CHAPTER 1

Dating Love

A History of the Love-Lock Custom

Questing for the origins of a contemporary folk custom is an often futile and fruitless task. It is also not an endeavour favoured by modern-day Folklore Studies, partly because of the difficulties entailed in reaching confident conclusions but also because focus tends to be less on where a custom comes from and more on its state today. However, I am as much a historian as a folklorist, and in order to understand the twenty-first-century widespread popularity of the love-lock custom, I maintain that it must be placed within its historical context. After all, no custom emerges entirely out of the blue. Customs are nearly always (one might go so far as to say always) adaptations or borrowings from other periods, cultures or communities. Where, then, did the custom of attaching padlocks to public structures begin? And how did it spread to over 500 locations worldwide? This chapter attempts to answer these questions.

However, compiling a history of love-locking has proved no easy feat. There are two primary reasons for this. Firstly, the custom's international spread, which sees numerous narratives and networks of dissemination, rather than a single, linear thread. The origins of one assemblage are not necessarily the same as the origins of another, neither are the rates of growth, and with at least 500 (but probably thousands of) assemblages worldwide, the establishment of a chronology poses difficulties. Secondly, in light of these difficulties, a range of fictions have been created, adapted and adopted in order to contextualise the custom, most notably by the tourist industry and the media. Rumours are presented as reality, and it has been a complicated task separating fact from fiction. This chapter traces the solid facts, handling the solid evidence, while the shakier evidence (such as the frequent attribution of the practice to a tragic pair of Serbian lovers) and the likely fictions (the casual attribution to an 'ancient Chinese custom') will be examined in *Chapter Six: Selling Love*.

Love-Locking in the 1980s

The earliest solid evidence for the mass deposition of padlocks on public structures comes from Europe in the 1980s.[1] The best-documented example is in Hungary. In Janus Pannonius Utca in the city of Pécs, close to the historic monuments of Pécs Cathedral and the former mosque Pasha Gázi Kászim, is a fence festooned with love-locks. Art historian Cynthia Hammond, whom we met in the Introduction, confidently dates this assemblage to the 1980s.[2] Hammond argues that in order to understand this custom, it must be set within the context of late twentieth-century Hungarian history, when the hold of Soviet social control over the country began to loosen. This control, she asserts, extended to a repression of public displays of romantic love, and the 1980s saw a gradually growing freedom of expression. By the 1990s, it was far more permissible to express romantic relations publicly.

Love-locks were being deposited prior to this though, at a time when the custom would have been frowned upon or even forbidden. Why would the depositors have risked censure and punishment? Hammond theorises a connection with the Punk music subculture permeating the youth scene of Hungary during this period. During the 1970s, Sid Vicious of the Sex Pistols adopted the padlock as a symbol, wearing one around his neck on a chain. The padlock therefore became, in Hammond's words, 'a forceful symbol of resistance, dissent, and art against convention'.[3] Hammond does not believe it was a coincidence that within a few years of the padlock becoming a symbol of the Punk movement people had begun attaching them to the fence in Pécs. Despite the Pécs love-locks' controversial origins, by 2007 the fence had become part of the city's heritage and repackaged as a tourist destination (see *Chapter Six: Selling Love*).

Another example of the mass deposition of padlocks on a public structure was in Merano, an Alpine town in northern Italy. From the 1980s until 2005, it was a local custom for Italian soldiers undertaking their military conscription in Merano to celebrate the end of their service by locking the padlock from their barracks locker to the Ponte Teatro in the town centre. They would often inscribe the lock with their period of military service and the name of their military company.[4] Local authorities tolerated the practice, removing the locks only when the balustrade began overflowing. The custom died out with the ending of obligatory conscription and the closure of the Merano military complex.[5] Also in Italy, graduates of the San Giorgio hospital academy similarly attached the padlocks from their lockers to a bridge in Florence at the end of their training.[6]

Interestingly, none of these examples appear to have originally been about declaring romantic attachment – in fact, as Richter and Pfeiffer-Kloss observe, the Italian customs celebrated regained freedom[7] – although the Pécs assemblage did develop an amorous element over time. It would take over a decade for other sites to host the custom with an explicitly romantic colour, and again these

appear quite isolated. The love-locks on Jade Peak of the Yellow Mountains, China, for example, are believed to have appeared in 1999/2000, possibly leading to dissemination in the Far East (see *Chapter Six: Selling Love*). However, it was not until the 2000s that the custom gained global popularity – spurred by a teenage romance novel.

The Moccia Phenomenon

In 1992, Italian novelist Federico Moccia released his first novel *Tre Metri Sopra il Cielo* (*Three Meters Above Heaven*), paying the publishing costs himself and printing 1,500 copies. A first-person narrated story of teenage angst and love, centred on Roman 'bad boy' Step's ill-fated relationship with 'good girl' Babi, it gained popularity amongst young Italian readers and, soon out of print, circulated by way of photocopies. Twelve years later, in 2004, a heavily-edited *Tre Metri Sopra il Cielo* was reissued by Feltrinelli, one of the biggest publishing houses in Italy. It sold 1,850,000 copies and was subsequently turned into a film directed by Luca Lucini. Riding on its success, Moccia published a sequel in 2006 entitled *Ho voglia di te* (*I Want You*), in which the protagonist Step remains the same but his love interest – now a girl called Gin – does not. In the second half of the novel, Gin and Step, driving through Rome in Step's brother's car, stop near the Milvio Bridge. Gin takes him to the middle of the bridge and points out a street lamp surrounded by padlocks. '"This is the lover's chain",' she explains to him. 'You have to put a padlock on this chain, lock it and throw the key in the Tevere.' 'And then?' 'You never break up.'[8] Gin accuses Step of being 'scared of locking a padlock', to which he responds by retrieving a padlock from his brother's car:

> I hold the key between my thumb and forefinger. I hang it loose for a while, suspended in the air, uncertain. Then suddenly I let it go. And it flies down, fast, rolls in the air and gets lost in the waters of the Tevere.
> "You really did it."[9]

And thus the love-lock phenomenon was born.

In an interview with *USA Today*, Moccia – who may have already been familiar with the custom in Florence – admitted to placing a padlock on the third lamp post of the Ponte Milvio the night before *Ho voglia di te* was published, for the benefit of any curious readers who may visit the site to check if the love-lock custom was real. 'I thought only someone particularly engrossed by the story would have wanted to check,' Moccia is reported to have recalled in 2015, bemused by what happened next. 'I went there a week later and there were already 300 locks. They haven't stopped since.'[10] It certainly did not take long for the custom to establish itself on the Ponte Milvio. One year later, an article in the

'Travel' section of the *Telegraph* reported that, following Moccia's novel, the lamp post on the Ponte Milvio has become:

> . . . bedecked with hundreds of padlocks. Like characters in the book, lovers come here to add a chain inscribed with their names – and then throw the key into the river. But hurry if you want to follow suit. The weight of the locks is bending the post, and there are now calls for the custom to be banned.[11]

It is unsurprising that such quantities of people visited the site from the book. It was a remarkably successful novel, with a million copies sold in Italy alone, and translations also proving popular; 600,000 copies were sold in Spain, for example.[12] Moccia's work has been published in fifteen languages worldwide, with an English translation planned for 2021.[13] Films followed the books, with *Ho voglia di te*, directed by Luis Prieto, hitting the screens in Italy in 2007 (a Spanish version – as *Tengo ganas de ti* – was released in 2012). The film is evidence of the love-lock custom on the Ponte Milvio, for the scene with Step and Gin on the bridge features the real assemblage. So, in the short amount of time between the book's publication in February 2006 and the release of the film in March 2007, the love-lock lamp post had become an established feature.

Connected to the film was singer-songwriter Tiziano Ferro's *Ti scatterò una foto* (*I will take a photo of you*). The lyrics of this love song speak of 'memory', 'always', 'remember forever' and the fear of being forgotten. The music video for this featured Ferro standing on the Ponte Milvio with actress Laura Chiatti, who played Gin in *Ho voglia di te*. Throughout the video, which is regularly interspersed with shots of the bridge's assemblage, both Ferro and Chiatti melancholically touch and study the love-locks. The song was released in February 2007 and was in the Italian music charts for 20 weeks.[14] The popularity of the novel, films and song has been dubbed the 'Moccia phenomenon' in popular media;[15] the love-lock custom – which sprang from this popularity in such a short space of time – was soon being dubbed the same.

From Popular Culture to Popular Custom

This conversion from popular culture to popular custom is not uncommon. Literature, film and television are well-known travel inducements, attracting fans to the sites that feature in the fiction. Fans of *The Lord of the Rings* visit New Zealand in their search for Middle Earth; for the *Twilight Saga* they travel to Forks (Washington) and Volterra (Tuscany); for *Gladiator*, the Roman Coliseum.[16] Similar to the Moccia phenomenon is what Amy Sargent terms the 'Darcy Effect', which saw immense increases in visits to historic homes following the hugely successful 1995 BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*.[17] Visitor numbers at the National

Trust property of Lyme Park – BBC's Pemberley and of Colin Firth's wet-shirt-scene fame – rose from 32,000 to 91,000 the year of the miniseries' release.[18]

What compels such visits? Ashley Orr writes that fans seek connections with fictional 'characters through a sense of shared geographical, if not temporal, space', and such trips 'offer the possibility of inhabiting a beloved narrative'.[19] This form of visit, known as literary tourism and film tourism, can sometimes offer more than habitation in a narrative; it can offer the opportunity for imaginative and embodied play through the re-enactment of character actions. This is what is happening when, as Nick Couldry writes, visitors to the Manchester set of British soap opera *Coronation Street* 'pretend for a moment they live on the Street, posing with door knocker in hand or calling upstairs to a Street character'.[20]

This is what is happening in Transylvania when fans of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* retrace the journey made by the character Jonathan Harker, and when they pay a fee to lie in – and rise dramatically from – a coffin in the basement of Hotel Castle Dracula.[21] And this is what is happening in London King's Cross train station, when fans of *Harry Potter* queue up at the staged 'Platform 9 ¾', don a Hogwarts scarf, grasp hold of the handlebars of a half-disappeared luggage trolley and pose for photographs.[22] To use a folkloric term, these are examples of ostensive action. Folklorists Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi borrowed the word 'ostension' (from the Latin *ostendere*, 'to show') from semiotics to make sense of this relationship between folklore and popular culture. Communication through ostension is, they explained, 'essentially the showing of actions'; the physical enactment of folk narrative and legend.[23] And like folk narratives and legends, popular culture, Chieko Iwashita observes, 'is very good at turning people's dreams and curiosity into action'.[24]

Such re-enactments even precipitate adaptations of belief systems and lifestyles. For example, Helen Berger and Douglas Ezzy explore how modern witchcraft has been impacted by popular culture, with the number of teen witchcraft practitioners seeing a significant increase during the 1990s. This was, Berger and Ezzy argue, accelerated or even triggered by the popular 1996 film *The Craft*, which centred on a group of teenage witches, and television shows *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (which ran 1996–2003) and *Charmed* (1998–2006).[25] The same process is evident in what Markus Davidsen identifies as 'fiction-based religions', such as those based on *The Lord of the Rings* and *Star Wars*; while the 'Jedi Census Phenomenon', which in 2001 saw more than 500,000 people claim 'Jedi' as their religion, was largely a prank, there are groups who earnestly identify themselves as Jedi Knights.[26]

Often, however, re-enactments are transient, consisting of a single action that lasts no longer than a few moments. They also often, like Moccia's love-locks, have a romantic element. Visitors to the Casa di Giulietta in Verona, for instance, queue for their brief moment on 'Juliet's balcony' to re-enact that most famous of love scenes: 'Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?' Likewise,

Kim explores couples' fan play at sites from South Korean television show *Winter Sonata*, where they re-enact romantic scenes of bicycle rides through a specific redwood-lined road, as the show's characters did before them. 'By this performance', Kim writes, '. . . it is presumed that the tourists would then become true lovers in their own context and love story.'[27]

These romantic re-enactments, or ostensive actions, while transient, can sometimes leave tangible traces, physically altering the landscapes and creating something real that only previously existed in fiction. Love-locks are one example of this. Another example is a bench in Oxford's Botanic Gardens carved with the names 'Lyra + Will' or initials 'L and W'. This is the bench from Philip Pullman's popular fantasy trilogy *His Dark Materials*, on which the parted protagonists, unable to reunite, promise to sit once a year and think of each other. Despite the bench bearing no marker officially identifying it as 'Lyra and Will's' bench, fans have come to share the spot with Pullman's fictional characters and carve their names into the wood.

Melissa Beattie details another example of imaginative play tangibly transforming the environment in her paper on the Ianto Jones memorial in Cardiff. Ianto Jones was a fictional character from BBC science-fiction television series *Torchwood*. Following the character's death in the third season of the show, an impromptu memorial was set up by fans at Mermaid Quay, close to the fictional Torchwood headquarters, containing the same assemblage of objects you would find at the memorial of a non-fictional character: flowers, notes, photographs, and personal items.[28] A similar impromptu memorial was formed following the death of actor Alan Rickman in 2016. The actor, having played Severus Snape in Warner Brothers' film adaptations of *Harry Potter* since 2001, had become so synonymous with the character that fans set up a memorial for him at London King's Cross station, identified above as a site of *Harry Potter* imaginative play. Although it was the actor rather than the character who had sadly passed in this case, many of the notes left at the memorial made explicit reference to Severus Snape and the world of *Harry Potter*, as did the location of the memorial: by Platform 9 ¾.

Imaginative play has therefore engendered folk assemblages, popular culture thus begetting a popular custom.[29] This is the process that popularised the love-lock custom in Italy. Fans of Moccia's novels and the subsequent films participated in ostensive actions, re-enacting the locking of a padlock on the Ponte Milvio and creating a folk custom by drawing a fictional action into reality. Fans who could not visit Rome initiated the custom elsewhere, such as Venice's Rialto Bridge, forming further folk assemblages and cementing the custom as a ritual declaration of romantic commitment. And so, by the 2000s, love-locks had become an established feature in some European cities, but what followed was a rapid and geographically unbound growth – and as popular as Moccia's novels were, his fans cannot wholly account for it.

Tourist Folklore

Many of the perpetuators and disseminators of the custom were tourists (see *Chapter Four: Locking Love*). The articles that describe the custom in Italy as a symptom of the 'Moccia phenomenon' go on to observe that by the late 2000s tourists had begun imitating the local fans by adding their own love-locks. One written in 2007 for *The New York Times* notes, 'tossing a key off Ponte Milvio, some Italians complain, may soon be as touristy as flipping a coin into the Trevi Fountain' and 'Some young Roman said that . . . the ritual had lost its appeal and gotten touristy.'[30] Two years later, in Cologne, the custom is described as one practised by local lovers, but the author of the article observes that 'The tokens have also become an attraction for tourists, who stop to take a closer look at the messages inscribed on them.'[31] From this point on, the myriad newspaper and magazine articles that refer to the love-lock custom describe it as a tourist practice – in many cases actually having been initiated by tourists.

It is no coincidence that many of the world's tourist attractions also feature love-locks: New York's Brooklyn Bridge, Paris's Pont des Arts, Florence's Ponte Vecchio, Sydney's Harbour Bridge, Prague's Charles Bridge, Seoul's Namsan Tower. Tourists brought the custom to these sites and took them onwards from there, seeing them whilst on one holiday (or encountering them less directly through, for example, social media – see below) and then disseminating the practice on their next trip or back home. 'The idea of hanging locks originated from local tourists a few years ago who saw the same thing at Tokyo Tower,' wrote Yu-jin in his article on love-locks on Seoul Tower in 2008.[32] Even in the more obscure locations, once enough locks are added to a structure, that structure becomes culturally and aesthetically interesting, consequently attracting tourists. Love-lock assemblages thus became something more than features of tourist attractions; they became tourist attractions in and of themselves.

Mass international tourism has been growing since the introduction of commercial air travel in the twentieth century and has become one of, if not *the* largest industries in the world.[33] The ease and popularity of international travel (together with the dawning of our digital age, see below) has led to a worldwide interconnectedness and consequently a convergence of the local and the global. This has resulted in what is commonly referred to as the 'global village' or 'global ecumene', with the population of any given site or city becoming both more transnational and more transient.[34] Hannerz suggests that what we are seeing through such globalisation is the rise of a 'new civilization': one that is not bound by geography or even nationality.[35] Such dramatic changes in the social fabric of our planet inevitably impact the 'locality' of a people and their customs.

Love-locking on the Ponte Milvio is no longer a 'local' custom practised by resident teenagers but a tourist one, perpetuated by Rome's many domestic and international visitors. Debates surrounding the 'authenticity' of tourist culture

are explored in *Chapter Seven: Unlocking Love*; what this chapter is concerned with is the existence of tourist culture. Much past literature has focused on the creation or performance of culture *for* tourists, rather than *by* tourists,[36] and Bruner notes the ethnographer's tendency to omit tourists from their studies altogether: 'a purposeful ignoring of that which is present but that ethnography finds embarrassing'.[37] However, some research has shifted focus to the culture of tourists themselves, such as MacCannell's seminal *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, and Urry's *The Tourist Gaze*.[38]

Defining tourists as 'sightseers . . . who are at this moment deployed throughout the entire world in search of experience', MacCannell views them as a distinct 'group' from a sociological perspective.[39] They can also be recognised as a 'folk' group. This is apparent if we use folklorist Alan Dundes's oft-cited definition: 'The term "folk" can refer to *any group of people whatsoever* who share at least one common factor' (emphases in the original).[40] Tourists share a common factor in that they are all non-residents of the country, city or site they currently occupy and have travelled there for pleasure. They may have little else in common: a person of any nationality, race, class, occupation and gender can be a tourist, but through their shared status as leisure travellers, they constitute a folk group. And as a folk group, the customs they practise are folk customs, and the lore they share is folklore.

Equations between the tourist and the pilgrim, the holiday and the ritual, have frequently been made.[41] Anthropologists Victor and Edith Turner famously observed, 'a tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist', whilst Singh notes that pilgrimages have been identified in sociology and anthropology as the earliest form of tourism.[42] The festivals that tourists participate in today are viewed by Cooley as tourist 'rituals'.[43] Tourists' engagement with attractions is described by MacCannell as 'a twofold process of *sight sacralization* that is met with a corresponding *ritual attitude* on the part of tourists' (emphases in the original).[44] And the stories heard, shared and perpetuated by tourists are deemed 'tourist folklore' by Joyce Hammond. An example given by Hammond is that of the 'curse of Pele'. From at least the 1940s, visitors to Hawai'i and Maui shared the belief that Pele, the 'goddess of volcanoes', would punish any tourist who removed rocks from the island. This inevitably led to many rocks being posted back to the national parks by tourists having suffered some bad luck upon returning home with them. This notion, Hammond asserts, has no apparent precedent in early Hawaiian beliefs and is an example of pure 'tourist folklore'.[45]

Tourists therefore not only co-consume; they also co-produce.[46] Love-lock assemblages are possibly the most notable example of this. These structures are both tourist attractions and attractions created largely *by* tourists. MacCannell describes the tourist attraction as 'the locus of a human relationship between un-like-minded individuals, the locus of an urgent desire to share – an intimate connection between one stranger and another, through the local object'.[47] In

the case of love-lock assemblages, this sharing has become physical – tourists contribute their own piece to the local object – and this notion overlays neatly onto McNeill's concept of serial collaborative creations[48] (see *Introduction*) and Preston's definition of folk assemblages:

> Such objects are the evolving product of a series of private acts . . . that cumulatively form an object that itself evokes the sense of an imagined community – that imagined community being the various individuals, usually anonymous, who have responded in kind to the acts of earlier individuals and who frequently envision their responses as linking them to a group of people who, though invisible to them, are made visible by that which they have left behind.[49]

The Love-Lock as Marked Attraction

MacCannell defines the tourist attraction as 'an empirical relationship between a *tourist*, a *sight* and a *marker* (a piece of information about a sight)' (emphases in the original).[50] There is, according to this definition, more to the process of love-locks becoming established attractions than tourists simply seeing an assemblage (the *sight*). Also needed is the marker. For many world attractions, this marker takes the form of official signage: plaques or information boards erected at a site/structure, providing some details and clearly demarcating it as a sight of interest. However, although there are some exceptions to this (see *Chapter Six: Selling Love*), this is not usually the case at love-lock assemblages. For these sites, such markers tend to be unofficial: they are not demarcated by land managers or local authorities. And they are less *present* than other markers, rarely tangibly at the site itself.

Most love-lock assemblage markers are forms of written or visual material produced by other tourists or interest groups, often encountered beyond the context of the site. For instance, in January 2019 a Twitter marketing campaign for Viking Cruises advertised their cruise to Paris with a photograph of a Parisian love-lock bridge and the words: 'Feel the love as you stroll across Love Lock Bridge in #Paris. Every day, couples attach a padlock to the bridge & throw the key into the Seine River as a sign of eternal love.'[51] Such markers provide information (both directly and indirectly) about love-locks, increasing knowledge and thus the dissemination of the custom. The media is the most obvious example of this. As Iwashita observes, 'More and more people are being exposed to representations provided by "global" popular culture and they are used to seeing places through the media. Popular cultural forms of the media can create tourism geographies in a strong sense . . . actively shaping interactions in and with places.'[52]

Since the late 2000s, love-locks have been a popular feature of newspaper and magazine articles: 'In Rome, a New Ritual on an Old Bridge' in the *New York*

Times, 2007; 'Seoul Tower Locked in Everlasting Love' in *Korea Times*, 2008; 'Japan's Young Couples Risking Death in "Love Padlock" Ritual' in *The Telegraph*, 2009; 'That's Amore! But Lovers' Locks are Littering the Brooklyn Bridge' in the *Brooklyn Paper*, 2010.[53] Love-locks gained greater popularity in the media as the custom grew more contested (see *Chapter Seven: Unlocking Love*). 'Paris to Remove Love Padlocks from Pont des Arts Bridge' in *The Telegraph*, May 2010, and 'Love Padlocks Vanish from Paris Bridge' in quick succession, less than two weeks later; 'Rome's Ponte Milvio Bridge: "Padlocks of Love" removed' in *BBC News*, 2012; '"Love Locks" to be Removed from Ha'penny Bridge'; '"Love locks" Banned on Ky. Bridge', and so on.[54] Even when the articles are wholly negative about the custom – Jonathan Jones's 2015 *Guardian* article: 'Love Locks are the Shallowest, Stupidest, Phoniest Expression of Love Ever' comes to mind – they are still disseminating knowledge and perhaps, unwittingly, perpetuating it.[55]

The Internet, particularly user-generated content, has also played a significant role in disseminating knowledge of the love-lock custom. This is despite past predictions that folklore would not survive the rise of mass culture and technology, with folklorist Trevor Blank asserting instead that 'folklore flourishes on the Internet.'[56] He believes that new media technology – from laptops and tablets to mobile telephones – is now so deeply integrated into our communication practices that it has become an instrumental 'conduit of folkloric transmission'.[57] Even as early as 1996, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett was noting the Internet's efficacy for transmitting folklore, and in 2005 Dundes asserted that 'folklore continues to be alive and well in the modern world, due in part to increased transmission via e-mail and the Internet.' Tok Thompson, who describes online folklore as 'Folklore 2.0', likewise states that 'folklore is enjoying a tremendous renaissance online', while Mariann Domokos asserts that with the Internet now being the main means of communication, folklorists can neither ignore it nor overestimate its centrality in the mediation of folklore.[58] Love-locks attest to this, most especially with regards to social media.

Love-locks feature widely on Instagram, a photo and video-sharing social networking service that launched in 2010. As of August 2018, 183,224 Instagram posts contained '#lovelocks' in their tagging. Most of these posts are images of love-locks, either close-up shots of the locks and their inscriptions, or photographs of people posing on or beside a love-lock structure. Love-locks are also a popular feature on the video-sharing website YouTube, founded in 2005. Thousands of videos have been uploaded, primarily by tourists as part of their travelling vlogs (video blogs), many featuring couples attaching love-locks themselves. This form of documented participation will be further explored in *Chapter Four: Locking Love*; what is pertinent here are the amounts of people who are encountering love-locks through social media. Significantly, a random selection of 100 YouTube love-lock videos was examined for this study, ranging in date from 2010 to 2018, and these reported a total of 494,966 views. This number will have

increased, and those 100 videos are only a small sample of the vast and growing number online.

This posting of photographs and videos of love-locks online demonstrates the significance of another contemporary innovation: the mobile camera phone. First introduced in 2000, camera phones have become a staple product of everyday life. In 2017, 85% of adults in the UK owned smartphones; many of these use the camera applications on their devices, with 39% of teenagers taking photographs and/or videos every day.[59] The ubiquity of this device, now partnered with the 'selfie stick', not only means that most people, regardless of age or camera literacy, are able – and inclined – to spontaneously photograph or record their encounters with tourist attractions without having to pre-plan or spend money on films,[60] but they are also able to share them instantaneously even when abroad, via multimedia messaging and social media platforms.[61] 'Camera phones', observes sociologist Penny Tinkler, 'are heralded as shifting photographic practices.'[62] It seems they are also shifting ritual practices – a process that will be explored in more depth in *Chapter Four: Locking Love*.

What we are seeing here is 'Digital Age Tourism': social media has become central to how people share travel knowledge – electronic word-of-mouth – and thus learn about new places and attractions, with Elisa Giaccardi observing that our sense of place is rearticulated through social media.[63] Videos are particularly important to this process, and Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier note the role they play as MacCannell's *markers*, as discussed above, demarcating a site as a tourist attraction: 'Being perceived as sources of information, the shared videos act as the markers; they provide meanings and structures to different sights that can be visited and activities that can be done . . . The videos can signify that a particular sight is worth viewing, as it is portrayed to be gazed at by other tourists.'[64] Social media, however, does more than mark a love-lock assemblage as a tourist attraction; it perpetuates the custom.

The Internet provides ideal conditions for the transmission and dissemination of folklore and customs for two primary reasons. Firstly, it offers a rapid and effective 'distribution mechanism', computer-mediated communication allowing for the quick (indeed, instant), widespread and easy exchange of information. Secondly, it is not restricted geographically. The Internet has altered not only how the 'folk' communicate and transmit folklore but also what constitutes the 'folk'. As with mass tourism, because of the global discourse of the Internet, cultural identity is no longer necessarily equated with geography, and therefore a 'folk group' has no need for a geographical base. And, as Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier observe, 'An important need of tourists is to share their experiences with others'; a person can share images and information about the love-lock custom with thousands of people from across the globe.[65]

And so, if the 'folk' of the twenty-first century are no longer restricted by geography, then the dissemination of twenty-first-century folklore is not either, and

the love-lock custom has been able to spread rapidly and widely across the planet via computer-mediated communication.[66] Digital Age Tourism, therefore, provides more than markers for love-lock assemblages; it *enables* the custom. Tracing the Internet-mediated dissemination of information about 'flash mobs', folklorist Lynne McNeill demonstrates that 'technologically mediated communication affects cultural expression', and Munar et al. note that social media has 'led to the emergence of new tourism cultures and practices'. As will be further explored in *Chapter Four: Locking Love*, the love-locks are a prime example of this.[67]

Conclusion

Compiling a history of love-locking has been no simple task. The custom's origins remain obscure, and we only have any real evidence of it from the 1980s, when it was documented in Pécs and in Italian Alpine towns. This is not to claim that the practice originated then and there, only that no solid proof has yet been identified giving an earlier date. Of course, an absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, but this chapter promised to handle the facts. The difficulties in separating fact from fiction stem from the custom's international spread, which sees numerous narratives and networks of dissemination, rather than a single, linear thread, and from the many rumours circulating and presented as fact by the media. However, while this has complicated the task of contextualising the practice, it is also central to it because internationality and obscure origins are what make the love-lock custom so interesting.

This chapter has demonstrated how rapidly a custom of unknown provenance can become established at one site and then can disseminate to hundreds, probably thousands, of locations around the globe, without any official driving force – and often without the approval of landowners and site managers. Through popular culture and embodied play, tourist folklore, and the geographically unbound distribution mechanism of the Internet, the custom of love-locking has spread like wildfire, and assemblages have become marked attractions worldwide, culturally consumed by the millions who visit them. The following chapter further explores this notion of consumption by considering the love-lock's place within popular culture.

Notes

1. Solid evidence has proved difficult to attain regarding the history of this custom, and I am not confident that these are the earliest examples of love-locking. International researchers proficient in a range of languages would be required to ascertain with any certainty when and where the earliest love-lock assemblage emerged.

2. Hammond, 'Renegade Ornament and the Image of the Post-Socialist City'.

3. Ibid., 187.

4. There are unsubstantiated claims that soldiers practised the same custom on the Ponte Vecchio in Florence during the 1960s.

5. Pers. comm. 23/01/2019 Julia Sanin, Tourist office Merano; Pers. comm. Elmar Gobbi, Palais Mamming Museum, Merano, 25/01/2019. With many thanks to Roberto Labanti for tracking this information down.

6. Richter and Pfeiffer-Kloss, 'Bridges, Locks and Love', 189.

7. Ibid., 189.

8. Moccia, *Ho voglia di te* [*I Want You*], 274–76. Translation from Italian by Francesca Benetti, with much appreciation.

9. Ibid.

10. Berton, '"Love Locks" Scourge of Bridges Worldwide'.

11. Owen, 'Rome: City of Love'.

12. Pers. comm. Maria Cardona Serra, Pontas Literary Agency, 23/11/2018.

13. Pontas Literary Agency, 'Grand Central Publishing to Publish the #1 Italian Bestselling Author Federico Moccia'.

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