

Remembering the Alamo: Cosmopolitan communication and grammars of transcendence

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines the role of memory in the creation of social reality, and it maintains that there are many stories about the Alamo that can be remembered. Although scholars typically have underused the concept of the communication perspective, it is proposed that monuments and memorials present distinctive grammars which facilitate different stories and engage visitors in different forms of communication. The concepts of cosmopolitan communication and of transcendent storytelling are applied to illustrate how museum visitors can use grammars of transcendence. Two types of methods were used to examine stories of the Alamo: 1) participant observation; and 2) textual analysis of the Alamo museum, of a book of the exhibits published by the Daughters of the Republic of Texas (1986), and of the official website of the Alamo (<http://www.thealamo.org>). To “Remember the Alamo” is to create a grammar whose rules allow literal, symbolic, social constructionist, and transcendent storytelling. The practical implications of this re-remembering are to (re)construct memory sites as resources in other contexts that are not oppressive by what they choose to privilege in remembering and forgetting. This can be accomplished by invoking stories that have been lived, but untold, unheard, and unknown up to now. To eliminate the endemic amnesia fostered in memory sites requires us to use different grammars and to challenge the coherence of the stories privileged. We thus “remember” other stories than what the exhibits want us to privilege, and create a different type of memory. The question is not whether we remember the Alamo, but which stories thereof and how the memory work is performed.

Remembering the Alamo: Cosmopolitan communication and grammars of transcendence

I first heard the expression “Remember the Alamo!” as an exchange student from México at a U.S. American high school. I was enrolled in a required course titled “Recent American History.” Discussing the period of the U.S.-Mexico war, the teacher asked me, “Do you ‘remember the Alamo?’” to which I replied that I did not know why I should remember a tree.¹ He was disturbed by my honest yet impertinent comment.

The first time I visited the Alamo² was as a tourist, 17 years later. At that time, I was intrigued by the fact that, despite the sign at the entrance requesting visitors for their respectful behavior,³ many children were going through the exhibits as if in a playground, while exasperated parents attempted to discipline them loudly. Many schoolchildren on field trips walked through the exhibits, the “Shrine” and the gift shop as they do in most museums. However, I was intrigued by the large number of Latino/a children and their reactions to the exhibits.

After this first visit, I was unable to “remember” anything from these stories, because they were not coherent with any of my cultural resources, even though I had lived in the U.S. for 15 years. The second visit four months later was with the purpose of re-reading the texts in order to

1 “Alamo” means cottonwood in Spanish.

2 The museum memorializes a crucial battle for the independence of Texas from México.

3 A sign at the entrance reads: “Gentleman on entering the Alamo will please remove their hats, and all visitors will speak in low tones, in recognition of the sacredness of this shrine.”

have something about the Alamo to “remember.” I subsequently performed a third, follow-up visit, in April 1996.

The “Defenders of Texas Liberty” called upon others to “Remember the Alamo!” This essay examines the role of memory in the creation of social reality, and it maintains that there are many stories about the Alamo that can be remembered. Let us first consider the guiding concepts of this essay.

In *Communication and the Human Condition*, Pearce (1989) introduced the fruitful concept of the Communication Perspective to examine the social construction process. According to Pearce, communication often is considered an “odorless, colorless, tasteless vehicle of thought and expression” (p. 8). By contrast, in the communication perspective, communication is the central process whereby humans co-create our social worlds. In his view, “‘we’ consist of a cluster of social conversations, and ... [p]atterns of communication constitute the world as we know it” (p. 11). Pearce uses the communication perspective to discuss architecture, clothing, sidewalks, reticence, and national development. In this essay, I want to expand this list by analyzing monuments, memorials, and museums such as the Alamo in San Antonio, Texas, from the communication perspective.

Although scholars typically have underused the concept of the communication perspective, I propose here that monuments and memorials present distinctive grammars which facilitate different stories and engage visitors in different forms of communication. The objective of this article is to apply the concepts of cosmopolitan communication and of transcendent storytelling to illustrate how museum visitors can use grammars of transcendence. Two types of methods were used to examine stories of the Alamo: 1) participant observation; and 2) textual analysis of the Alamo museum, of a book of the exhibits published by the Daughters of the Republic of Texas (1986), and of the official website of the Alamo: <http://www.thealamo.org>. I will make use of the taxonomy outlined by Pearce about forms of communication and ways of being human, which focuses on a) the way communicators engage each other to determine whether their interlocutors are “native” or “not native” of their own cultural practices/resources and b) whether they will be enlightened by the practices/resources of the other or unequivocally label these as incoherent and useless. I will also use Pearce and Pearce’s concept of transcendent storytelling (1998) to highlight the dynamic, ongoing aspect of storytelling. Lastly I will use the term “grammar” in the Wittgensteinian sense in generating the concept “grammars of transcendence” to aid in the co-creation, development, and transformation of Alamo stories.

Forms of communication, transcendent storytelling and grammar

“The communication perspective sees all forms of human activity as a recurring, reflexive process in which resources are expressed in practices and in which practices (re)construct resources,” (Pearce 1989, 23). In this sense, “practices” include actions such as seeing a movie, seeing someone, and seeing the light whereas “resources” are the “stories, images, symbols, and institutions that persons use to make their world meaningful,” such as the movie industry, moving together, and moving moments. The terms “practices” and “resources” imply that actions and meanings are intricately tied and each is both the cause and result of the other.

Based on this practices/resources relationship, Pearce introduces three universally-shared aspects of communication: coordination, coherence, and mystery. Coordination refers to our interactions with others. It does not mean participants match perfectly their resources and practices but that they collaborate in the production of a pattern that encourages further development. As the essential basis of all communication, Littlejohn (2002) states that coordination “involves meshing one’s actions with those of another to the point of feeling that the sequence of actions is logical or appropriate” (p. 174).

Coherence refers to our experience-in-interaction and our interpretations of such interactions. It entails sense-making through the (re)telling of stories, the driving force in the human condition. The institutionalizing of coherence depends primarily upon family stories, followed closely by peer groups, but cultures, communication technologies, and nation-states contribute greatly in this regard. Pearce alludes to several monuments to demonstrate how “humans have shaped the material of their world to fit [our] stories of meaning, honor, hope, and faith” (p. 70). In the interest of coherence, human beings must have an uncanny ability to (re)create stories and to actively reject contradictions among these stories.

Mystery, the third universally-shared aspect of communication, refers to an understanding that our experiences and interpretations thereof are open-ended and unfinished. This is where the utility of grammars of transcendence surfaces and which I will discuss subsequently.

Pearce’s taxonomy of “forms of communication” and “ways of being human” purposefully avoids a condemnation of practices/resources by offering a humane approach to understanding the human condition. Forms of communication have co-evolved with different “ways of being human” which are, in essence, different social realities. I will use two parts of the taxonomy - ethnocentric and cosmopolitan communication - to explore how the Alamo - the museum, the book, and website - invite visitors, readers (virtual and otherwise), to “remember.”

The “ethnocentric” form of communication relies heavily on dichotomy (“us” v. “them”), enthymeme (unstated assumptions and implications), as well as the moral rightness of one’s actions and the wrongness of the actions of others. In this form, one does not question the adequacy and appropriateness of one’s own interpretive criteria for making sense of the world. Interlocutors are treated as either “people like us” or “people who are different from us.” In the Alamo, the ethnocentric form of communication exists in the rhetorically eloquent distinction between “us” and “them.”

On the other hand, cosmopolitan communicators face a paradox. By strategically questioning whether their sense-making methods are adequate in each context, conversants are able to expand their own and each other’s interpretive criteria, enriching their options. They then look to what others use for making sense and construct a combined set of interpretive criteria. The way the “other” is treated also lies in paradox: they are at the same time “not like us” in how they interpret the world differently; but also “like us” in how they have developed ways of looking at the world similar to ours in form, albeit not in content. The cosmopolitan communicator, mindful of differences in interpretive criteria, seeks neither to erase these differences in self nor in others, but to respect them and use them as a basis for establishing a new, common, and sometimes necessarily temporary set of criteria.

Along a similar vein, Pearce and Pearce (1998) identify four forms of storytelling. The “literalist” form, which privileges facts, is often found in scientific and legal texts. The “symbolic” form, which requires both storytellers and story listeners to forgo a critical reading and to accept otherwise-unaccountable or illogical aspects of the story, is often found in religious and mythical texts. The “social constructionist” form privileges the interactional nature of communication and a multiverse of context-specific and emergent meanings. This form acknowledges the consequentiality of communication and, because it is ubiquitously “made,” it is crucial in transforming social worlds. The fourth form of storytelling is “transcendent” and it can encompass any, some, or all of the previously mentioned forms and it can stand on its own. The three characteristics of transcendent storytelling are: it can include literal, symbolic, and social constructionist forms of storytelling and it does so reflexively; it acknowledges that the other three forms provide advantages and disadvantages, depending on the context; and it requires storytellers’ mindfulness regarding their own person-positions wherein the teller is aware of being part of the story in first-person position and, in parallel, commenting on the story in third-person position.

To advance the notion of grammars of transcendence, I would like to refer to Wittgenstein’s proposition (1953) that the meaning of an utterance comes not from the word or words but how they are used. This constitutes “grammars” which are governed by rules. A word may have a denotative meaning that is sanctioned, such as a dictionary meaning. However, the same word could acquire a connotative definition that is a consensually agreed usage. As language-game changes, the rules governing communicative action vary depending on the players, their interpretation of those rules, and their willingness to change them in the interest of the game.

In privileged stories about the Alamo, the grammar presupposes certain characteristics of the people involved in defending it: selfless volunteers, noble motives, etc. It is grammatically correct to consider freedom brought about by war as not only unavoidable but desirable. The aim of this project is to create grammars whence some heretofore ungrammatical utterances could be considered as permissible. For example, in the permissible language game of remembering the Alamo, it is ungrammatical to speak about the defenders as mercenaries, but in reading their biographies, alternate stories become possible through transcendent storytelling.

In order to establish reality, social actors participate in language-games, wherein their positions are crucial to the resulting coherence. Moreover, language functions as a resource for coordination. Once it becomes part of a larger pattern of interaction, in other words, once it becomes institutionalized, the grammar, as well as the patterns in which it is created, is redefined and new resources create variations of the grammar.

Cosmopolitan communication and transcendent storytelling in the Alamo exist in the tension between the incommensurability of interpretive resources and the potential comparability of those resources. I believe that this is achieved by using an enriched and inclusive grammar of transcendence which relies heavily on analogy and metaphor, and by entertaining the notion that multiple stories - some of them contradictory - can coexist.

The Alamo: a literal story

Established by Catholic missionaries in 1724, the Misión San Antonio de Valero became known by its current name by Spanish soldiers in honor of their hometown of Alamo de Parras in the State of Coahuila, Mexico. During México's war of independence, command of the Alamo changed back and forth between the Spanish military and the Mexican insurgents. The Mexican army, under the command of General Martín Perfecto de Cós, used it until December, 1835, when a group of Texans led by Ben Milam forced them to surrender and then occupied it. This marked the beginning of a series of events that culminated in a battle between the Mexican army led by General Antonio López de Santa Anna and a group of some two hundred Texans on March 6, 1836.

“On February 23, 1836, the arrival of General Antonio López de Santa Anna's army outside San Antonio nearly caught them by surprise. Undaunted, the Texans and Tejanos prepared to defend the Alamo together. The defenders held out for 13 days against Santa Anna's army. William B. Travis, the commander of the Alamo sent forth couriers carrying pleas for help to communities in Texas. On the eighth day of the siege, a band of 32 volunteers from Gonzales arrived, bringing the number of defenders to nearly two hundred. Legend holds that with the possibility of additional help fading, Colonel Travis drew a line on the ground and asked any man willing to stay and fight to step over — all except one did. As the defenders saw it, the Alamo was the key to the defense of Texas, and they were ready to give their lives rather than surrender their position to General Santa Anna. Among the Alamo's garrison were Jim Bowie, renowned knife fighter, and David Crockett, famed frontiersman and former congressman from Tennessee.”⁴

After the battle, the Alamo remained under the control of the Mexican army, serving as a hospital until May, when it was partially razed as they retreated. The compound consisted of a chapel and the “Long Barrack.” After Texas gained statehood, the U.S. army used it as quartermaster's depot, and during the U.S. Civil War, it briefly served as armory for a local militia assisting Confederate troops. No mention is made in the museum, the book, or the website about the fate of the chapel until 1883. Then the Catholic Church sold the chapel to the State of Texas, and two years later it was donated to the City of San Antonio. The Long Barrack was sold in 1877 to be used as a warehouse, again in 1885, and finally in 1904, when the Daughters of the Republic of Texas⁵ purchased it, largely with monies raised by Adina de Zavala and personal funds from Clara Driscoll.

The preservation and administration of the Alamo museum came under the stewardship of the DAUGHTERS OF THE REPUBLIC OF TEXAS in 1905. Presently, the Alamo consists of a 4.2 acre complex of gardens and three buildings - the old chapel known as The Shrine, the Long Barrack Museum, and The Gift Museum - which house exhibits on Texas history. Donations and sales from the gift shop fund preservation and education efforts as entrance is free.

Yet, as a cultural and interpretive resource, the Alamo consists of much more than a literal story: “While the facts surrounding the siege of the Alamo continue to be debated, there is no

4 <http://www.thealamo.org/historicpast.html>.

5 “Daughters” are descendents from veterans of the Texas revolution.

doubt about what the battle has come to symbolize. People worldwide continue to remember the Alamo as a heroic struggle against overwhelming odds - a place where men made the ultimate sacrifice for freedom. For this reason the Alamo remains hallowed ground and the Shrine of Texas Liberty.”

What is it about the Alamo that people are asked to “Remember”? Although the Texans lost the battle of the Alamo, they used this defeat to rally support to their cause in the battle of San Jacinto, which gave them the advantage in their fight toward independence and, eventually, toward statehood. On a larger scale, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which marked the end of Mexican-American War, required Mexico to relinquish over half of its territory, nowadays California, Arizona, New Mexico and large parts of other western states. While not immediate, the geopolitical gains from the Alamo battle eventually gave the U.S. the territory to become a world power.⁶

Forgetting to remember

As the institutionalization of memory changed from the perspective of the elites to that of the populace during the eighteenth century, paradoxically these memories became more divisive (Gillis, 1994). As national identities emerged, particularly in the United States, the collective effort required immigrants to relinquish or diminish their individual identities. New memories were created at the expense of old ones through a process of “concerted forgetting” resulting in “collective amnesia.” As Nora (1989) also suggests, memory sites emerge at times when and places where there is a perceived or constructed break with the past.

Shotter’s social constructionist approach (1987) to remembering and forgetting “maintains that the primary function of speech is to create, maintain, reproduce, and transform certain modes of social and societal relationships...” and that “...our ways of talking about our experiences work, not primarily to represent the nature of those experiences in themselves, but to represent them in such a way as to promote one or another kind of social order” (p. 11). The same idea is invoked in Jacoby’s work on social amnesia (1975) which is an institutionally contrived forgetting or repression of things, if not already known, in fact, then at least experienced. As Schutz (1972) suggests, we need “places” of rest which we must grasp on to give meaning to our experience. In other words, we have the capabilities to remember who we are and what we are about, and to act as self-determining agents precisely because of our ability to reflect upon these resting places as common-sensical. While Schutz meant this locale as metaphorical, I would like to use it to inchoate the relationship between stories and the Alamo and to suggest that grammars function as resources for memory to facilitate transcendent storytelling.

Pearce and Pearce (1998) expand on a variation of this memory theme as they discuss the fundamental role that stories play in the construction of a social identity. Their focus is on the role of communication in the co-creation, development, and transformation of our social realities through stories lived, unknown stories, untold stories, unheard stories, stories told and story telling. All of these are neither mutually exclusive nor commensurate with one another. A story lived may not necessarily be told in linear terms, for it is intricately related to the different tellers’ grammar. In telling stories about ourselves, about our relationships with one another, and about

6 <http://www.thealamo.org/faqs.html#twentyone>.

others, we make the subject matter real. Sense-making is joint-action which brings about some kinds of possibilities, but precludes others. We act as if the actions and events that we encounter in the world were “found” and not “created,” forgetting our role in their creation.

In order to abandon some of those aspects of social systems which could become oppressive by privileging certain types of stories and subverting others, Pearce and Pearce suggest taking a self-reflexive position for remembering or creating alternate ways of acting and being in the world. This living and telling stories liberates us of the endemic amnesia we have created in our social practices by avoiding unwanted patterns, since our social world is mostly constituted of stories. In other words, stories are not just a set of lenses through which we perceive reality: reality itself is co-created in stories.

The Alamo museum, book, and website are examples of stories lived, unknown stories, untold stories, unheard stories, stories told, and story telling, (Pearce and Pearce, 1998). Their physical representation should not be thought to inhere their only meaning. Memory is created in the social activities of people involved in using particular grammars as resources for coherence.

Ethnocentric communication and symbolic storytelling

While passing itself as a literal story representing facts, the Alamo museum and book also constitute a symbolic form of storytelling. Even a cursory look privileges a story that pits “natives” (read “Texans”) against “not natives” (read “Mexicans”). The very first exhibit room/book section (Daughters of the Republic of Texas, 1986) is titled “The First Texans” but includes descriptions about the lives of the “docile and affectionate” Payaya, the Spanish explorers, and the first missions, (p. 4). The museum and book foster endemic amnesia by suppressing stories about the several Mexican families who joined the Anglos in the fight for independence.

Most exemplary of ethnocentric communication and symbolic storytelling is a museum exhibit consisting of two life-size cardboard cut-outs. On one side of the room is the (stereo?)typical Mexican army soldier, who wears a uniform, complete with epaulettes and high hat, holds his musket and bayonet with one hand as it rests on the ground. His face looks stern, almost sinister, with the corners of his mouth turned downwards, reminiscent of a bandido or other despicable character. The descriptive card by this exhibit (and the photo caption in the book, 23) is titled “‘Typical’ Mexican Infantryman” yet the text reads “The Mexican officers made a brilliant show with their black leather shakos (stiff hats) and gold epaulets enhancing their dark blue uniforms.” On the other side of the room/page, is a Texan volunteer. He wears a fringed jacket and pants, and a floppy hat. He stands with his weight resting on one leg and holds his weapon at an angle with the left hand higher than the right. His face looks calm, solemn, dignified. Although both figures are drawn in sepia tones, clearly the drawing suggests the Texan’s eyes were green or blue. The card/caption reads: “Men of the Texas volunteer army came to defend their country and their rights dressed in buckskin breeches and armed with muskets, shotguns, Kentucky long rifles, and their trusted Bowie knives,” (p. 24).

These two figures offer one example of ethnocentric communication and of symbolic storytelling: one is either “native” (a defender of liberty), or “not a native” (the fearsome aggressor who obliterates liberty, freedom). The description of the Mexican soldier addresses its

showy uniform. Although the title of the card/caption labels him “typical” the text of the book contradicts this: “The average soldier in the Mexican army, however, generally wore fatigue (work) clothes made of white sailcloth In general, the Mexican soldier of 1836 was so poorly equipped and trained - particularly the Indian recruits and liberated convicts, who comprised a goodly portion of the army. Some did not know how to fire their ... muskets,” (p. 23). On the other hand, the description of the Texan alludes to his (presumably good) motives: while they came and went as they pleased, dressed often in buckskin breeches, they formed mostly a “fantastic military array to a casual observer, but the one great purpose animating every heart clothed us in a uniform more perfect in our eyes than was ever donned by regulars on dress parade,” (p. 24).

Symbolic storytelling exists in many of the exhibits by invoking terms like “freedom,” “courage,” “rights,” and “liberty” and by articulating these in language-games typical of monuments. However, the website, with its multiple links to other websites, provides alternate stories about the same event (social constructionist storytelling), as well as historical facts (literal storytelling) about the lives of “defenders” and survivors.

Transcendent storytelling at the Alamo

Following the characteristics of transcendent storytelling, I propose a three-part model to generate alternative grammars to “Remember the Alamo.” The first part of this model invites self-awareness and possibility: one must be able to (re)construct resources and use alternative grammars to invent other stories. There are at least two different stories about the aforementioned exhibit by which to remember the Alamo. One story states that, while the Texans may have been greatly outnumbered, their adversaries were mostly poorly-trained and meagerly-dressed Indians and liberated convicts, led by fashionably dressed officers and “picturesque” Dragoons. The mightiness of the Mexican army is called into question as is the imbalance of the battle not only in terms of number, but also in terms of military strategy and skill. Another story might go something like this: many of the Mexican soldiers were poor and had little recourse but to join the army. They were driven to cover 365 miles in 29 days with little water, food, medicines, or warm clothing. They, too, were defending the liberty of their country.

The second part of the model entails seeking many comparisons among the various forms of storytelling and to establish connections among the stories that do not exist there already. For example, the card that accompanies Theodore Gentilz’s painting of a Comanche Chief reads “The liberty and power provided by horses, brought over by the Spaniards in the 1500’s encouraged the Indians’ boldness and natural fierceness.” This artifact is displayed in the section of the museum/book titled “The Cross and The Sword.” It highlights the establishment of the mission and its transition into a Spanish fort, stating that the Comanche were “small, agile people [who] crossed the plains of West Texas, conquering tribes that lay in their path,” (p. 6) and that “War - a means to prestige for the warriors - was their way of life and their legacy.” Yet, a quote by Stephen F. Austin, who, after being imprisoned in Mexico City for 18 months under the (founded) suspicion that he led an insurgency movement, wrote in 1835: “War is our only resource - there is no other remedy but to defend our rights, our country, and ourselves by force

of arms,” (p. 14). Transcendent grammar allows visitors/readers to storytell that the Comanche had much in common not only with the Spanish and the Mexican Armies, but also with the “defenders of liberty.” Each sought to preserve their way of life, even sacrificing their lives for this by engaging in acts of war, sometimes desperately.

The third part of the model borrows a technique from the method of family therapy developed by Palazolli et al. (1978), called “gossiping in the presence of others” and follows the shifts in person-position characteristic of transcendent storytelling. The Alamo museum provides visitors with the opportunity to sign a guest book and to write comments. I was struck by an entry in the guest book that alluded to the idea that the Texans and their allies were out for themselves, fighting not to “defend liberty” but to get land in exchange - with all expenses paid. This entry demonstrates that many stories, often contradictory, acquire coherence from justifiably valid resources. Within another grammar, the following story becomes coherent: the Texans settlers were renegade and insurgent, in contempt of the Imperial Colonization Law of 1823, which required them to learn Spanish and to convert to Catholicism (Daughters of the Republic of Texas, 1986, p.14). Moreover, they violated the Mexican law of April 6, 1830, which sought to limit the amount of settlers coming from the U.S., introduced taxation, and prohibited slavery, (p. 17). This entry also highlights the idea that visitors to the Alamo could sign the guest book and engage in shifts in person-position characteristic of transcendent storytelling for themselves, the Alamo custodians and other historians, as well as to other visitors.

Cosmopolitan Communication and Transcendent Storytelling

The website <http://thealamo.org> offers examples of cosmopolitan communication and possibilities for transcendent storytelling: it features not just the privileged (symbolic) stories about the Alamo by the Daughters of the Republic of Texas, but it also provides links to biographies of the Alamo Defenders provided by *The Handbook of Texas On-Line*,⁷ a project of the Texas State Historical Association. These biographies offer literal stories, faithful to the historical record, which contain sobering details of the defenders’ lives. These details sometimes contradict the descriptive cards of the museum and the book. The biographies of James Bowie, the co-commander of the Alamo, and of a man named Joe, as well as the song that Santa Anna allegedly ordered his bugler to play as his army charged the Texan garrison, are but two examples.

In the exhibit/book description about a knife belonging to James Bowie, the latter is portrayed as synonymous with the hunting knife and as “a man of independence and action.” Significant details about Bowie’s life include his popularity among the volunteers who chose to report to him instead of Commander Travis. In a drawing depicting the defenders valiantly marching over Travis’s line on the sand, Bowie is shown being carried over the line on his cot, ill with pneumonia. He had collapsed days earlier and relinquished his authority to Travis. “Tradition holds that James Bowie died on his cot defending himself with a brace of pistols given him by David Crockett. Receiving the news of her son’s death, Mrs. Rezin Bowie, Sr. stated, ‘*So Jim is dead? ... I’ll wager they found no wounds in his back*,’” (p. 28). There is no mention of his wife, Ursula, however, details about her are available in the book section that discusses her family’s prominent role in the town. The shrine also displays the doors of the house that Ursula’s father,

7 <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/index.html>

Juan Martín de Veramendi, Governor of Coahuila and Texas from 1832 to 1833, built, and which the couple occupied for a while.

The grammar of the website link to Bowie's biography (Williamson, 2004) opens possibilities for cosmopolitan communication, as it candidly details a life of trading slaves from the pirate Jean Laffite, knife fighting, perennially indebted card playing, and "ambitious ... scheming." This account also informs browsers about how his land speculations in Coahuila earned the distrust of Stephen F. Austin; how his marriage of convenience to Ursula brought about his conversion to Catholicism and Mexican citizenship; and that his fascination with quick wealth led him to search for lost mines, kill dozens of Indians, and imperil the lives of his companions. Rather than pneumonia, it is believed his illness was advanced tuberculosis, and that "[m]ost historians no longer believe that he fell from a platform while attempting to position a canon. He was confined to a cot and urged the volunteers to follow Travis. He was occasionally carried outside to visit his men." He died on his cot, shot in the head. The link text ends with the following words: "During his lifetime he had been described by his old friend Caiaphas K. Ham as "a clever, polite gentleman...attentive to the ladies on all occasions...a true, constant, and generous friend...a foe no one dared to undervalue and many feared. Slave trader, gambler, land speculator, dreamer, and hero, James Bowie in death became immortal in the annals of Texas history." The link offers a grammar that allows browsers to engage in transcendent storytelling about Bowie; if this does not necessarily tarnish his armor, at least presents him as a multi-faceted character whose actions and motives were sometimes less-than-noble.

Also intriguing is the characterization of a man known as "Joe." He is described as Travis's "servant" (p. 42) who was among the 16 survivors of the battle. Turning to the website, Joe's biography (Thompson, 2004) shows that Joe, Sam (Bowie's servant/slave), and Ben (Susana Dickinson's cook) were three black men whose lives were spared by Santa Anna.⁸ This seemingly insignificant detail offers grammar to cohere a story that Santa Anna the invader might have had more respect for humans in a condition of slavery than the defenders of freedom. In Joe's biography, further description recounts his modesty, candor, and clarity while reporting to the Texas Cabinet about the battle. Despite being so articulate, this Defender of Freedom was rewarded for his sacrifices not by receiving the promised land, as many of the other Texan defenders did, or even his own freedom: he was returned to Travis's state from which he escaped almost a year later. The usual "run-away slave" posters circulated for several months, fruitlessly. Although someone allegedly saw Joe as late as 1875 in Austin, the year of his death remains a question mark.

A third and final example of cosmopolitan communication and possibilities for transcendent storytelling comes from the controversy surrounding the "Degüello." The DAUGHTERS OF THE REPUBLIC OF TEXAS book states that Santa Anna directed his bugler to play the Spanish march of no-quarter known as "Degüello" (throat cutting) and that "Mexican soldiers, inflamed by their heavy losses and the sound of the song engaged in an orgy of violence and mutilation, [sic] hoisting bodies in the air with their bayonets," (p. 39). By contrast, the website FAQs section asks "What song did Santa Anna order played at the start of the battle?" The answer recognizes the discrepancies in stories about the Alamo: while some historians claim that the

8 México had outlawed slavery when independence was declared in 1810.

song was indeed played and heard by account of some survivors, others make no mention of the song, and still others who even doubt the presence of such so-called survivors also doubt that the song was played. Nonetheless, if visitors would like to know more about the tune, the link provides a bibliography for at least three different sheet music versions, and any museum visitor interested in hearing it can purchase a recording from the gift shop.

Grammars of transcendence

The Alamo is not history, but one story among many, developed from a specific set of resources that make it coherent. Does the Alamo contain different grammars to allow alternative readings and the crafting of alternative stories? The cosmopolitan communicator, when engaging with texts such as the Alamo, is able to craft transcendent stories that are equally valid - or valid for his/her own resources. Since no story is ever “right” or the only story, the cosmopolitan communicator understands that the Alamo has resonance and “validity” within a multiverse of stories.

Shotter’s work on remembering and forgetting (1987) cautions us against thinking of memory as things that go inside our heads. Instead, by treating memory as the activities in which people engage to enact the events, the intentional aspects of the memory process give play to a multiplicity of voices to tell stories lived. As our memory principles “are intricately interwoven into [praxis], the different discursive practices by which we ... account for ourselves, to one another in our society,” become intelligible and legitimate. While the exhibits as memory sites have “currency within a specific set of social practices, customs and institutions,” (p. 18) in the trading of stories privileged by lore, through grammars of transcendence, the praxis of remembering the Alamo is tantamount to creating a space, a *lieu de memoire*,⁹ as Nora (p. 12) suggests.

To “Remember the Alamo” is to create a grammar whose rules allow literal, symbolic, social constructionist, and transcendent storytelling. Even while focusing on a sole exhibit text, its polysemic qualities render grammars of transcendence. The practical implications of this re-remembering are not to build *lieux de memoire* that contain the “correct grammar” for the intelligibility and legitimacy of the stories we wish to tell, but to (re)construct memory sites as resources in other contexts that are not oppressive by what they choose to privilege in remembering and forgetting. This can be accomplished by invoking stories that have been lived, but untold, unheard, and unknown up to now.

To eliminate the endemic amnesia fostered in memory sites requires us to use different grammars and to challenge the coherence of the stories privileged. We thus “remember” other stories than what the exhibits want us to privilege, and create a different type of memory. In this manner, if I were asked again the question “Remember the Alamo”? I confidently would respond affirmatively. The question is not whether I remember the Alamo, but which stories thereof and how the memory work is performed.

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9 a place or stead.

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