

Making Objects, Creating Places: McCall Winter Carnival

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“I think that’s it,” said Marilyn. “We should quit for the night.” It was eleven o’clock. Most of us were still left: Marilyn Krahn, Karen Morris, Ron and Pauline Hines, Mark Bennett, Marley Wilcomb, Nancy Krahn, and myself. Nancy’s husband, Dan, would stay for another half-hour to mist the snow sculpture with water from a garden hose one last time. We stood back, for perhaps the millionth time, to admire the seventy-foot snow sculpture of “Sharlie,” the legendary monster of Idaho’s Payette Lake. The sculpture would be judged at 8:00 AM the following day. The team would arrive a bit earlier—around seven o’clock, Nancy said, to file away any drips that had developed during the night, spray a bit more, and glaze any areas that had been missed. But for now, the night before the opening day of the McCall Winter Carnival, it was finished.

“It’s like a jewel,” Marilyn declared. The sculpture glistened in the bright construction lamplight, its highly polished finish the result of final hours spent “glazing.”¹ Made entirely from snow and water, the sculpture was unnaturally white and shiny, like glass or highly polished marble. Although it was our own creation, this particular Sharlie paralleled other icy interpretations rendered during previous Winter Carnivals: serpentine humps dipped beneath the water, and scales had been molded with the help of pie tins (fig. 1). But the parallels stopped there. Mark’s magnificent tail, for example, called to mind a fighting fish, and the entire piece had a Disney-like quality. Karen and Marley, chief sculptors, left the jaw open and created a lolling tongue as support. Perhaps most unusual, this Sharlie was female—a first in Carnival history—and she sported a dainty bow on top of her head to prove it. Water splashes, created only hours before, indicated movement.

We were happy, exhausted, and glad the work was nearly over, although Nancy kept mentioning that there would be “maintenance” to do throughout the next ten days, such as replacing fallen scales. As people started to leave, Marilyn reminded everyone about the following evening’s party, an annual event she and her husband, Gaylord, give as a thank-you to the sculptors and their families after the Winter Carnival opening ceremonies.

Robert Lavenda writes that community festivals such as the McCall Winter Carnival have been examined as texts, social dramas, communication systems, and reflections or reversals of social structure (1991; see especially Babcock 1978). This article utilizes the trope of transformation drawn from this body of festival scholarship to examine how material objects create and transform “place” within one particular cultural performance.

Definitions of “place” are as myriad and confusing as definitions of folklore.² Here, I define place not as a thing but as an activity or process involving the interrelationship of people (social dimension), landscape (physical dimension), and history (idealist or cultural dimension). Festival objects—in this case, giant snow sculptures created for the McCall Winter Carnival—are one of many symbols and means of communication created by and exchanged among festival participants, and therefore one way in which festivals transform everyday life and experiment with meaning. These objects are conspicuous creations—“devices for mobilizing, attracting, focusing, and ordering attention” (MacAloon 1982:262)—and constructed as a rite of intensification and conspicuous display (Falassi 1997). I argue that by ordering human attention in particular ways, conspicuous festival objects can also structure and transform various dimensions of place. First, I examine how the snow sculpture creates a social place during the construction process by ordering attention as an object of work and play. Second, I consider how completed snow sculptures create a physical place by ordering attention as objects to be seen. Finally, I suggest that the content and form of the sculptures order human attention in ways that contribute to the construction of a place of fantasy.

The topic of “place” has attracted scholarly attention from a wide array of fields, including folklore, literary criticism, cultural geography, American studies, anthropology, and philosophy. Yi-Fu Tuan’s classic distinction between “space” and “place,” which postulated “space” as abstract and empty, and “place” as space overlaid with human meaning, was perhaps an early impetus for this interdisciplinary interest (1974, 1977). Much recent scholarship, however, particularly that stemming from postcolonial studies, has focused on dismantling the “one culture/one place” ideal underlying many studies of place, seeking to highlight the underlying ideologies that such a notion serves. These scholars point out that notions of “place” often imply stasis, boundedness, stability, locality—all nostalgic qualities that exclude many people and can quickly lead to unhealthy forms of nationalism. Such a static conception of place, they argue, has no role in an era that celebrates movement and global flows (Appadurai 1990; Gupta and Ferguson 1992). It is true that many folkloristic studies of “place” or “sense of place” emphasize the cohesiveness of a particular group and its related worldview (e.g., Allen and Schlereth 1990; Ryden 1993). But place can also be analyzed using ideas drawn from performance theory as developed in the disciplines of folklore and sociolinguistics, and it can even be considered “performative,” an orientation that fruitfully reconceptualizes place as inherently creative, process-oriented, and emergent (Bauman 1986). As a kind of ongoing performance, then, place is a dynamic and contingent activity—a “happening” (Casey 1996) that can be ethnographically examined within a festival context.

McCall, Idaho

McCall is a small alpine village in the central portion of Idaho. Located along the shores of Payette Lake and bordering a national forest, McCall experiences population swells during the summer and is the site of many summer cottages. Until 1977, when the Boise-Cascade Corporation closed the local mill, McCall’s economy was based on logging, while tourism and recreation played an important but secondary role. Since that time, however, the recreation, tourism, and real estate industries have become more prominent. This is

because, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notes, the tourism industry is shifting from an older model of providing touristic experiences based on “seeing” to a newer model of providing experiences based on “doing” (1998:137). This shift enables geographically isolated, rugged regions like McCall to attract visitors with promises of adventure. McCall’s emerging identity is that of a destination resort, although logging, forestry, and ranching are still economically and emotionally important.

Summers are short and hot, while winters are long and severe. Snow begins to fall in late October or early November, and flurries continue into late April or even May. It has been known to snow or hail on the Fourth of July. According to many residents, McCall’s permanent population remains small because of the severity of the area’s winters. “I like the fact that you’ve got to be pretty hardy to live here through the winter,” says sculptor Mark Bennett, echoing the sentiments of many people. “I’ve had friends who have moved here . . . they love it here, it’s the greatest place on earth, and then we get winter. And a lot of them are gone by the end of January.”

Snow plays an important role in the winter economy, since alpine skiing, Nordic skiing, and snowmobiling are primary winter activities and an important source of income for many people. Thus, the year-round economy depends on the weather, making snow something akin to an agricultural product. A good snow year brings business, while a bad winter (no snow) means little income. A bad winter also means a dry forest and raging fires during the summer, as well as water rationing, since melting snow provides water for the surrounding farms and ranches. Even in summer, then, conversations often turn to the subject of winter. Winter is also used to count time spent in the region. When I asked people how long they had lived in McCall, for example, I was told, “This is my fifteenth winter here.” When people found out this was my “first winter” in McCall, they would cluck sympathetically and ask how I was holding up. Winter, then, occupies a large portion of the collective psyche. It is little wonder that the primary festival in the area is a winter carnival, held in late January or early February, when winter is at its coldest, and that snow—piled up high and built into sculptures—is ritually intensified and conspicuously displayed.

History

1924–1932

The McCall Winter Carnival originally started in 1924 and was produced annually until 1932,³ when it ceased, presumably because of the Depression. The reasons for the first Winter Carnival—also known as the Winter Sports Carnival—are not well documented. Current residents speculate that it was initiated simply to get people outdoors in the middle of winter. Early newspapers reveal that the carnival was organized by the newly formed Commercial Club, suggesting that original motivations were economic rather than psychological. Further, a Universal Studios crew was in town filming snow scenes during the original Winter Carnival, and prior knowledge of the crew's arrival may have inspired city officials to hold the first festival that same weekend. Although no direct connection can be made, it is plausible that the film crew's presence influenced event planning.

The original Winter Carnival occurred during a single weekend in mid-February or early March and centered on various winter sports activities. Dog racing, ski jumping, and ski racing were the main events, but attractions also included skijoring (skiing behind a horse), horseracing on ice, snowshoeing, tobogganing, and “Finnish sports,” such as a Finnish sulky sleigh race. Cash prizes of up to \$275 were offered, and the various events drew participants from towns within a 100-mile radius, including Emmett, Nampa, Cascade, Caldwell, and Boise; from isolated ranches along the Salmon River; and from as far away as British Columbia.

Newspaper reports suggest that the early Winter Carnival centered on and around Payette Lake. Carnival photos from this era show a contraption that might be an early snowmobile, but which is identified as a “motor ice boat”—a sleigh with an airplane propeller, which apparently “gave the visitors many an exhilarating ride over the smooth ice-covered expanse of the lake, and the huge toboggan slide built in the center of the town and running down onto the lake was a great center of attraction to both young and old” (“McCall Carnival Goes Over Big” 1924). In addition, the dogsled racecourse was also on the frozen lake “in full view at all times from the shore line” (“McCall Winter Carnival to Be Big Affair” 1924).

1964–2001

The modern Winter Carnival was revived in 1964 by members of the newly formed McCall Area Chamber of Commerce. According to Bob Scoles, a retired pharmacist, the group decided to revive the Carnival in order to attract business to the area during the slow winter season. Scoles remembers occasions during the winter when his entire day consisted of filling three prescriptions. Thus, he says, the reincarnation of Carnival was economically motivated.

Scoles says that native McCall resident and local patriarch Warren Brown came up with the idea of having a snow-sculpting competition. Scoles wrote to Dartmouth, N.H., and Montreal asking for information, since these places also held winter carnivals featuring snow sculptures. He says, however, that he didn't get much information back, and so would-be sculptors had to experiment. The snow was crusty that first year, so they cut the sculptures from blocks. "We [five Chamber of Commerce members] worked for hours getting this one tower up before we learned how to do it. It was pathetic," remembers Scoles. They also organized a parade, which consisted of an oil truck decorated with crepe paper, the local brownie and cub scout troops, a school band, an honor guard from Mountain Home (an air force base some 140 miles away), and "one guy walking a dog." The revived carnival attracted about 500 people.

Despite the modest quality of the first year's sculptures, Scoles says that the committee quickly realized the snow sculptures would become the centerpieces of the Carnival. He chaired Carnival the second year, adding a snow queen contest, a variety show, and various events on the ski hill. Shore Lodge, a main hotel in town, first began to make the large, elaborate sculptures that define the contemporary event. Today, Winter Carnival is a ten-day festival. In contrast to the earlier 1920s version, the modern Winter Carnival does not include events on the lake since it is considered too dangerous. The snow sculptures continue to be the centerpiece, while competition and sporting events remain very important.⁴ The parade, along with various fundraising activities such as bingo, Monte Carlo night, an occasional winter Snow Ball, and pancake breakfasts sponsored by the Masonic lodge and senior citizens center make up the rest of the activities. The

Chamber of Commerce estimates that the carnival now attracts some 50,000 visitors over the ten-day period.

Festival Objects and the Social Dimension of Place

The social construction of place has come to the fore of place-oriented scholarship in recent years, particularly among geographers who had previously focused on landscape only. Feminist geographers Linda McDowell (1999) and Doreen Massey (1994) posit that “place” is constructed entirely of social relations, while P. Adams (1998) suggests that place is dialectically related to social processes. Massey, for example, justifiably argues for examining place “in context,” by which she means in relation to and constituted by other places. As a Marxist, Massey originally was interested in modes of production and their interrelationships on a national and global scale: workers in one area and a cluster of managers in another produce a working-class town here and an upper-middle-class area there. Place, she says, consists of social relations “stretched out,” and one must look to the construction of social relations beyond a particular place to understand that locale.

Still, the social relations McDowell, Massey, and others discuss remain largely abstract.⁵ As Clifford Geertz adroitly quips, “[I]t is still the case that no one lives in the world in general” (1996:262). Actual human relations are also always concrete—built, maintained, and transformed in face-to-face interaction—but overlooked in studies that are not ethnographic. In festivals, social relationships are not just maintained in face-to-face interaction—they are also transformed. In the case of the Winter Carnival, creating snow sculptures opens up social space/place for participants based on play—Simmel’s “sociability” (in MacAloon 1982). The result, according to my own fieldwork conducted in 2001, is a transformation of social relations both within the event and the rearrangement of social structures beyond it (see Paredes 1989).

I discovered the importance of social relations in regard to the McCall Winter Carnival by attending to production processes. In their study of a Mexican *coloquio*, Richard Bauman and Pamela Rich note

that scholars often overlook the processes that result in finished performance events. They suggest that the “privileging of fully performed texts and/or bounded performance events as our analytical frames of reference has largely precluded *systematic* attention to other significant dimensions of performance as a mode of social action” (1994:25–26). In Winter Carnival, attention to production processes highlighted the importance of social relations and social interaction; indeed, these relations were often cited as the reason for participation in the first place.

In 2001, I volunteered for three weeks with the Krahns snow-sculpting team, an amalgamation of friends, family, and employees associated with Krahns Home Furnishings. When I noticed the group’s initial Winter Carnival activity in mid-January, I introduced myself to a woman standing outside the store. I was interested in the carnival for school research, I said, and would they take volunteers? The woman, perhaps in her fifties, had bright, light blue eyes and a direct, endearing way of speaking. She laughed. “Oh, *YEAH*. We take volunteers.” This was Marilyn Krahn, one of the store owners. She then introduced me to the other members of the 2001 team (fig. 2). Her daughter-in-law Nancy, a blond, energetic, and athletic woman, is an expert builder, leader, motivator, and primary participant. Tireless in her energy, Nancy spurred the group on with her hard work long after the rest of us were pooped. There was also Mark Bennett, a store employee and long-time friend of the Krahns. Good-humored, sardonic, and hard-working, Mark is an actor who spent many years in San Francisco and Los Angeles in the theatre and movie business before moving back to the area four years ago to help his aging mother manage the family ranch. Marilyn’s son Dan, a tall man with black hair and bright blue eyes, has managed Krahns Home Furnishings since 1978. He looked after the store and made deliveries while we worked, but helped us build if business was slow. After business hours, he stayed to spray down the sculpture when we were through, in order to create a layer of ice during the night.

Other participants included Ron and Pauline Hines, who came nearly every day. Retired, the Hineses live in McCall part time and were originally store customers. This was their second year helping

the Krahns; they had flown out from Nebraska to prepare for the event. One of the primary artists was Karen Morris, a store employee specializing in interior design. She has an art background and drew the picture of Sharlie that was used as a guideline. As in a small atelier, Karen did more conceptual work than physical labor and constructed the most difficult parts of the sculpture, such as the head and face. She worked with Marley Wilcomb, the other primary artist. Marley is a sculptor and another long-time friend of the Krahns.

Marilyn told me to show up the next day dressed warmly. When I asked what they were sculpting, Marilyn answered that they were making Sharlie, the local legendary lake monster, and did I know the story? Yes, I said, I was interested in it (cf. Gabbert 2000). The next day, Marilyn took me down into the basement of the store and showed me where “things were.” Particularly important was a dryer for wet clothes. Extra socks, sweaters, and jackets were also stored in the basement, along with a box of various industrial rubber gloves. Marilyn explained that they wore rubber gloves with liners underneath: the liners keep the hands warm, and the rubber gloves keep them dry. Gloves are pulled on or duct-taped over a sweater or coat to keep the water from dripping into the sleeves.

Initial work consisted of shoveling snow into “forms”—crude, temporary boxes made by standing large pieces of plywood up against each other. These were filled with snow, hosed down with water, and then packed solid by climbing into the forms and stomping them down. “It’s like making wine,” Mark grinned. “The goal,” Nancy explained, “is ice.” The mixture froze during the night, and the more water the snow absorbed, the more solid the base became. Throughout the day we climbed ladders, handed up buckets of slush, stomped and packed piles of snow, and fought the garden hose with a small butane torch to keep it from freezing up. It was hard, heavy labor, and I collapsed into bed at the end of each day.

Much time was spent gathering buckets of snow and filling them with water to create “slush,” which is similar to the consistency of clay. Marilyn explained that fresh, powdery snow makes the best slush. It melts evenly, producing slush that spreads smoothly without lumps of ice. This slush is used for making finer details such as scales and

fins. Heavy, wet snow makes a lumpier slush, which is used for adding height or width to the base (fig. 3).

Marilyn and Nancy also explained the importance of using *clean* snow, since any dirt would melt that part of the sculpture faster. "We're just snow snobs," Nancy said. "It also looks a lot better when you are done if there is no dirt in it." Under their direction, I picked out tiny pebbles and rocks and bits of dirt from the snow-filled buckets. About halfway through the day, Marilyn handed out hot chocolate to warm the team up. I promptly slipped on the ice and spilled my drink. "You're dirtying the snow!" Mark yelled, only half-joking. Mortified, I hurried to dig out the ugly brown spots.

During the weeks it took to build the sculpture, the importance of the various social dimensions of our activities came into focus. At the immediate personal level, my relationship with the Krahn's was permanently transformed. There were five or six people working on the sculpture at any one time—usually Ron, Pauline, Marilyn, Nancy, Mark, and me. We worked closely together and grew to know each other well. Nancy and Marilyn were very interested in my folklore studies and the fact that I had left my husband for several months to do fieldwork. I learned about Mark's background as an actor in San Francisco, about Nancy's kids and the sports activities they were involved in, about Marilyn's philosophies on life and work, and about the history of the store. Pauline and Ron talked about their travels and where they lived at different times of the year. By the end of the work period, my relationship with the Krahn's had been changed from one of a stranger and volunteer to one of comrade and friend.

On a slightly broader level, extensive social interaction occurred with people on the street, leading to the maintenance and transformation of wider networks of social relations. Because the team worked outside in the parking lot next to the store, we were continuously in full public view. People felt free to talk, offer support, and provide feedback. "He wasn't that big when I saw him!" joked one man when he saw the giant monster. Local people walking by—most of whom the Krahn's knew personally—stopped to ask what we were making, offered words of encouragement, and wished us luck on the upcoming competition. Either Marilyn or Nancy would introduce me to every person,

explaining that I was a student and volunteer. The person usually responded by laughing and asking if I “knew what I was getting into.” Brief conversations and gossip were exchanged. Occasionally people brought gifts of cookies, which were gratefully consumed. I also learned information about these people. After someone walked by, Nancy would offer information about the person’s occupation, spouse, children, relatives in town, and connection to Nancy herself. My impressions of people and place changed, and her introductions provided an opportunity to develop relationships beyond the immediate event.

Our collective identity, symbolized by the red team jackets the Krahns provided, also affected relationships. For example, the Krahns interacted with other teams in particular ways and felt solidarity with them.⁶ In the building down the street from us, for example, three people were creating “The Wizard of Oz.” Each team complimented the other daily on its respective work, and once we borrowed water from their hose when ours was accidentally shut off. Marilyn notes: “Everybody in town—everybody who makes sculptures anyway—has a feeling of kinship or camaraderie—if it’s raining why you all cry together, and if it’s good sculpting weather like this year, why you all celebrate together. It’s a sharing of the same circumstances, I guess.” Non-sculptors treated sculpting teams deferentially. For instance, when we broke for lunch, Marilyn treated us to a meal at the deli down the street. The first day we arrived the restaurant owner said, “Looks like a snow-sculpting team!” and offered us free treats.

In general, although the work was hard, the atmosphere was one of extreme sociability and play, a dimension essential to the creation of art (Glassie 1989). Free lunches and spiked hot chocolate added an extra celebratory dimension to the hard work. And because play was the dominant frame, team members interacted in a mode that differed from everyday life, expanding and transforming immediate social relations. Further, these expanded social relations were contingent upon our relation to the sculpture under construction. My relationship with the Krahns grew more intimate, onlookers spoke to us, we were treated preferentially, and we interacted with other teams in special ways because, as Marilyn noted, we were all in the same boat. Says

Marilyn: “[I like] being together and . . . going through the joys and the sorrows and the ups and the people coming by and visiting and so forth. It’s really sort of a people project, I think. And if you don’t enjoy that, why I would think sculpting would be a cold, lonesome job.” Thus, as a device for focusing attention and participation, the sculpture structured and transformed social relations for participants both within the festival frame and beyond it, altering what is arguably the most important dimension of placemaking activity.

Festival Objects and the Physical Dimension of Place

Examining place as a kind of symbolic activity is most easily accomplished by looking at the ways in which people transform the landscape to “mean.” This physical dimension of place has received the most scholarly attention. The study of material culture, especially vernacular architecture (Glassie [1968] 1971), has been particularly fruitful in explaining how humans create place (or region), since house construction adapts to the immediate environment even as it transforms it. While houses are stable and permanent creations, festival objects can be used to create more temporary places. In the case of the Winter Carnival, one function of the snow sculptures is to emplace the festival, creating a physical place for it to occur while at the same time temporarily altering the landscape to do so.

Sculptures must be finished by 8:00 AM on Friday, the day of judging. At this time, the streets are empty. The artists who had worked feverishly—sometimes through the night—are absent. They leave behind their creations, transforming the town from an ordinary place into festival space for onlookers.⁷ As Marilyn and Nancy commented, those sculptures that have been glazed “look like jewels” or “like they’ve been dipped” (fig. 4). Snow and ice particles reflect the morning light, making the town into a literal “winter wonderland” and linking this festival place to a larger cultural idea derived from popular culture.

The loci of intense social activity and creative attention in days preceding the festival, as completed objects the sculptures order attention for spectators and onlookers. Taken in array, or considered in terms of what Victor Turner (1982) calls positional meaning, they

literally define festival space and contours, transforming the town into an outdoor museum. In 2001, there were forty sculptures. Although the sculptures were scattered throughout town, the heaviest concentration of sculptures was in the downtown area, which runs along the lakeshore.⁸ Each piece helps outline the oldest portion of town—also the most scenic and the most central—metonymically invoking McCall as a whole. Downtown is also the heart of the carnival, since here one finds food booths, the music stage, and vendors. The rest of the sculptures are found in various (usually well-traveled) locations throughout the village, and all are mapped by the Chamber of Commerce and the local newspapers so that visitors can find them.

Increasingly, over the past two years other towns in Valley County have entered the sculpture competition, expanding the physical horizons of Carnival while at the same time centralizing and unifying the region—a common phenomenon for rural areas during the late twentieth century.⁹ In 2000 and 2001, a restaurant in Cascade—a town 30 miles south of McCall but located along the same highway corridor—entered a forty-foot snowman in the competition. Donnelly, also located along Highway 55 but only eleven miles to the south, also has proffered several recent entries. These sculptures are entered in the competition, judged alongside sculptures made in McCall, and included on visitor maps as regular attractions, thus encouraging tourists to visit those places as well.

The sculptures are always located in front of businesses and organizations, whose employees either construct the sculpture themselves (like the Krahn's), depend on volunteers, or—increasingly—pay someone to do it. Generally, these organizations are considered “good patrons,” i.e., local businesses that are heavily involved in community activities and contribute to public functions throughout the year. The Krahn's, for example, have a red, white, and blue box on their counter year-round in order to collect donations for the Fourth of July fireworks display. Such businesses also sponsor prizes for Carnival events, donate to local charity functions, support school fundraisers and sports teams, serve on local civic committees, and do volunteer work. During Winter Carnival, the community notices whether or not a particular business or organization has made a sculpture. Organizations that make

sculptures (especially first-timers) are applauded for their attempts (no matter what the result), while others are criticized for their refusal to participate.¹⁰ Thus, as spectators travel to view each sculpture, they collectively trace or embody the outlines of the active business community, ritually reinforcing its boundaries. In the Winter Carnival, festival space is therefore coterminous with business interests and community spirit, reflecting a politics of participation. The sculptures transform an ordinary place by making it more concentrated, potent, and symbolic, but it is still one that reflects (a transformed version of) the everyday world (Abrahams and Bauman 1978).

Festival Objects and the Idealist Dimension of Place

The idealist dimension of place has to do with the making of meaning, such as the creation of history or cultural ideas. A place cannot exist—cannot be specific—without being linked to meaning. Objects, particularly festive objects, have long been noted for their ability to play with and expand meaning. Such objects create and transform ideas or evoke the past—if only for the duration of the event—signifying through both content and form. What an object or array of objects actually “say” is of course open to interpretation; most scholars agree that the messages that objects transmit cannot be decoded entirely. Of celebratory objects, Victor Turner writes:

There is perhaps no need to render into words what the symbols “say,” for they transmit their messages in a number of sensory codes simultaneously. Moreover, we are seldom dealing with separate symbols but with clusters made up of objects, actions, sounds, states, odors, contacts, each unit, act, or thing, at once itself and standing for more than itself, the ensemble making up more than the sum of its parts. (1982:19)

Turner’s comments apply to McCall Winter Carnival sculptures; meaning stems from the feelings they evoke rather than from a specific idea.

The 2001 Carnival theme was “Childhood Memories,” a topic that beautifully combined imagination with the past. Overall, the sculpture content was drawn from literature, popular culture, or

fantasy.¹¹ Dr. Seuss's elephant Horton stared down in surprise at the tiny Who he held in his trunk; Harry Potter rode his broomstick accompanied by Hedwig the Owl; a giant Popeye at the helm of a ship, pipe in mouth, rested beside the lake. Dorothy, along with Toto, the Tin Man, the Lion, and Scarecrow, walked arm-in-arm along a brick road toward a glistening white Emerald City; Snoopy slept atop his doghouse; and E.T. phoned home in front of the telephone company.¹² There was also a log cabin, a child sledding down a hill, and several teddy bears. Taken together, they impelled the mind to meditate on a few obvious themes: the childishly playful, the imaginary, the fantastic, and the unrecoverable past.

Form signifies more subtly. Scale is important: the sculptures are quite large. Most are as big as a human being, and the real "crowd-pleasers" are often gigantic. The Krahn's sculpture, which won Grand Prize in 2001, was approximately seventy feet long (fig. 5). Further, Carnival sculptures are relentlessly realistic. Horton and his Who looked exactly as Dr. Seuss had drawn them, and Dorothy and company were faithfully reproduced in 1939 MGM style. Abstract sculptures are more rare. In 2001, there was only one truly abstract sculpture: a "Cubist" rendition of a man playing guitar. Abstract sculptures, however, elicit less enthusiasm from the audience and rarely win top prizes. For members of the community, realistic sculptures are the most aesthetically satisfying, and the ability to copy exactly is evidence of talent. Such faithfulness to an "original" might be considered akin to other kinds of authoritative discourse and modes of representation, in which (perceived) exact reproduction of a past original is essential to ritual efficacy in the present.¹³ Though replication is most obviously validated during the carnival by positive aesthetic responses and awarded prizes, exact replication of form may also symbolically reinforce community continuity. Thus, sculpture-making may have a more ritualistic dimension, even as the sculptures simultaneously embody interrelationships between snow and economic health and links among sculpture creation, local businesses, and community goodwill.

Finally, in true festival tradition, the sculptures juxtapose oppositional elements: realistic style contrasts with fantastic subject

matter, and fantastic subject matter is intensified—made more “fantasy-like”—by snow and ice. Further, the sculptures’ giganticism contrasts with the ephemerality of the building materials, giving viewers the impression that sculptures are strong and stable.¹⁴ Such impressions, however, are false because the sculptures are delicate and fall apart easily. Taken as a whole, the meaning invoked in this festival place is magical. The result is something like an outdoor sculpture garden or museum exhibit juxtaposing literary fantasy with literal realism. Like Alice among the flowers, visitors are surrounded by lifelike objects made of the most fleeting materials.

While it seems absurd to suggest any deeper cultural meaning in a sculpture of “Horton Hears a Who,” most scholars agree that festivals are metasocial events, highly accessible symbolic performances in which a society or community speaks about itself to itself and to others. Perhaps then it is not too much to suggest that the outdoor fantasy in ice created by the sculptures symbolically represents McCall’s emerging identity as a tourist destination resort—a very particular kind of place indeed. Almost by definition, resorts involve notions of fantasy; they evoke ideas of beauty, wealth, and ultimate happiness. They are places where one’s dreams, unattainable in an everyday place, become reality simply by virtue of one’s presence. Resorts are also the opposite of work; they suggest a lifestyle of luxury and leisure. They set people apart from the rest of society; they are isolated and *displaced* places.

The basis of McCall’s growing fame as a tourist resort primarily rests in the surrounding natural beauty and easy access to the Payette National Forest, Idaho’s River of No Return Wilderness Area, and Hell’s Canyon National Recreation Area. Environmental beauty and low population are the primary reasons for the current population influx. Like many other resort areas, however, the reality of living in McCall falls short of fantasy. For many locals, living in the area means low-paying, seasonal, and part-time work; less access to higher education; high rates of alcoholism; and long, dark, harsh winters.¹⁵ In this context, then, the creation of a snow-bound fantasy world consisting of characters and ideas that *seem* solid and real, but are imaginary and fleeting, is unsurprising. These fantasies, constructed

year after year with hard, heavy labor, are built with immaterial substances that quickly fade or are actively destroyed. Considering the continuous process of the sculptures' re-creation, however, is perhaps one way to understand the meaning of Winter Carnival and the kind of place temporarily constituted through it.

Conclusion

Linda McDowell notes that theories of globalization often suggest a diminishing importance of place and "the local" (1999). Further, Gupta and Ferguson suggest that there are "significant problems" stemming from the oft-assumed isomorphism of culture and place, such as a tendency to overlook or dismiss the reality of borderlands and hybrid cultures (1992). Social theorists of the last decade have worked hard to undo this presumption by theorizing space/place in terms of borderlands, power differences, global flows, disjunctures, and deterritorializations in order to better understand how perceived cultural differences are already produced even before the ethnographic encounter occurs. But another way to circumvent an assumption of isomorphism between place and culture might be to consider place as an activity located in and created through symbolic performances. From this performative perspective, place is dynamic, emergent, and powerful. Like language, it is a fluid phenomenon constructed and negotiated in face-to-face interaction, not an essentialized structure that exists outside human creation and is always experienced in the same way. By organizing attention for different participants in various ways, Winter Carnival snow sculptures temporarily constitute and transform various dimensions of place.

The benefit of examining placemaking activity within a festival context is twofold. First, despite the fact that festivals are complex performances, they are more bounded than everyday life because they are set apart in time and space (Falassi 1987); second, festivals illuminate everyday life by foregrounding salient aspects through symbolic intensification. Some scholars argue that the chaos of festivals absolutely overturns everyday life and defies social structures by rendering all participants equal (see, for example, Bakhtin [1968]

1984 as a classic study). Others point out that although festivals are chaotic, they also reflect everyday life and social structures, but in an exaggerated and symbolic way (e.g., Abrahams and Bauman 1978; Lavenda 1983; Lindahl 1996, among many). Indeed, secular festivals in the U.S. might be considered entirely as “performances of place” since they are generally designed to attract outsiders to a particular area, either by inverting social norms altogether or exaggerating some “local” aspect. Whether festivals function to oppose society or to reflect it, examining place-construction within a festival context and focusing on festival objects in particular yields information about quotidian places and the production processes used to transform their social, physical, and idealist dimensions.

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Notes

1. “Glazing” refers to the finishing process in which a completed sculpture is rubbed with warm water. The water melts the top layer of snow into ice, resulting in a “glazed” look. Nancy Krahn said they had *ironed* snow in past years to achieve this effect.

2. Cf. the oft-cited twenty-one definitions of folklore found in Funk and Wagnall’s *Standard Dictionary of Folklore*.

3. This date is an educated guess; newspaper records are unavailable for that year.

4. Lavenda (1991) suggests that the principle of uncertainty necessary to festival can be found in competitions such as sporting events and games.

5. Massey says that specificity is important and argues that studying particular localities is one way of attending to this; her argument is that studying “the local” does not necessarily indicate an anti-progressive or atheoretical stance. The level of specificity to which she refers does not, however, reach the micro-level of ethnography.

6. But teams are also competitive, another kind of relation brought about specifically due to sculpting.

7. It was evident that festival time was structured differently for participants as well. When defined as a set of festival behaviors rather than an "official" starting date, Winter Carnival began sometime after one began working on a sculpture and ended on opening day. At this time, the event was turned over to spectators and tourists.

8. According to newspaper records, this arrangement has been true for nearly every festival.

9. I would like to thank Richard Bauman for pointing this out in conversation.

10. Thus, making a snow sculpture reaches beyond the immediate arena to implicate larger social structures. Shore Lodge, for example, has not participated in recent years, a fact attributed to the new owner's lack of compassion for and involvement in the community.

11. Although the theme for 2001 was particularly appropriate for sculptures of fantasy, my impression from looking at hundreds of photographs of past Winter Carnivals is that fantasy elements predominate from year to year regardless of the annual theme.

12. Sculptures often embody themes appropriate to the sponsoring organization, but this is certainly not always the case. When this occurs, the sculpture is viewed as particularly clever. Apart from E.T. phoning home in front of the telephone company, some examples from 2001 include Marvin the Martian on skis in front of Hometown Sports (a local ski shop); a sculpture entitled "The Knock-Out" featuring Garfield punching Odie and sponsored by McCall Taekwando; and a sculpture dubbed "Santa's Coming to Breakfast" by the Pancake House, a local restaurant. A particularly beautiful and symbolically potent sculpture, constructed by U.S. Forest Service employees in 1998, was called "Buckaroo Bear" and featured Smokey the Bear sporting cowboy boots and chaps and riding Sharlie the Lake Monster like a bucking bronco.

13. Thanks to *Forum* staff for this insight.

14. This impression causes problems between artists and visitors. Visitors often think that the sculptures are stable and try to climb on them, occasionally breaking off pieces in the process.

15. According to the 1990 census, 25 percent of McCall's residents have graduated from college, although this is a relatively high rate compared with the overall state rate of 18 percent. The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for Valley County in June 1999 was 11.3 percent, more than double the state rate of 5.3 percent. (This information was gleaned from a draft of the McCall Area Comprehensive Plan 2000. Information from the 2000 census was limited at the time of writing. High rates of alcoholism are based on personal observation and anecdotal evidence.)

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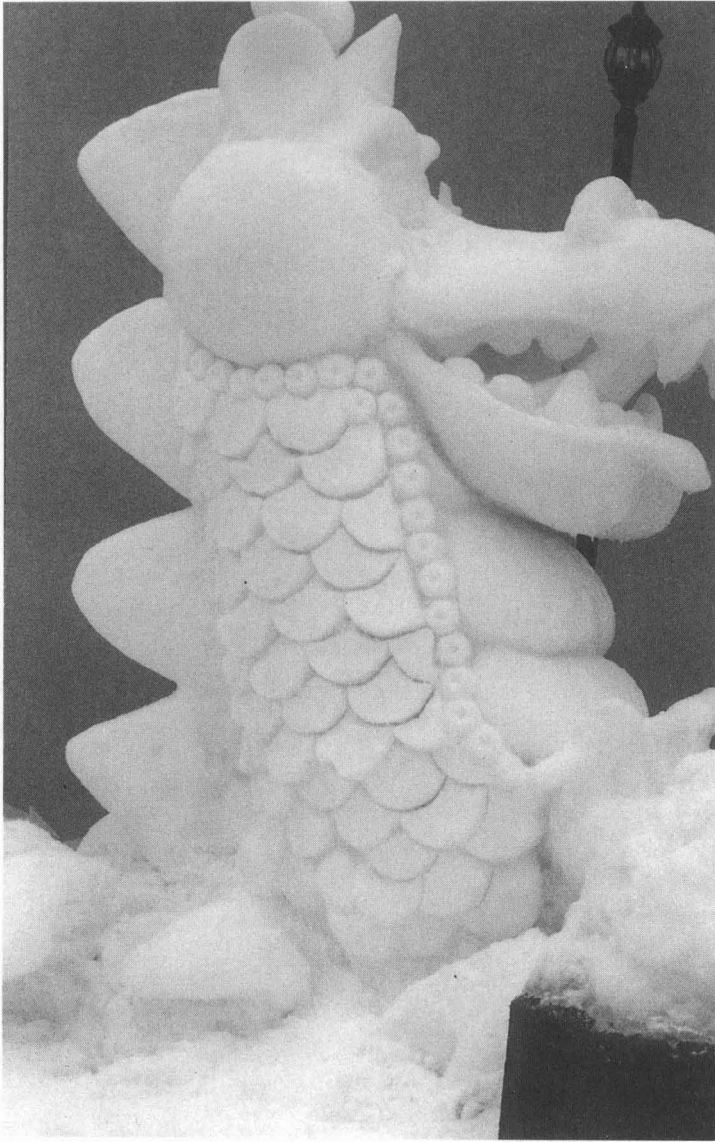


Figure 1. *The glistening head of Sharlie, legendary monster of Idaho's Payette Lake. The Krahn's sculpting team formed the scales by using pie tins.*



Figure 2. The 2001 Krahn's Home Furnishings sculpting team. Front (L-R): Lisa Gabbert, Dan Krahn, Nancy Krahn, and Ron Hines. Back: Karen Morris, Marilyn Krahn, Pauline Hines, and Sue Anderson.



Figure 3. Sculpting Sharlie with fresh slush. From left to right: Ron Hines, Marilyn Krahn, and Pauline Hines.

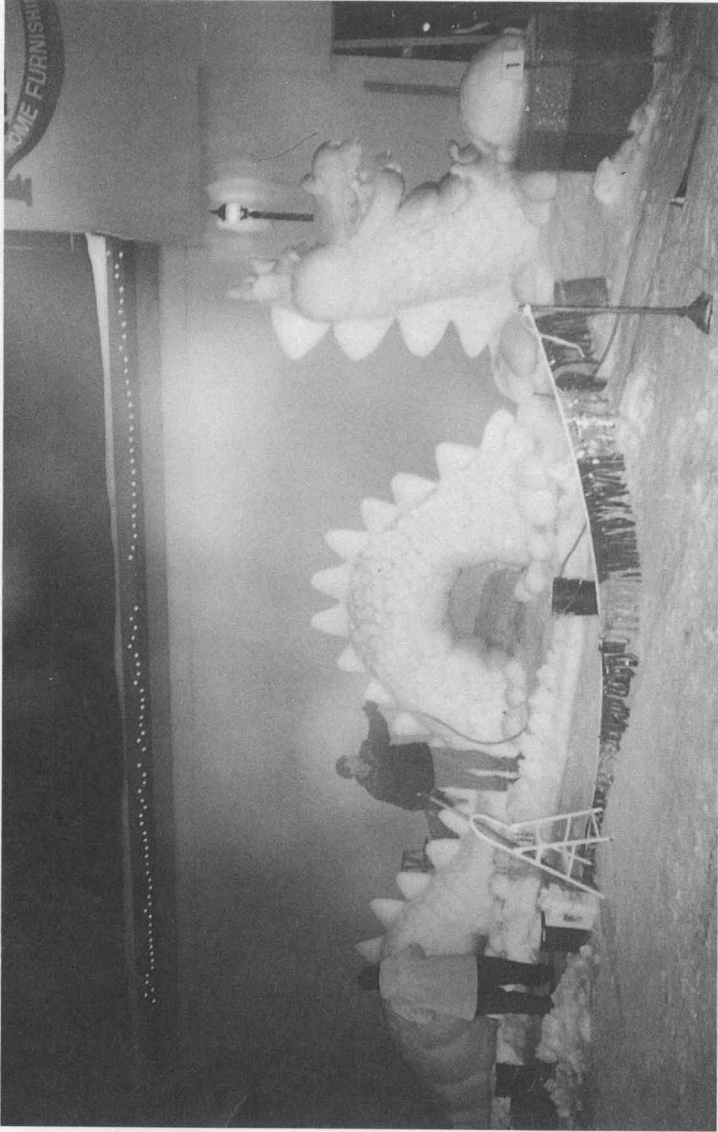


Figure 4. Dan Krahn sprays the ice sculpture the night before judging, creating a shiny "glaze" effect.

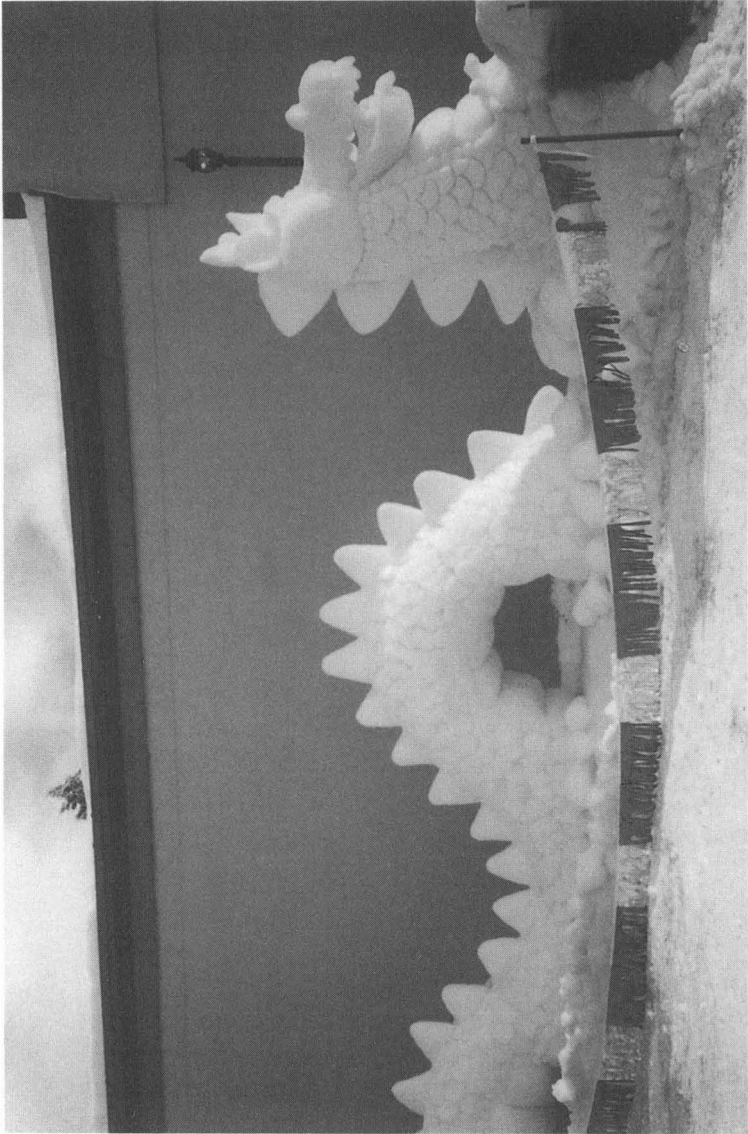


Figure 5. *Sharlie the lake monster.*