Remixing Culture: Folklore and Mythology in the Digital Age

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> "Folklore is just as much, if not more of, an agent of the *present* as it is of the past."
> -Trevor J. Blank

When you think of folklore, you might think of oral traditions, "tall tales," fairy tales, lost cultures, stories about monsters and magic, and pastoral or gothic landscapes. These consist a vital part of the history of folklore and mythology, but as folklorists transition to studying present-day folklore, the realm of the digital has replaced any other vehicle for the transfer and proliferation of contemporary folklore. While some anthropologists and folklorists initially dismissed "Internet folklore" as a valid discipline of study, the current day finds a host of research dedicated to the study of the Internet as a radical new way to create and distribute folklore, taking folklore from the relatively anonymous oral tradition sustained by smaller communities in specific areas, to the mass-scale realm of the digital, where myths and folktales pervade all areas of the Internet and can often be traced back to specific individuals. However, we will also discuss how aspects of "traditional" folklore can still be found within Internet folklore.

Among other questions, this seminar will attempt to answer:

- What is the history behind the current study of digital folklore, and how did this become a "valid" academic field of study?
- How do the psychological/psychoanalytic capacities of folklore still carry into the digital age?
- Are memes a form of mythology in the digital age? How can they function as units of ideology, cultural cohesion, and active creators of meaning and cultural realities?
- How do online communities (Creepypasta, subreddits, SCP Foundation, etc) influence and shape digital culture, and how do their mechanisms differ from the creation of "traditional" folklore?
- What is meant by the idea of digital "traces," and how can the Internet continue to archive itself and its history going forward?
- What is the correlation and/or differences between fan-fiction and folklore, and how are issues of copyright and ownership addressed within both creative areas?
- How do gaming communities and digital folklore intersect (folklore about games, and games about folklore), and how have the two helped the other develop and create new avenues of meaning?

- How do themes of race, gender, and other types of identities relate to digital folklore, and to what degree degree is it still influenced by the "fear of the other," as "traditional" folklore often is?
- How does the idea of "authenticity" factor into the creation and distribution of digital folklore? What does it mean for a legend or myth to be or feel "authentic"?
- What is the non-digital impact of digital folklore and the online communities who produce it? Does it possess relevance for everyone, or is it only for those who are active in the communities that produce it?
- What is the future of digital folklore? How is it changing even now, and what will it look like going forward?

This seminar would be of interest to those who are interested in anthropology, literature, history, psychology, new media theory, online communities and digital culture in general, gaming, gender and/or race studies…. Since digital folklore in and of itself is such an interdisciplinary field of study that can not be confined just to anthropology and laography (the study of folklore), essentially anyone at all involved in the humanities and social sciences might be interested in what this course has to offer.

Possible Texts:
Castell, *The Rise of the Networked Society*
Tucker, *Folk Culture in the Digital Age*
Blank, *Folklore and the Internet*
Blank, *Folk Humor, Celebrity Culture, and Mass-Mediated Disasters in the Digital Age*
Chess and Newsome, *Folklore, Horror Stories, and the Slender Man: The Development of an Internet Mythology*
Lessig, *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in this Hybrid Economy*
Foley, *Oral Tradition and the Internet*
McNeill, *Folklore Rules*
Brunvand, *The Vanishing Hitchhiker*
Ellis, *Aliens, Ghosts, and Cults: The Legends We Live*

Articles:
Understanding Folk Culture in the Digital Age: An Interview with Folklorist Trevor J. Blank
Born Digital Folklore and the Vernacular Web: An Interview with Robert Glenn Howard
Folk Culture Online (audio interview)
"They all see dead people-- but we (do)n't want to tell you about it." On Legend Gathering in Real and Cyberspace
Absurdist Narratives in the Sunshine State: Comic, Criminal, Folkloric, and Fantastic Escapades in the Swamps and Suburbs of Florida

[Internet Memes: the Mythology of Augmented Society](#)
Newsom, *Participatory Storytelling and the New Folklore of the Digital Age*
Smith, et. al., *The Grateful Terrorist: Folklore as a Psychological Coping Mechanism*
Tye, *On Their Own: Contemporary Legends of Women Alone in the Urban Landscape*
Henken, *Gender Shifts in Contemporary Legend*

Films/videos:
Brodsky, *Beware the Slenderman* (2016)
Mitchell, *It Follows* (2014)
Myrick and Sanchez, *The Blair Witch Project* (1999)
The Marble Hornets project
lonelygirl15

Possible Video Games:
Parsec Productions, *Slender: The Eight Pages*
Blue Isle Studios, *Slender: The Arrival*
Cawthon, *Five Nights at Freddy's* 1-4
Veloso, *Bunny Man: Lost Souls*
Atari, *Bezerk*
Nintendo, *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask*
Nintendo, *Pokemon Red, Green,* and *Blue*
Atari, *E.T: The Extra-Terrestrial*
Konsordo, *Rake*
Rikkonen, *SCP - Containment Breach*
Fox, *Undertale*
varlamov5264, *Bitardia*
Oldernberg, *1000 Heads Among the Trees*
Dejobaan Games, *Elegy for a Dead World*
Everything Unlimited, *The Beginner's Guide*

Assorted Resources:
Creepypasta.com
The SCP Foundation
Coast to Coast AM
The "No Sleep" subreddit
UrbanLegendsOnline

Potential speakers:

- Trevor J. Blank, folklorist specializing in digital culture, current assistant professor of Communications at the State University of New York.
- Elizabeth Tucker, professor and folklorist at Binghamton University, has written article and taught courses about the intersections of folklore and mass media.
- Sharon Hill, geologist, founder of the Anomalies Research Society, and advocate for paranormal research with an emphasis on critical thinking and evidence-based inquiry.