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## Folklore and the Internet

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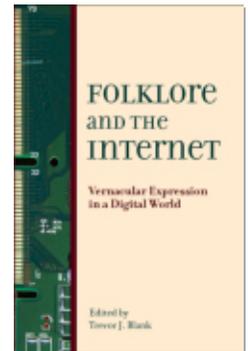
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## Chapter 8

# Public Folklore in Cyberspace

GREGORY HANSEN

In 1985 I was working with the Kentucky Center for the Arts in Louisville as a fieldworker for the Kentucky Folk Project. The project was funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, and it consisted of a twelve-county survey of folk arts in north-central Kentucky. Four months of fieldwork resulted in presentations at the center's festival, the Kentucky Folklife Celebration. Additional activities included a traveling exhibit entitled "Patterns between the Rivers: Tradition in North-Central Kentucky." During the course of the project, fieldworkers documented a range of Kentucky folk arts, including blues music, quilt-making, old-time fiddling, johnboat building, tobacco twisting, weaving, woodcarving, beekeeping, and dozens of other forms of expressive culture. The project provided me with many firsts: the opportunity to work as a public folklorist, assist with a folklife festival, and see photographs that I had taken featured in an exhibit (Feintuch 1988, 1). It also was my first exposure to the use of computers in public programming. I open with this example to illustrate several of the activities of public folklorists, as well as to foreground some of the salient issues involved in using computers in public presentations of folklife.

This era of computing was pre-Internet. I had heard rumors of something akin to text messaging while I was taking courses on computing at the Pennsylvania State University. The instructor was teaching us to use BASIC as well as PLI computer languages, and I completed an independent study project in which I computerized Vladímir Propp's morphology using computer punchcards. The next semester our campus

installed its first CRTs, and I learned to use existing software, create databases, clandestinely send messages on a nascent network confined only to small computer labs, and discovered a range of graphics programs that involved scanning images and using titles. These types of computer uses all became part of the Kentucky Center's exhibit, as the project director was able to secure support from the Wang Corporation to use its PCs and receive some technical assistance to enhance the presentation of fieldwork material.

During this time, public folklorists were using computers in their projects, but colleagues told me that they were mainly employing them as resources in the field. Word processors were beginning to replace electric typewriters, and folklorists were starting to assemble databases of material they had collected. When the Wang Corporation agreed to create a partnership with the Kentucky Center for the Arts, the idea was that computers would augment the panels of photographs and text by supplementing the primary material on display. These support materials mainly consisted of information available from a database that would allow viewers to find specific details about the folklife of a particular county within the survey area and see images scanned using Wang's Autocad program. Examples of items audiences could access from the database included weather beliefs, home remedies, and recipes. Our visual images were limited by the scanty storage of these early personal computers, so the computer screens showed a diagram of a tobacco plant, a drawing of a johnboat, images of quilt patterns, and other one-page representations. The results from the computerized component of the exhibit were mixed. On the one hand, viewers did interact with the computer, but they quickly lost interest; the relatively crude black-and-white images were not nearly as attractive as the exhibit's color photographs reproduced from 35mm slides. Emphasis on using the computer for images was often at the expense of content, as there was little opportunity to integrate interpretive text into the scanned images at this time. The databases had the potential to be more successful, but the grand plan of indexing collectanea to counties suffered because of limited data as well as the Byzantine system that was required to create this program. Furthermore, our plan to place the computers and their CPU into wooden cabinets failed within the first day of exhibit. The equipment overheated, and woodworkers had to redo the cabinets to create a ventilation system by cutting out large sections of the wood and installing small fans. Maintaining this computer technology became so labor intensive that eventually the traveling-exhibit version of the project became available without the support of the computers, and the older model of

combining text and photographs on exhibit panels seemed to succeed just as well without access to scanned images and the database.

This somewhat nostalgic review of my first use of computers in public programming provides some historical context for employing them there. The Kentucky Folk Project was one of the first times computers were used in the presentation—rather than the researching—of folklore within the public sector. This brief account also provides specific examples of ways in which public folklore often differs from academic research. Our work was supported through a public institution, funded by a grant, designed for public viewing rather than academic review, and written for a nonacademic audience (Baron and Spitzer 2007, viii). The focus was less on advancing scholarship on folklore and more on using the concepts and methods of folklorists to address the interests and needs of the general public (Hufford 1994, 5). Our staff had to follow the basic principles of keeping exhibit labels and computer texts short and simple. Jargon and footnotes were an anathema. This particular experience with computers also showcases some of the central problems in using them in public folklore. Even with the subsequent great advances in hardware and software and the myriad resources of the Internet, public folklorists still face the same problems that we encountered. Using computers creates challenges in adapting fieldwork data to computer-friendly formats. Reshaping the material of folklore into graphic forms appropriate for computer displays can be difficult. There often is a surprising scarcity of appropriate field data that can be used in computer technology. It is also challenging to use this technology in an innovative way that doesn't duplicate what can be presented in non-computerized formats. Moreover, it is tempting to simply computerize folklore mainly for the sake of computerizing folklore, rather than recognizing that some aspects of folklife can be understood much more vividly, vibrantly, and viscerally outside of cyberspace. Lastly, the equipment tends to break down. Despite the drawbacks, public folklorists and folklorists coordinating applied folklore projects within academic institutions are creatively using the Web to build innovative and engaging presentations to teach the public about folklore outside of college and university classrooms.

Marshal McLuhan's shopworn mantra, "the medium is the message" (1964, 23), is sometimes juxtaposed with the adage that content is king in cyberspace. The widespread adoption of new media has changed the scale of human interaction, and the Internet itself—as a new medium—is a novel way of conveying information about social interaction and a shifting sense of what it means to be part of an audience for

public-folklore programming. On the other hand, folklore—as content for this innovative media—also has important implications for thinking about ways in which public folklorists use the Internet. Collections were simply waiting to be digitized, and widespread preservation efforts to convert archives and other collections into this format easily lend themselves to online applications. In this respect, using the Internet blends together the importance of the medium with the message as it addresses the dual goals of preservation and dissemination.

Moreover, looking at public folklorists' use of computer technology from both poles can provide additional useful perspectives that are well worth further consideration. One major interest is in ways folklorists' use of various computerized media shape the users' interactions both with the material of folklore and with a community of users. The sense of "public" in public folklore is very different in cyberspace. An audience of one person who is staring at a computer screen to view the work of public folklorists is in sharp contrast to an audience of hundreds, thousands, even millions, who attend concerts and folk festivals. It would be well worth researching how this different sense of audience is related to major themes in folklore, such as the place of public presentations within community life, the role of folklore in cultural conservation, and the potential use of folklore as cultural intervention (Hufford 1994, 3–4; Kurin 1997; Baron and Spitzer 2007, viii; Whisnant 1983, 13–14). In contrast to the metafolkloric issues that pertain to the use of media in general, what of the relationships between folklore as content and the use of computers to present information about our discipline? It is easy to access the Internet to discover a wealth of data and commentary about specific folk traditions, and folklore has an intrinsic appeal to many computer users. The content of folklore is evident in some of the most popular activities in cyberspace, from the presence of motifs, tale types, and folkloric themes in fantasy games to the websites of folklore enthusiasts who may specialize in highly esoteric forms of folk music, traditional art, vernacular architecture, or virtually any other genre.

A specific argument to weigh out one side or the other in this dichotomy, however, seems less relevant than looking at the ways public folklorists are using the Internet. Public folklorists are culture brokers (Kurin 1997, 13). They must mediate an understanding about folklore that engages both the intellectual history of folklore studies as a discipline and the needs of various interested publics. To comprehend how public folklorists use the computer to broker folk culture, it could be useful to explore these implications further by examining the tension between the importance of the medium versus the place of content in the use of

computer technology. But, taking a different stance, leaping outside of this dichotomy provides a more useful way of understanding how folklorists are using cyberspace. Looking at specific genres and modes of representation gives a clearer idea of some ways in which folklorists are using computer technology to teach the public about folklore.

Sharon Sherman (1998) provides a useful entry point for looking at the modes of public presentations of folklore in cyberspace. Adapting ideas from film theorist Bill Nichols, Sherman analyzes folklorists' documentary films and videos and places them into five characteristic modes of presentation. These modes consist of the following ways to structure websites: expository, observational, interactive, reflexive, and performative. This chapter will later explore in greater detail specific websites examined in relation to these modes, but it is important to begin with basic definitions and the distinctions between them. In the *expository mode*, the website's builder typically poses a problem and then develops the content to establish conclusions about the initial situation. In the *observational mode*, the designers provide less mediation and typically use web cameras and synchronized sound to show events either unfolding in real time or video recordings of previous events. The *interactive mode* is especially well suited to the Internet. In this form of presentation, the website focuses on ways in which the user interacts with the content and forms of presentation. In contrast to an interactive documentary film, which highlights the director's choices, an interactive website places its emphasis on ways that computer users make choices as they navigate a specific site. The *reflexive mode* takes a different approach to this type of interaction. Whereas the previous mode stresses the users' interactions within the website, the reflexive mode emphasizes various problems involved in the presentation of its content. Rather than building a Brechtian fourth wall in cyberspace, reflexive website designers bring their own presence into the form and content of the presentation. The website builder is unmasked, and his or her choices and sense of subjectivity are included in the presentation of the material placed into cyberspace. Content frequently forms the emphasis of such modes as the expository and the interactive. In contrast, the fifth representational form, the *performative mode*, opens enormous resources for creatively using new technologies. In this style, the website foregrounds the artistic, poetic, and rhetorical aspects of what is presented, thereby forcing viewers to fill in the material itself. The focus is less on didactic content and more on aesthetic appeal. Finely crafted performative websites unite techniques from documentary filmmaking with principles of website design to create a highly mediated feel for the experience of a folkloric

performance. Sherman's typology undoubtedly can be extended into additional modes of presentation, and most websites embody elements of each of the five modes in their own presentations. There are, however, numerous websites designed, created, and maintained by public folklorists that predominantly use one of these particular styles in their presentation. The subject is so vast that doing full justice to all of the work of public folklorists is beyond the scope of this chapter. Rather, it will explore exemplary sites that typify each mode of representation.

By necessity, much of work in public folklore involves exposition. Exposition is part of all websites, although the mode is often presented implicitly as webmasters guide viewers through their sites by blending contextual information together with content. For public-folklore sites, the explicit problem often is simply and explicitly stated as providing those who view the website with an understanding of the nature of folklore and folklife studies. Most public folklorists use the definition of *folklore*, formulated largely by Archie Green in Public Law (P.L.) 105-275, to explain that folklife is "the traditional expressive, shared culture of various groups in the United States: familial, ethnic, occupational, religious, and regional" (Bartis 2002, 1). P.L. 105-275 lists specific forms of folk culture to provide examples of genres and activities that encompass the nature and scope of folklife studies, and these, in turn, allow public folklorists to dramatically use the resources of computer technology to show denizens of the Internet how the folklorists identify and present various forms of traditional expressive culture. They offer the results of their fieldwork and public presentations of folklore through visual images, sound bytes, and written text in ways that broker a vivid perception of folklore to an audience whose understanding of it ranges widely—from those having virtually no information to experts in the field. Public folklorists recognize that a major part of their exposition is to resolve problems with misconceptions about folklore, and they frequently expand on the narrow popular conceptions of folklore by integrating a diverse array of folk traditions and folk groups within their websites. In this respect, the challenges created by a limited public understanding of folklore become opportunities for using the Internet to teach about folklore in a direct and meaningful manner.

One of the most successful sites for accomplishing this type of exposition is the Mississippi Arts Commission's "Crossroads of the Heart." After entering the site through an attractive home page, viewers come to the crossroads, graphically illustrated in a vivid black-and-white photograph at the top of the site. Scrolling down, viewers can read a succinctly written text that introduces the website and explains the essentials of

folklife studies that are supported by Mississippi's public folklore program. Themes relevant to community life and traditional expressive culture are then vibrantly explored in specific subject areas that viewers can access through five thumbnails on the right of the page: music, hand-made objects, maritime traditions, quilting, and narrative. This page also includes links to an excellent teacher's guide for use in the public schools plus a resource guide for additional information on the folklife program, its artists, and its resources.

Each thumbnail's link is well worth a mouse click. They all use a similar template in which genres or forms are linked via additional thumbnails. For example, clicking on the general subject of music, viewers find more expository text that introduces them to Mississippi's folk music traditions as well as four additional thumbnails that direct them to genres that are characteristic of the state's musical traditions: blues, gospel, fiddling, and Sacred Harp singing. Each of these thumbnails, in turn, provides a biographical sketch of a folk musician or musical community, an audio sample, and a link to additional text written by folk music scholars such as David Evans, Kip Lornell, Jay Orr, and David Warren Steel. The blues link provides an excellent introduction to the Mississippi blues of Johnnie Billington, and the fiddling link allows viewers to learn about the old-time fiddle tunes of Charles Smith, including an audio sample of his spirited rendition of "Andy's Tune." This format also shows up in each of the additional subject areas, and the engaging introductions to the wide array of Mississippi folklife reach not only residents of the state but also aficionados of southern folklife who live outside of the region.

"Crossroads of the Heart" uses the expository mode to introduce viewers to Mississippi folklore with the implicit purpose of encouraging additional fieldwork and programming on the state's folk culture. Other sites employing the expository mode take different approaches. One common method is to allow viewers to access an archival collection of preexisting fieldwork. Some of the most extensive and interesting websites to take this approach are the American Folklife Center's "American Memory" projects. One valuable collection, one of the first to be placed online, is the Center's "Florida Folklife from the WPA Collections: 1937-1942." This collection is now housed within the Library of Congress and Florida's State Archives, and it contains irreplaceable field recordings by researchers including Stetson Kennedy (the project's director), Herbert Halpert, Alan Lomax, and Zora Neale Hurston. This site's exposition involves a less-direct explanation of key terms in folklife studies and more emphasis on ways to locate the important recordings and field

documentation that are now available in digitized form through this site. The indexing and cross-indexing is impressively arranged to provide users with useful search capabilities, including the ability to browse lists of performers, audio titles, manuscript titles, and geographic locations in Florida where the fieldwork was completed. Savvy users can also employ the search engines to discover the recordings of specific fieldworkers. The chance to hear Zora Neale Hurston actually perform some of the work songs, blues tunes, and rhyming-game songs that she documented is an especially vibrant and popular feature of this website. This project is typical of other websites that predominantly make use of the expository mode in that it provides various links, including web pages for finding additional information about the collection and the Federal Writers' Project in Florida. Stetson Kennedy's essay, "A Florida Treasure Hunt," is an excellent feature on this site, as it provides his fascinating reflections on the efforts of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in Florida. The site also includes an extensive bibliography and information on using the collection for primary-source research.

The second major mode of public folklore programming in cyberspace is *observational*; websites that use this approach consist mainly of live webcasting of public folklore events, including performances at concerts, folklife festivals, and conferences. In contrast to the expository mode, the observational mode involves less mediation by the web designer, as it typically uses web cameras and digital sound-recording technology to position the site's viewer as another member of the audience. Folklorists who work within this mode tend to use one-camera shoots, with little editing and fairly limited production effects. The style, in fact, is influenced by cinema vérité. As with the vérité styles, producers in this mode use a direct form of production to depict events as they unfold, ideally with little intrusion from the camera operator and with no attempt to restructure the sequence of events within the performance (Sherman 1998, 21). As do many documentary film directors influenced by cinema vérité, the creators of webcasts in the observational style often attempt to position their cameras directly within the audience, thereby blurring the boundary between the producer of the media event and those who are witnessing the performance. The overall feel for these websites is an increased sense of realism, fostering the idea that this mode of presentation is a more objective representation of an actual event, rather than a presentation that is sophisticatedly brokered through the site's producers. It is the folkloric equivalent of Jennicam, Jennifer Ringley's "reality show" in which she broadcast her life over the Internet in real time (Ringley 1998, 76).

Numerous public- and private-sector folklore organizations use the observational mode of presentation to webcast their events. The largest one recorded using this mode of presentation is the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. Produced by the Smithsonian's Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, this event regularly attracts audiences of over one million to a two-week event on the National Mall that is described as a "living museum without walls" (Kurin 1997, 125). Well over 16,000 individuals have participated as demonstrating artists, musical performers, storytellers, raconteurs, and other carriers of tradition. The festival is organized into three or four major program areas. Each one often consists of a presentation of the folklife and cultural heritage of a specific region or state in America, or the folklife of a nation or transnational ethnic group. Music and dance stages, craft demonstration areas, a performance space for demonstrations of foodways, and other showcases are designed to offer a range of folk cultures, and webcasts of the event are often transmitted from these specific areas. Thus viewers around the world can observe the festival's opening ceremony, musical performances, demonstrations of folk culture, and audience interactions as they unfold in real time. Most of these webcasts are displayed only once, but the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage and other sponsoring organizations sometimes include edited versions of these events on their websites. For example, the website devoted to the Smithsonian's 2002 festival program, "The Silk Road: Connecting Cultures, Creating Trust," includes excerpts from various presentations.

With the growing use of Internet technology, additional festivals and concerts are presented in real time on the Internet. These events frequently provide an entry point for Internet users to access other presentations from additional public folklore research projects. The Western Folklife Center provides exemplary presentations of its fieldwork and programming, including its annual National Cowboy Poetry Gathering in Elko, Nevada. The Center creates webcasts of many of its events, but it also uses podcasts from previous events, thereby managing an online archival collection of cowboy poetry gatherings. Live webcasts as well as previously recorded podcasts include keynote addresses, poetry readings, interviews, and other features that employ the observational mode. These productions typically involve minimal editing and little or no voiceover, thereby allowing viewers a relatively less-mediated experience, witnessing the activity as if they were sitting in the audience. Not only do these types of presentations compress space by creating a performance area that connects visitors who are seated thousands of miles away with the actual audience, but these presentations

also compress time. Recordings from events held during the Cowboy Poetry Gathering's quarter-century history are now available online, thereby bringing together early readings with contemporary activities. Combining current technology with previous analog recordings through ongoing cybercasts brings an aural and visual presence to the Western Folklife Center's fieldwork. This fieldwork becomes a living archive, with these resources available to specialized scholars as well as the public in ways that blur boundaries between academicians and laypeople.

The *interactive mode* often uses principles from the expository and observational modes, but its focus is on increasing the interaction between the website's user and the material's format. All Internet sites are interactive; computer users must make choices as they navigate the Web, and they must become actively engaged with a site's content and format to effectively use this technology. The interactive mode, however, foregrounds the choices that users make, and the users themselves create much of the educational experience offered through the site. The elements of interaction in cyberspace become clearer when this mode is contrasted with Sharon Sherman's (1998, 261–62) discussion of it in documentary films and videos. In interactive film, it is the filmmaker who negotiates the interaction. By positioning themselves into the scene, filmmakers using this mode to structure significant aspects of their production around the events precipitated by the filmmakers' involvement. Michael Moore is perhaps the most well-known practitioner of this style, but it also is evident in folklore documentaries produced by Barbara Kopple, Patricia Turner, and Les Blank when they call attention to new insights gleaned from their actual participation alongside the subjects who are featured in their production. On websites this mode may employ a great deal of interaction from the web designer, but interaction in cyberspace is focused primarily on the user. Because site visitors can interact to a far greater degree than viewers of documentaries, web designers have created new presentation formats that emphasize how viewers participate in the navigation and even creation of the website.

One of the oldest and most successful websites that focuses heavily on folklore and highlights interaction is Karen Ellis's "Educational CyberPlayGround." This massive, award-winning site is oriented to pre-kindergarten through high school teachers, but it also is accessed by college professors, scholars, and anyone with an interest in folkloric content on the Internet. The site contains well over 1,500 pages, and it has been accessed by two million visitors each year. Fortunately, ten quick links are available for easy navigation: music education, literacy, school directory, technology, transdisciplinary, teachers, linguistics, Internet,

arts, and songs NCFR (National Children's Folksong Repository). These links take visitors to a wealth of material in the CyberPlayGround and provide connections to over 10,000 interdisciplinary links. Viewers can find directories, indexes, webcasts, and a myriad of resources for educational use.

While the CyberPlayGround uses the modes previously discussed, its NCFR is an excellent example of the interactive mode. Viewers using this resource are asked to first view a short video that explains the project. Images with a voiceover provide an overview of the importance of musical creativity within cultures; video vignettes of Grammy Award-winner Allan Slutsky and in-school video footage provide the rationale for the website. Essentially, the site is designed to identify, document, preserve, and interpret the traditional musical expressions of children. The NCFR involves teachers, students, parents, guardians, and other interested participants in the collection process, as they are encouraged to submit song texts and performances that they have documented. The process of collection often blurs the line between field-worker and performer, since new material can be submitted via e-mail messages, video footage, links to sites like YouTube, and even over the telephone. These collected materials are available through the website, and project's staff members continually develop new means of using children's folksongs as educational resources. The staff members pay special attention to ways in which their collection and documentation project can foster links between students, schools, and communities, and CyberPlayGround actively encourages the creation of vital online communities. In this respect, the interactive components of this site are much less controlled than those constructed by the designers who created the cultural interpretation in websites employing the expository mode. Because users are given greater opportunities to contribute to the site, the focus of CyberPlayGround is centered as much on the process of "doing folklore" as it is on the presentation and interpretation of traditional expressive culture.

As demonstrated in CyberPlayGround, the interactive mode is especially well suited to folklife-in-education programs. Another site that features a range of modes yet emphasizes interaction is the Wisconsin Arts Board's "Wisconsin Folks," which won the Dorothy Howard Folklife-in-Education Award. This website opens with a home page that welcomes visitors with a variety of attractive photo images and minimal text. Upon clicking past this introduction, visitors are given choices for navigating the site. They may search for information about folk artists and musicians through various options, including looking

for artists from specific ethnic groups or locations in Wisconsin, or those employing diverse artistic forms and genres or various themes in their artwork. For example, a user may wish to identify artists and musicians from a particular area in southwestern Wisconsin listed as "CESA 4." This link provides the user with the names of individuals and groups from within this region who are featured on the website. Clicking on "Nodji Van Wychen," for example, takes the viewer to a series of pages about cranberry farming in the rural area near Warrens, Wisconsin. The introductory page contextualizes the hundred-year-old family tradition within Van Wychen's community by giving an overview of the essential aspects of her family's agricultural tradition. Hotlinks show digital photographs of cranberry-growing equipment, reflective questions are illustrated with relevant visual designs, and additional pages feature audio clips of interviews. After viewers work through the first few pages, they find two button links under the heading "Activities." The first one is entitled "What do you know?" and consists of an interactive quiz about the site's content. The second button is labeled "Work the Seasons" and takes viewers to another interactive locale. Viewers are invited to play a computer game in which they match the activities involved in growing cranberries with the specific season in which the work is completed. Cartoon-like graphics allow the user to spray the plants with water to protect the buds from freezing, flood the bogs to begin harvesting the berries, and learn about other activities associated with the occupational folklife of cranberry production. The interactive capabilities of this site also include opportunities for educators to move beyond the virtual world and directly interact with Van Wychen by contracting with her to come into their classrooms to speak directly with students. Scores of other tradition-bearers within the Wisconsin Folks website are also featured in similar ways, and viewers can hear audio samples of musical and storytelling performances, view virtual exhibits of folk arts, discover recipes and learn about foodways traditions, explore weather beliefs, and encounter a wealth of information about the state's traditional expressive culture.

Highly interactive modes often blend into the fourth major approach for presenting folklore on the Internet: the *reflexive mode*. Sherman explains that a reflexive documentary pushes the idea of interactive film into a further foray into the subjective qualities of cultural representation (1998, 262). In a reflexive documentary, the director calls attention to his or her own presence as a filmmaker or videographer and uses this unmasking to demonstrate how choices in using various production techniques shape the content of the cultural representation. Reflexive

documentaries created by folklorists are made available through Tom Davenport's "Folkstreams." His own 2008 production, "Bodhidharma's Shoe," is a fine example of a reflexive ethnographic documentary, taking viewers through his own involvement in a Zen Buddhist "sesshin," a mediation retreat at a center in New Mexico. Typical techniques used in reflexive documentaries include first-person narration, inclusion of the filmmaker in the frame, sparse and simple editing, long-takes, relatively inexpensive cameras and audio-recording devices, and very little use of slick graphics in the editing. A unifying tenet in this mode of documentation is that the stylistic influences of cinema verité amplify a sense of reality in the piece, breaking Brecht's "fourth wall" to show that the "realism" of more objective modes of documentation is merely a style of production.

Designers of public folklore sites have adapted some of these ideas about reflexivity. Some use the first-person to navigate viewers through their websites, and most sites include links that allow users to interact directly with them, often through e-mail and sometimes by building links to various other sites. Reflexivity can be especially useful in interactive websites that encourage users to document and interpret their own folklore. One of the most successful sites to use the reflexive mode is Gail Matthews-DeNatale's "Keepsakes and Dreams." Matthews-DeNatale initiated this online writing forum as an educational resource for teaching language arts classes within the Urban Alternative, an educational project sponsored by George Mason University's Institute for Educational Transformation.

Student participants were asked to write about a range of topic relevant to their own life experiences by using any of the following questions to turn their memories into stories:

1. What keepsakes do you value?
2. What aspects of your cultural heritage do you hold dear?
3. What are your dreams for the future?
4. In what ways are your cultural keepsakes related to your dreams?

Responding to these questions, twenty participants collaboratively published fine pieces of writing that used their families' folklife as a resource for their own pieces. The writing in the Keepsakes and Dreams project reflects the multiethnic and international diversity of the Urban Alternative program. In the site, Matthews-DeNatale states that these accounts and stories were composed to show how new immigrants

create cultural continuities in their new homes while also embracing change. She notes that immigrants who were writing about their dreams for the future might discover ways to realize their visions through this process. She also notes that the project was planned with a wider audience in mind. The website was built to blend cultural documentation with community education to foster intercultural dialogue and a richer understanding of local communities.

Cultural diversity is clearly evident as a positive resource within this site. Students were originally from Argentina, Bolivia, Cambodia, Guatemala, Hungary, Indonesia, Korea, Mexico, Pakistan, Panama, Peru, and Somalia. Each writer was given a web page on which to post his or her essays and reflections. Expressions of family folklore—especially in the form of mementos, heirlooms, poetry, and stories—are often central to the students' writing. Most of the participants included photographs of themselves, and many added other images that they had preserved from their home country. The photographs themselves often became central to the writer's reflections. Sokha Mob, a Cambodian student, writes about a keepsake that is depicted in a photograph on her web page:

My necklace is the most valuable thing that I own because it represents my family and my heritage. [It] is a Buddha sculpture pendant that my mother gave to me on my wedding day. This is my most cherished and valued gift.

After my grandmother died, my mother saved one of my grandmother's teeth for seven years. We believe that it is good to keep the teeth of our ancestors. My mother wanted to give the tooth to me, but first she took it to a craftsman in our town of Tani. The artist's name was Mr. Hang, and he was very old.

Mr. Hang was a very knowledgeable and gifted ivory carver. There were not any people in our area who knew how to carve things as well as Mr. Hang. My mother thought that if he knew how to carve tusks, he would also be able to make a beautiful carving out of my grandmother's tooth. She asked Mr. Hang to make a Buddha pendant out of the tooth. Even though this was an unusual request, he said that he would do it.

My mother didn't tell me about her surprise, she kept it a secret until my wedding day. On that important day, she gave me my necklace, and she also gave a second pendant to my husband. My husband's necklace had a pendant that was made out of my grandfather's tooth. But my special necklace was different from my husband's necklace, because only mine was carved into the shape of the Buddha. She told me that my necklace was special because she loved

me very much. She said that she loved her parents and she would like us to keep them with us. She thought that if we wore our necklaces my ancestors would always live with us. It means so much to me to know that every time we go to the temple to pray to God, we also have our grandparents with us.

I love my necklace very much. I wear it all the time because whenever I miss my mother and my country, I look at my pendant and it makes me feel better.

In these types of writing projects, the students' willingness to share family histories and reveal personal memories and aspirations demands important degrees of openness from the teacher. Matthews-DeNatale includes her own reflections on the project within this website, and the importance of incorporating reflexivity within the project becomes clearer. She explains that the project involves collaborative learning, and she suggests that this type of collaboration demands much more of her own personal involvement in what became a learning community—especially when compared to what typically is required of a teacher within more conventional forms of classroom instruction. In sum, as a form of collaborative education, "Keepsakes and Dreams" includes a strong sense of Matthews-DeNatale's own subjective engagement with her students' stories, because her role is defined as a co-creator of the site, rather than simply as a teacher who is posting her students' work on the Web. Those who read her introduction to the website and her own journal will discover ways in which Matthews-DeNatale's self-disclosure contributed to the project's development.

The final mode of presentation is the *performative* mode. Sherman (1998, 263) characterizes a folkloric documentary completed in the performative mode as one that emphasizes the poetic, expressive, and rhetorical aspects of the production over the more didactic elements of historical and cultural contexts. A performative piece stresses the multivocality of symbolic expression and forces viewers to create the major messages that are evoked in the juxtaposition of imagery, sound, and text. A performative piece is artsy. Filmmakers and video producers using this mode often avoid voiceover and other, more pedantic technical resources; they often rely heavily on editing, and particularly on cinematic montage, to create a documentary that looks more like a performance piece than a scholarly representation. Sherman notes that there are relatively few folkloric documentaries that employ this method, but she suggests that Roberta Cantow's 1981 documentary "Clotheslines" and Tony Silver and Henry Chalfant's 1983 film "Style Wars" represent this mode of media production (1998, 264). Cantow's documentary, for

example, uses the juxtaposition of visual images associated with wash-day to evoke systems of associations about the values and meanings that emerge in gendered domestic culture. Silver and Chalfant's film pairs colorful images of graffiti-adorned subway cars with rap music to allow viewers to experience a sense of place, thereby contextualizing the interview content with seen and unseen graffiti taggers and painters of "pieces."

Folklife is the subject of video-like performative websites. Curiously, most of these productions are not created by professional folklorists. One of the best places to find these performative pieces is YouTube. The entries tend to be ephemeral, but it is well worth watching YouTube with an eye for folkloric content as seen through the lens of performative modes of production. A user named "Deathmaster66," for example, has a number of entries that are creative, interesting, and sometimes a bit mystifying. This self-identified 106-year-old "arsonist" has a minute-long piece entitled "He Rambled—Charlie Poole" that juxtaposes an eighty-year-old recording of Poole's old-time string band tune "He Rambled" with an early Popeye cartoon. The cartoon features a fight, a moment of conflict resolution, and, to complete the episode, Popeye and Olive Oyl dancing as a couple. The cryptic references, humor, and occasional brilliance of these types of YouTube videos certainly add something to the dialogue on public folklore, but they are not the types of media productions that are created by public-sector folklorists—at least not while they are on company time. Public folklorists who have been trained through academic folklore programs, and are employed with state or federal agencies, have crafted few performative videos and even fewer websites that follow this mode of production. The Web provides creative individuals with great opportunities for using new technologies in effective and artistically engaging ways, but artsy, irreverent, and perhaps even edgy uses of the Internet are not generally encouraged within governmental agencies. Still, there are a number of sites that utilize computer technology in ways that showcase the performative mode of expression.

One of the most interesting is the University of Central Florida's "Folkvine." Produced by the UCF's Cultural Heritage Alliance, much of the work is a collaboration between professors, students, and public folklorists from the Sunshine State. The site opens with a pastel image of a rural Florida road. A road sign reads "JCT 41—Explorin' Florida." The next image of another road, rendered in the same style, features the sign "Without a Guide?" By the time the next image rolls up, the viewers understand the Burma-Shave-sign mode by seeing another image

of a road with the sign "To See Great Art," which then dissolves into a fourth image of a roadside produce stand with the signpost "Just Come Inside." These visuals are all accompanied by a soundtrack that features the ambient sound of traffic noise mingled with seagulls screeching and other shorebirds calling, thereby evoking audio impressions of Florida's soundscape. Upon arriving at the exterior of the roadside produce stand, site visitors are then taken to a web page that invites them to come inside from the front porch. Viewers are then given options to click on various elements of the site, where they will discover that Folkvine is a showcase for Florida folk artists. The site presents information on folk art traditions from across the state, as well as "tour guides" exploring humanities concepts related to different aspects of these traditions. For example, viewers can mouse over and spin an image that represents a display stand for selling souvenir postcards, and then click on a specific card. The different postcards allow viewers to learn about artists such as the Jewish Ketubah (wedding contract) maker Eileen Brautman and "Diamond" Jim Parker's miniature model circus carvings. The theme of visiting with artists through the virtual world of a storefront is a creative entry point for the educational content. The site's designers employ the capabilities of the Web to use audio clips, images, text, games, and a variety of other presentations that move beyond the interactive mode into the performative. The Cultural Heritage Alliance is constantly expanding the site, and a major focus of its work is in continuing to explore the performative mode. Computerized images of folktales collected in Florida are now being made available on the site, and Folkvine is providing links to numerous other sites that feature sophisticated uses of technology.

These examples of websites that represent the work of public folklorists are intended to introduce readers to ways in which folklorists use the Internet to present folklore to the public. Virtually every public-folklore program has a website, and spatial constraints limit the number of sites that can be discussed in this chapter. Furthermore, the five modes of presentation that unify the overall design of these sites are not mutually exclusive. "Folkvine" is *performative*, *interactive*, *reflexive*, *observational*, and *expository* in various degrees, just as "Crossroads of the Heart" also includes elements of all five modes. Nor are website designs limited to these five modes of presentation, as the Internet can provide new opportunities for creating additional forms of representation. "Folkvine" and "Wisconsin Folks," for example, utilize what may be a sixth mode of presentation that is characteristic of computerized media: the *gaming* mode. In employing gaming as part of these sites' pedagogy,

web designers are using familiar ways of interacting within cyberspace to further the goals of public folklore programming. Some of the games are perhaps of the “old-school” video-game style, but more folklorists are also looking at virtual reality games, such as Second Life, to further develop modes of cultural representation in cyberspace. Along with the gaming mode, some folklorists are using the *virtual exhibit* mode to present their work to the public. This seventh mode is evident in websites that accompany stationary exhibits. The Historical Museum of South Florida, for example, regularly features online exhibitions of folk culture. These have included presentations based on the traveling exhibit “Florida Folklife: Traditional Art in Contemporary Communities” and “At the Crossroads: Afro-Cuban Orisha Arts in Miami.” These virtual displays are often beautifully presented and provide online visitors with opportunities to preview what they may see when they visit the museum or review what they have witnessed during a previous visit to the exhibit in the world of bricks and mortar. Adding the *gaming* mode and the *virtual exhibit* mode to the five other modes is but a starting point for identifying additional means of presenting folklore to the public in cyberspace.

Reflecting on the proliferation of public folklore in cyberspace over the past twenty years, numerous changes become clear, especially when contrasted with the use of the now-defunct Wang Corporation computers in the Kentucky Center for the Arts’ “Patterns between the Rivers” exhibit. The computerized component of the Center’s production was a novelty; now a digitized component is almost always expected in most major exhibits. In the Center’s displays, the computer system was an add-on that came with the photographic and text panels; it was not linked to a worldwide network. Contemporary online exhibits currently connect thousands, even millions, of users. Computers’ early search capabilities were simple and required lengthy waits for information to appear on a screen. Viewers’ tolerance for these types of long waits would now be strained, as they are conditioned to faster CPUs and sophisticated search engines. But the biggest difference between then and now is related to McLuhan’s emphasis on social changes created by the adoption of new media.

Whereas the early uses of computers in public folklore were designed to supplement real-world exhibits, many folklorists currently use computer technology as a primary resource for public programming. It is unlikely that all—or even most—public programming will be situated in cyberspace. Nevertheless, the use of computers has changed public folklorists’ ideas about what constitutes “the public.” Webcasts

can attract larger audiences than concerts. Fieldwork data can easily be placed online, thereby creating a huge number of potential viewers, far greater than either folklorists or folk artists had ever anticipated. With the increased use of interactive and gaming modalities, users can simulate the folklore collection process, thereby emphasizing interaction in the virtual world, although possibly at the expense of direct interactions with those who carry forth folk traditions outside of cyberspace. This type of reliance on the virtual world and its simulations of actual processes, products, and people carries with it vast possibilities for increasing public understanding of the work of folklorists, just as it carries numerous problematic issues. As Burt Feintuch (1988) points out, part of the appeal of public folklore programming is its potential to encourage people within a community to interact directly with each other by witnessing displays of folk culture. Whether or not interactions in cyberspace carry the same sense of presence that is linked with fostering healthy and engaging conversations about culture conservation remains to be seen, as does whether its effects will be felt not only in real communities but also in cyberspace.