

2.5 Uncertainties and the Negotiation of Trust in Communing

In all three texts the writers' reflection of their own material experience points to the core issue of common belief—or trust—in communing. The writers thus also point to parallels between the uncertainties involved in communing and this communing's symbolic meaning communicated to readers. The relationship between writer and reader is one of fundamental asymmetry. Because the writers' experience cannot be repeated by the reader, any "transmission of knowledge is only possible with the help of the social bond of trust."¹ This reliance on reader trust as consequence of fundamental asymmetry, which is at the core of reportage, corresponds to the fundamental uncertainty at the core of communing more generally. In the texts analyzed, this uncertainty is bridged by way of commonly accepted narratives of belief in the benefits of consumerism and religion. What makes everybody—precisely except David Foster Wallace—have a good time on the cruise is the commonly accepted and therefore authentic consumerist narrative of the hard worker who deserves to be pampered. Foster Wallace criticizes this belief as fantastically inauthentic and seeks to demonstrate in his text a sincerity he has not found on the cruise. What keeps George Saunders from decrying Dubai as a global consumerist dystopia is his belief in the human potential to do good that is kindled by fantastic authenticity despite the glaring evidence of material inequality. What conciliates John Jeremiah Sullivan with Evangelicals—despite their different taste in music—is their common celebration of authentic human weakness.

In all three cases then, writers critically replace the narratives of pre-fabricated touristic experience that aimed to define the experience's meaning as certain with new narratives of uncertainty. These narratives make new sense by way of incorporating and making transparent the function of belief in human

1 Krämer, *Medium, Messenger, Transmission: An Approach to Media Philosophy*, 149.

communing as a necessary symbolic instrument to address the fundamental uncertainty of communing itself. Thus, touristic experience is characterized as respite from critique in which pre-fabricated trust (by way of PR brochures, luxury architecture, preaching) is ritually performed. The authorial reinterpretations, in contrast, insist on the existential meaning of trust in communing and simultaneously incorporate this awareness into a narrative of said experience that seeks to be more sincere.

In this existential function, then, intersubjective trust undermines the technological reproducibility of communal meaning. It insists that, ultimately, in communing, individual humans interact materially and symbolically. The increasingly important role of technological mediation in mediatized societies, however, can only reflect this in a reduced way as it promotes simplified senses of meaning that must remain technologically reproducible and therefore certain.