertaining and educating each other about our local traditions and conventions.

People should be encouraged to document, celebrate, and share their community's traditional verbal arts, and also to develop new hybrid forms.  These are life-affirming activities.  Artistic expression can improve self-esteem, literacy, and ways of making a living.  Making and experiencing beautiful things, expressing oneself fully, discovering one's complex identity in changing conditions, learning how to use new technology, fulfilling oneself personally and professionally -- these things help to make life worth living.

Disaster-related assistances (concerning HIV, the 2004 Tsunami, etc.) are helpful gestures -- but local traditional and conventional methods of

communication and production should also be recognized, celebrated, and developed.  In this way, many types of human resilience, cleverness, and ingenuity can be discovered and made available for general use.

This dissertation has shown how ethnographic videoconferencing -- like virtual study trips on the school level -- can serve as a method of learning about other cultures.  A key point is that videoconferencing enables conversations with members of other cultures.  Such exposure and relationship can help to raise consciousness about the value of traditional cultures, enabling people on both sides of the conversation to see such cultures as valuable resources.

In a videoconference -- unlike a photograph, or a film or video -- what occurs between the watcher and the watched is a relationship, a process, a conversation, a negotiation, an exchange.  Both sides frame themselves, and speak for themselves (with translation, perhaps).  Videoconferencing, like conversation in general, is an antidote for objectification of other people, and for commodification of culture.

Ethnographic videoconferencing reminds us that data is never simply collected from people.  A relationship is always involved.  That relationship may be controlled by the scholar, and the person of the culture under study may have no opportunity to ask his or her own questions, and make his or her own comments.

Indeed this is often the way it has been in the past. But with ethnographic videoconferencing -- and more importantly, with the mindset, attitude, and morality of this interactivity -- the relationship will naturally be more reciprocal and transparent. If people are not satisfied with an interaction, and exchange, they tend to say so. Some scholars might prefer for such things to not be said in front of others, but such transparency and openness is beneficial for truth and science.

Ethnographic videoconferencing has been inspired by Penn Folklore and by the *Performance-centered approach to Folklore*. Ethnographic videoconferencing represents the same process- and relationship-oriented approach that the *Performance-centered approach* applied to folklore activity, now being applied to an electronically-mediated process of documenting folklore.

The *Performance-centered approach to folklore* was born in the 1960s. It was an aspect of the *Socio-linguistic Moment*, an aspect of the general redefinition of communication that occurred in the 1960s -- from mass media (top to bottom), to feedback-loop (horizontal). In this sense, it was part of a democratizing movement that is only now coming to fruition with the implementation of videoconferencing, an ultimate interactive medium. There will be improvements in and extensions of videoconferencing -- such as life-size figures, three-dimensionality, virtual reality (in which aspects of computer-generated environments respond to movements of one's body), the ability to share

webpages and video recordings in the course of videoconferences, and videoconferencing in through social networks -- but the basic fact of being able to visualize one's conversation partners is the defining and ultimate step.

This concluding chapter -- like the dissertation as a whole -- seeks to acculturate the reader into the social imaginary and actuality of videoconferencing. It does not so much seek to usher the reader into the Age of Videoconferencing, but rather to help the reader to realize that we are already in this new age, and to help the reader make sense of this new age. One way that it seeks to do this is by suggesting ways to integrate ancient aspects of human culture, with the present and future.

Videoconferencing does not just affect us when we are videoconferencing. The presence of this technology alters our general worldviews, just as technological breakthroughs have done in the past. Such breakthroughs affects not just those who are using the technology, and not just when they are using it -- rather, they affect people's entire personalities and cultures.

In the *Age of Videoconferencing*, videoconferencing is the media ideal. From this point of view, every other form of electronic communication might be considered to have something missing. When any electronically-mediated communication might occur, people might ask: "Why are we not videoconferencing? Why do I

not have the opportunity to fully (visually) interact with the person with whom I am speaking?"  If a one-way media is being used, one now might ask:  "Why can't I also ask questions and make comments, help to set the agenda, and make a bid to change the topic?"  That is, in the Age of Videoconferencing, it is taken for granted that every act of communication could be part of a long-distance instantaneously-participatory conversation.

Mobile telephones will be leading the way with videoconferencing, commonly known as "video calls" -- once the 3G (Third Generation) networks are widely in place.  The delay of the implementation of video calling on mobile telephones has been due not to limitations in mobile telephone hardware: it has been due to the lack of the necessary wireless bandwidth.

Desktop and laptop computers are increasingly videoconference-capable -- with cameras built into the hardware (usually above the screen), and the software either having been pre-loaded or being simple to download and install.  Some online social networks already offer videoconferencing at a click.  It remains to be seen whether or not online videoconferencing might be enabled by and associated with a particular software program or website -- as YouTube is associated with posting and sharing video recordings, and Twitter is associated with posting and sharing brief text messages.  At present, Skype is the most widely used software program for online videoconferencing on personal

computers (both the software and the videoconferencing are free). Polycom is the most prominent company in the field of expensive, high-quality videoconferencing that involves the use of specialized equipment other than personal computers. But for videoconferencing to come into its own, it will need to transcend any single company or brand name, and must be as convenient as making a phone call, or turning on a TV.

This dissertation has touched upon the question of how Kani villages in forest areas might be developed in green (sustainable, nature-preserving) ways, and has raised the possibility of eco-tourism in this regard. Solar power for street lamps is already being used in some Kani villages, and there is talk about also using solar power for electrified fences. Another aspect of eco-tourism could be people visiting via videoconference -- the afore-mentioned virtual study-trips, and ethnographic videoconferencing. Videoconferencing is a green activity in that it can enable members of the public to visit and learn about nature without physically coming there and possibly damaging the natural environment. Videoconferencing can also make unnecessary the use of fossil fuels that might be used in transportation processes.

This dissertation has presented a new variant of the model for Folklore fieldwork. Aspects of this new variant include the scholar:

1) Teaching those members of the community who are interested to operate the recording and transmission equipment.  Helping to develop a community multimedia cultural resource center and living museum -- both for members of the community and for visitors -- with members of the community in fieldwork, exhibition, and management positions.

2) Utilizing interactive telecommunication such as videoconferencing to present and share the findings with people at his/her home university, including students and faculty, members of the public, and members of the culture's diaspora community.  This activity can be called, ethnographic videoconferencing.

It is hoped that this dissertation has shown that children's songs/chants/ dances/games are an excellent gateway into a traditional culture.  These activities help children to develop spoken language ability; and also to learn "how to behave" in the culture.

The oral verbal elements of these activities are designed for beginners.  Many of the grammatical structures, and concepts, and behavior patterns presented in these activities also appear elsewhere in the culture's expressive repertoire.  The children's activities are relatively easy for an outsider to study -- if one can gain the confidence of the children, that is.  For these activities are not secret knowledge as far as adults are concerned.  They are offered to every infant who

appears, to be acculturated into the community.  A visitor from outside the

community is like an infant, in the sense of not knowing how to speak or behave

in this community.  Thus, it is appropriate for a visitor to put him/herself in the

humble position of an infant, in relation to a community.  A visitor can benefit

from sitting with the group's children, and learning alongside them -- through

observation of and participation in play -- how to speak and behave in the

community.  From the perspective of adults in a community, children's play

activities (especially those which are taught by adults to children) may be seen

as aspects of child-rearing.  These are interesting and important subjects for

anyone wishing to enter and learn about a community.  Learning children's

songs/chants/dances/games can, of course, be just a beginning of involvement

with a community.  Once this process is begun, people in the community may

also be willing to share other things.

Just as small children are on the verge of learning how to speak and

comprehend speech, we as humans are on the verge of utilizing

videoconferencing in a widespread manner, and this dissertation submits that the

Age of Videoconferencing can usher in changes that will be as dramatic as the

changes a child experiences when she first becomes able to speak and

understand speech.  For example, it is difficult to imagine that the concepts (and

actualities) of unemployment and loneliness will have the same power over

individuals' lives once the Age of Videoconferencing comes into its own: so many

new options for access will be there.  Aspects of the videoconference experience that have yet to be defined as global standards include: the configurations of screens, conventions for how to handle multiparty videoconferences; and how to find people of common interests and points of view with whom one might videoconference.  Thus, in regard to videoconferencing, we humans are like small children, just beginning to learn how to do it.  For this reason, it seems that exploring children's play in videoconferences is a very appropriate matching of form and content, of media and subject matter.  Both involve creating neural and other networks that will help people to communicate in new ways.  This dissertation has concerned: 1) the acquiring of oral language ability (including possible uses of play in this process); and 2) the acquiring of videoconferencing ability (including the establishment of infrastructures and conventions for videoconferences).  A common theme of these two processes is: learning ways to communicate.  Just as small children and uninitiated outsiders are new to a community's culture, so all of us humans are relatively new to the videoconferencing practices that we are now in the process of designing.