

• *Notes* •

**Photoshop Folklore and the “Tourist Guy”:
Thoughts on the Diamond Format and the
Possibilities of Mixed-Media Presentations**

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The above link is to a screencast version of a short PowerPoint slideshow originally presented at the 2010 annual meeting of the American Folklore Society in Nashville, Tennessee. After the live presentation, I converted the slides with voiceover into a screencast uploadable to YouTube. A brief explanation about form and content follows below.

Form

While preparing for the 2010 AFS annual meeting in Nashville, Tennessee, my colleague [Jason Baird Jackson](#) and I were eager to experiment with new formats for academic presentations. We explored a number of alternative formats, many of which were short and visually-oriented; eventually we developed a seven-minute template that would include twenty-one slides advanced automatically every twenty seconds. In theory, these formal constraints (7 minutes, 21 slides, 20 seconds each) operate like the parameters of traditional poetic genres, inspiring the performer to work creatively and, in this case, select material that can be effectively presented visually.

Such limits, of course, are not appropriate for every academic presentation, but are useful, for example, to provide an overview of a topic, focus intently on one idea, present numerous examples of a single concept, or introduce work in progress. In addition to photos and pictures, images might include graphs, charts, diagrams, or words; whatever the case, they illustrate or provide counterpoint to the speaker's oral presentation. Additionally, the emphasis on the visual also makes ideas more accessible for presenters and audience members not necessarily fluent in the language of presentation. Finally, seven-minutes is short enough so that audience members might be willing to sit through a presentation on a topic not immediately relevant to their own interests.

For the 2010 AFS meeting, Jason and I worked with four other scholars to put together one panel of these short-form presentations.¹ Though some topics proved

more amenable to the format than others, all of us found the construction of the slideshow to be surprisingly challenging and extremely productive for exploring particular concerns. Attendees also seemed to enjoy the format and we received many helpful comments and suggestions. At AFS 2011, this short format was instituted as the “Diamond Presentation” and “Diamond Panel,” the “Diamond” designation suggesting the sharp, concise, and multi-faceted potential of such talks.²

Content

This visual presentation allowed me to explore some material I had contemplated for several years. As I explain in the presentation itself, I have been presenting “Photoshop folklore,” and particularly the “Tourist Guy” images, in my *Introduction to Folklore* class at Indiana University every semester. Initially I chose this material simply to remind my students that technology did not destroy expressive culture, but could become intrinsic to its production, altering forms of expression in exciting, creative and often unpredictable ways. In stringing together images for my lecture, I realized that in addition to the production of such images, there was also another form of creativity at work here—the kind that comes from consumption, from *selecting* images (motifs, versions, variants) and linking them together in an effective, and perhaps affective, narrative. That is, even though I had not created any of these images myself, I was performing them in a particular way, speaking through them about something that was meaningful to me, and I hoped, to my students.

I wanted to share these thoughts, and these images, with colleagues beyond my introductory classroom, but it seemed to me that an academic article was not the appropriate format. I felt I did have something to say, a thesis of sorts, but not one that required twenty or thirty pages of written text. Moreover, such an article would be all but meaningless without an adequate number of the images themselves. The short-form presentation—the Diamond format—seemed ideal. Not only could I share these images and ideas, but by presenting them visually and orally, I could also, hopefully, replicate the affective experience I was exploring.

Mixed Media

After my AFS presentation, several people asked if I planned to *do anything* with this material. At first I declined; to my mind, the presentation itself was the end product. Did it have to be a step in a process to creating something “bigger” or “more academic” or “more permanent” such as a publishable article? To me, the Diamond format was big enough for the material, and the ephemeral nature of the presentation itself appropriately reflected the transient sense of immersion one gets when glancing through images on the Internet. On the other hand, though, I wanted to share my work with as many people as possible—and a presentation at AFS, however well attended, is necessarily limited. The screencast, therefore, is an attempt at a solution. Whether the product is successful or not, to date over 1,500 people have actually watched (or at least clicked on) the YouTube version—a lot more, of course, than were present at the original presentation or, for that matter, might access an article on the subject in an academic journal. The inclusion of this

text here, with the link to the screencast, then works as a compromise between the ephemerality of a one-off conference presentation and the textual (or digital) permanence of an academic article. I hope that this mixed-media format can itself be a form of academic discourse, an intertextual conversation reflecting the dynamic nature of the folkloric material under discussion.³

Perhaps presenting the project here will inspire different or more innovative presentation formats, or fresh folkloric ways to study the Internet and other forms of technology. Most importantly, however, I hope that the surprising emotional impact these Photoshopped pictures had on me will somehow be conveyed. Ten years after the devastating events that originally inspired them, our interpretation of these images may have changed, but their poignancy is undiminished.

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Notes

¹ The other participants were John Laudun, Janice E. Frisch, Jodine Perkins, and Suzanne Godby Ingalsbe.

² The “Diamond” name was suggested by Michael Robert Evans.

³ One drawback of this format is the inability to reference previous studies or credit influences. I would like to make acknowledgements here. I am grateful most of all to Jason Baird Jackson for organizing the panel and for later assisting with the conversion and uploading of the screencast version of my talk. I also thank the other participants in our original experimental panel. My thanks also goes to Barbara

Lloyd, Tim Lloyd, Lorraine Cashman and the Folklore Students Association of the Ohio State University for their insightful feedback when I presented this at a lunchtime gathering in Columbus, and also to Trevor J. Blank for suggesting that *New Directions in Folklore* might be an appropriate format for sharing my thoughts with a wider audience. It was while reading an excellent article by Rosemary V. Hathaway (2005) that I first learned of the Tourist Guy. See Russell Frank (2003; 2004; 2011) for examinations of Photoshopping (including the Tourist Guy) as folklore and for important analyses of Internet “newslore” more generally. Other recent scholarship that deals provocatively with these issues includes Csaszi (2003), Ellis (2003), and Howard (2008). In my presentation I directly quote Diane Goldstein (2011) and Stanley Fish (1970); the blog comments I quote in the presentation are from Steve Moss: <http://www.memlo.net/wtchoax/>. Most of the images here, along with hundreds more, are archived at: <http://www.touristofdeath.com/>. Finally, I would also like to thank the hundreds of students of F101 (*Introduction to Folklore*) at Indiana University who provided a captive audience as the current performance gradually took shape.

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