

From the Editors

The articles in this double issue center on ideas of representation and interpretation; they address the ways that cultural meaning is enacted and experienced, influenced and ascribed. Cati Coe's article builds on a growing literature about those large-scale cultural displays known as "world's fairs"—in this instance, the 1936 Empire Exhibition held in Johannesburg, South Africa. Coe explores contemporary interpretations of the event, tracing four distinct narratives—aimed at different imagined publics—that emerge in newspaper accounts of the day. Her examination highlights the divergent meanings promoted by event participants and observers. In a different essay, Pravina Shukla focuses instead on those engaged in creating exhibits. Drawing on her experience with a variety of curated displays in the United States, Shukla suggests ways that today's museum practitioners can attempt to present vernacular material culture in the richest possible interpretive contexts. Anna Brzozowska-Krajka's article discusses the representation of a magical worldview in words, paying particular attention to the multiple resonances of symbols and the efficacy of verbal rituals during points of transition. Finally, Patrick Feaster's study of recorded sound programs in the United States demonstrates how individuals bring prior interpretive norms to bear on their experience of new technologies. In his discussion of early phonograph conventions, Feaster illustrates how genre, belief, vernacular performance traditions, and even "linguistic profiling" all influenced the ways in which the phonograph was presented to individuals and interpreted by them. Taken together, the articles themselves employ a variety of interpretive frameworks and demonstrate a productive approach to issues of cultural presentation and reception.

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