

Utah State University

DigitalCommons@USU

---

Digital Folklore Project 2014

Digital Folklore Project

---

10-1-2014

## October Post 1

Ryan Price

*Utah State University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/dfp2014>

---

### Recommended Citation

Price, Ryan, "October Post 1" (2014). *Digital Folklore Project 2014*. Paper 2.

<https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/dfp2014/2>

This Messy Musing is brought to you for free and open access by the Digital Folklore Project at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Digital Folklore Project 2014 by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@usu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@usu.edu).





Ryan Price

Oct 20, 2014



*10-20-14 – Note to readers: this date's field notes are my gut reactions to the project... I asked myself questions, and then I answered them through a process of free writing. I apologize for the many, many errors and typos and redundancies! Because many of these reflections are mainly useful for me (to more clearly understand my own thought processes) and certainly not useful for someone else, I highlighted in bold text parts of this date's field notes that perhaps would be useful for others to consider as we move forward with the project.*

-Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw mention the importance of reflecting and noting initial impressions, and I've done a lot of those activities this week. I haven't gone into the "field" online and looked for instances of digital folklore, but, because I consider myself somewhat of a "digital native," I've reflected on my past online experiences, my initial impressions about instances of digital folklore, and my overall thoughts about our project of developing a research agenda for a "center of digital folklore."

Q-When have I encountered digital folklore in the past? What has my experience of living in a digital culture been like?

A-All the time on Facebook, email forwards, etc. When I was in high school, I still didn't have the internet in my home, but all my friends did. I remember how they would discuss things going on online (e.g. instant message conversations; but that stands out as something from junior high (1997-2000ish)). Their access to the internet made them the first to hear about certain things, and then they would talk about it later, and I would get filled in on the details in f2f conversations. I can't think of a specific example... perhaps the initial wave of mp3 pirating: I heard of Napster from friends; I never interacted with it; one of my friends, Brock, used to burn mix CDs, and they hugely impacted my interpretation of reality because we listened to them so much while dragging main street in Rexburg, Idaho.

A-Since I began college in 2007, I've had the internet in my home. Thinking back on my experience with the internet, my early interaction with it in college had mostly been directly related to school. Whether I've used email to talk to other students or teachers, the earliest interactions were school-related. After a while, I discovered Facebook and other social networks that connected me to family and past acquaintances.

A-Speaking of school-related internet use, I think a lot of the instances of digital folklore that I've encountered and shared have come from college professors who were trying to teach some course-related topic through Youtube videos, etc. For example, I went to BYU-Idaho (2007-2010), and in January of 2008, the Mormon president Gordon B. Hickley died. My chemistry teacher (David?), to begin the semester, found a video clip of Pres. Hinckley talking about the importance of chemistry. Since Pres. Hickley had just died, the clip made quite an impact spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually because all of us students were Mormons, we respected the speaker, and we were in a chemistry class. The video clip itself isn't an instance of folklore (i.e. the teacher hadn't edited it substantially other than limiting the length of the clip to only include what Pres. Hinckley had to say about the value of chemistry), but the way the teacher used it, I think, was an instance of digital folklore. The teacher was able to get a Youtube clip, use it in a culture where it mattered and was timely, rhetorically speaking, and the teacher played it for us in class and shared its link on the university's course management system (CMS). After that class, I too shared the video clip on Facebook, and I showed my wife the clip when I next saw her. And, of course, now that I'm thinking more about it, my English professors and Political Science professors shared tons of digital folklore in order to teach a concept, which we students then shared for our own purposes. The idea of using user-generated content, rather than popular textbooks, to teach concepts in a college course takes some aspect of the dominance of the educational system and flips it upside down, to an extent.

Q-How have I contributed to digital folklore in the past?

A-I can't think of any instance where I've taken creative license to something popular, changed it, and shared it (not that that's the only process for digital folklore creation...). I've shared many many many things on Facebook, but the only thing I've really created and shared have been thoughts I've had about current events or updates about my life. Nothing I've done personally has ever gone "viral" or would be considered folklore.

Q-Have I always been aware of the concept of digital folklore but only now have begun describing it or defining it as digital folklore?

A-Yes, to an extent. Certainly, I've only now begun to call these instances or forms "digital folklore." My conception of folklore, before taking my 1<sup>st</sup> folklore class in the fall 2013 semester, was Paul Bunyan and Pecos Bill—tall tales and such—which is pretty common for the lay person to think.

Q-How have this semester's readings and class discussions influenced my thought processes on the function and location of instances or forms of potential digital folklore? How ought we conceptualize this research project?

A-Instances of digital folklore are allowed and constrained by medium, culture, context, laws, and technological functionality, among other things. If an instance of digital folklore is currently trending, then surely something must have shifted or changed—provided exigence—in medium availability, culture, laws, or functionality of technology; otherwise there would be no exigence or audience or constraints (i.e. the three elements of what constitutes a rhetorical situation; Bitzer, 1968, as quoted by Harrison in *Central Works*, p. 257) for that particular instance of digital folklore. Surely, digital folklore is rhetorically situated in socially and technologically and culturally constructed contexts. With this in mind, it seems that to search for *trending* instances of digital folklore is, on another level, and to use an earthquake as a metaphor, to search for shifting social, technological, and cultural fault lines. What things are happening right now (or have happened in the past year or so) that affect/influence/dominate people's actions, behaviors, beliefs, or knowledge? To search for trends in digital folklore is to search for changes or evolutions or adaptations in society, politics, laws, economics, technology, and culture. That is, we are looking for rhetorically contextualized instances or forms of "informal traditional culture" that respond to and shape our existences in the world and our interpretations of reality.

If we agree that instances of digital folklore are responses to and/or shaping activities on behalf of our experiences (or "emergences" as discussed in class) in and interpretations of reality, then it would be a worthwhile starting point in our digital folklore project to look for "this year's top instances of digital folklore" where socio-economic-cultural-technological fault lines have shifted. For example, were there any important or publicized court cases (e.g. prop 8)? If so, those cases are not instances of digital folklore, but people's digital "informal traditional cultural" responses would be. And even if only thousands, not millions, of people participated in the receiving and/or conveying processes of that instance of digital folklore, perhaps it still ought to be considered by our proposed "center for digital folklore" as one of the top trends because of the weight of its core issue.

With the above reasoning in mind, the following is a list of potential topical starting lines (or topical *fault lines*, to continue the earthquake metaphor) where researchers in this kind of project may begin our search for rich sources of *trending* digital folklore:

- 1-Elections/politicians (national or otherwise)
- 2-Court cases
- 3-Natural disasters (or responses to natural disasters)
- 4-Innovations in technology (technology, in this sense, would mean any object that is used by humans to some end whether it is a theoretical object like an economic theory or a concrete object like an iPhone or a functional process like the ability to video chat on Skype, etc.)
- 5-Public health concerns (e.g. Ebola outbreak)
- 6-Things-gone-viral (i.e. the thing that went viral is not the instance of digital folklore; rather, it is the triggering mechanism that fostered some informal traditional cultural response)
- 7-Influential Movies, TV Shows, Music, Video Games, other pop culture or even off-beat media, etc. (i.e. again, the actual movie or song is not the instance of digital folklore, but the emerging response would be (such as a reaction to "Friday" by Rebecca Black))
- 8-War/Terrorism (i.e. or some instance of violence that evokes national response, like the drug cartels in Mexico or the US's response to ISIS or 9/11)
- 9-Celebrities' actions or behaviors (i.e. not their performance work, but something from their real lives such as Robin Williams' suicide)
- 10-Medical breakthroughs and other happenings in healthcare (i.e. this falls under the "innovations in technology" category, but I think that medicine in contemporary culture holds special degree of significance because of practically every person's somewhat forced interaction with its knowledge system and technologies)

11-God/Religion (e.g. perhaps a religion makes a really bold claim like announcing the specific time and date of the Second Coming, and then people respond to such an act, etc.)

12-(Un)Successful/Dominant Businesses or business practices (e.g. I'm thinking right now of the BP oil spill fiasco or the Enron scandal and the emerging digital folklore from those events; or even the success/dominance of Amazon.com and the emergence of "faux reviews")

\*Certainly there are other important issues that I haven't listed, but these are just examples off the top of my head.\*

We certainly need a list of resources (e.g. Facebook, Google, etc.) where we can turn to in order to discover instances and forms of digital folklore. However, when starting such a research project, especially involving collaboration, I think we need a "tidy" and replicable-yet-improvisational way to collectively conceptualize and conduct the research. I like the earthquake metaphor of looking for shifting social/cultural/technological (or other rhetorically contextual) fault lines and then tracing the resulting and/or emerging shockwaves—instances or forms of digital folklore—that follow. That perspective helps me. But, being new to folklore, I'm just not sure if that metaphor really helps anyone else or even if it's altogether simply an incorrect or overly simplistic metaphorical view of digital folklore. If we could use this metaphor (or another, better one that someone comes up with) as a way to guide the research, as a sort of method or guiding research principle, so to speak, then I think that the digital folklore project would benefit in the following ways: (1) the function, purpose, and/or mission of the "center for digital folklore" that we're creating would be easier for both researchers and, perhaps more importantly, site visitors to conceptualize; (2) not only for the initial research that we're doing but also for the continual research needed to keep the "center" updated, such a method (or perhaps "vision" or "mission" are better terms) would make the research process more systematic, orderly, and replicable.

10-27-14—

First, I've been thinking about transcendence. I was initially thinking that a "trend of the year" would be considered "of the year" because it was found across a variety of media, but now I'm not so sure. For example, the faux Amazon reviews are wonderful examples of digital folklore, but they don't transcend beyond the Amazon site. (At least, I haven't seen examples of their transcendence). But the social principle of (mis)using a technology provided by a dominant company is transcendent; people do that all the time (e.g. iPhone jailbreaking, etc.). So, to summarize my thoughts on transcendence: the folklore need not be transcendent, but the principle behind it may very well be transcendent.

Ah, another thing I was thinking of was the idea of risk. Considering the Amazon faux reviews again, and we didn't talk about this in class, there's a low level of risk when someone writes a faux review. That is, someone could write whatever the hell he or she wants as a review, and there will literally be no consequences for his or her action. In a different situation, however, such as a class like ours, if someone writes nonsense or uses the discussion boards in a way unintended by the instructor, then that person must face the consequences of a low(er) grade or even punishment, depending on what that person posted online. Or in other situations such as in a business, if an employee (mis)uses a memo or something, and he or she turns the intended purpose on its head, then that person runs the risk of getting fired. Perhaps, when considering the trend of the year, we ought to consider the level of risk involved in participating in or contributing to that particular folkloric trend.

11-10-14-

I recently bought a Livescribe pen, and I took notes and audio recorded our discussion of today's class. In order to interact with the PDF and its audio component, you need to install some Livescribe software, but I'm pretty sure it's free. Here's the link to the PDF: [Link](#) (11-10-14 Class discussion of DFP).

11-17-14

Same as the preceding entry: here's the link to the class discussion of the DFP on 11-17-14: [Link](#) .

11-24-14

Same again... Here is the link: [Link](#) ↗

Edited by [Kylie Schroeder](#) on Oct 12 at 8:07pm

← Reply



**Prof. McNeill**

Oct 22, 2014



Your point—"How have I contributed to digital folklore in the past?"—is a good one. We can remember our classic division of "active bearers and passive bearers" of tradition. We don't all always (re)create folklore ourselves. We may be passive recipients.

← Reply



**Prof. McNeill**

Oct 22, 2014



*My conception of folklore, before taking my 1st folklore class in the fall 2013 semester, was Paul Bunyan and Pecos Bill—tall tales and such—which is pretty common for the lay person to think.*

Our press release all need to work to overcome this. We need quick and easy phrases that will help people make the leap from what they think of when they think of folklore, to the stuff we're talking about in this project.

**With what phrases, keywords, etc. do we want to be peppering our public documents?**

Maybe: "of the people" or "informal"

Or: "unlike stuff that just 'goes viral,' digital folklore *evol*ves as it travels, as people adapt content and put their own stamp on it." (Though maybe that's not really succinct enough...)

← Reply



Ryan Price

Dec 12, 2014



I'm thinking that in the future it would be useful to get a better understanding of all the students'/team members' strengths at the beginning of the project. Once you've gained this understanding, then you could assign roles to each of the team members. For example, one of the students said that one of her future goals was to write for websites, so with this in mind, it would be useful not only to the DFP but also to the individual student to assign her a role that has to do with maintaining and creating content for the DFP website. For another example, other students said they were pretty good at analyzing folklore, so they could be assigned roles that are more oriented toward the digital fieldwork that is required to find the digital trends that the project hopes to find. Anyway, I think it's important to match roles/tasks/requirements of the DFP with the personal goals/skills of the individual team members.

I compiled all the questionnaire responses into one PDF, and I've inserted a link here: [Link](#) ↗ .

And here is a link to a blank template of the questionnaire if you want to take what I've said in this post into consideration: [Link](#) ↗ .

I hope this helps the DFP!!!

↩ Reply