Mash Media Storytelling: Linking Story Not HTML

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Mash Media Storytelling: Linking Story Not HTML

1. Abstract:

This paper will define the role of the mash media storyteller, a discipline born from the changing face of participatory media. These mash media storytellers create character collaboratively, understand Web 2.0 tools, and perform on the stage of the Global Theatre. By combining examples of my own work and those of other mash media storytellers I will seek to inspire a new generation of storytellers to take full creative advantage of the media age we are now living in to collectively tell, share, and participate in the global story.

Table of Contents:

2. Preface:

Mash Media Storytelling: Using appropriated media to tell a story through mass media channels.

In *Sound Unbound: Sampling Digital Music and Culture*, author, conceptual artist, and musician Paul D. Miller addresses, "the remix – how music, art, and literature have blurred the lines between what an artist can do and what a composer can create." In editing *Sound Unbound*, Miller asked "artists to describe their work and compositional strategies." What I will do in the following pages will do for storytelling what Miller has done for music. I will analyze storytelling strategies and explore how participatory media has enabled the remix or mash-up of stories, which has created an evolved form of collaborative storytelling that uses appropriated content to reach a mass audience. I am particularly interested in and continue to build work around the compositional strategies of storytelling in a socially networked world.

3. Introduction:

There are 175,000 blogs created a day (Technorati), YouTube serves well over 100 million videos (Michael Arrington, TechCrunch), and Facebook has over 90 million active users (Facebook). These are the numbers dominating the press discussions of web 2.0. The focus of this thesis will be to highlight the work of a new breed of storytellers who have learned to appropriate this media content to enhance their own storytelling ability in an online environment. These are

storytellers who push the creative envelope to move beyond a linear form of storytelling to create story from the sharing of participatory media. They create story by *mashing* media together to craft a story that is all their own. This emerging breed of storytellers has been hailed as "cut and paste Kings" with their ability to slice and dice to produce a media meal that is served up to the masses (BBC Radio One, 2007). Collage is used to build character and bricolage to fashion drama. This appropriation and remixing to create new meaning has always been in storytelling, but with mash media storytelling the storyteller is no longer governed by words and original content. These storytellers have a collection of shared rich media that can be used to create new stories. Understanding how literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin discusses the use of word helps further make this connection. "The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes one's own only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it with his own intention, his own semantic and expressive intention" (The Dialogic Imagination, Bakhtin). Instead of being wordsmiths these online authors use data, bits, and bytes to weave their tale. With the advent of new media sharing tools mash media storytellers are creating a new language, marked with their own accent, through the appropriation of shared content. These artists understand the technical mechanics of the social media evolution, but they see them as simply tools and canvases to create their work.   The tools are available to everyone; however, most are still just experimenting with their functionality and not their creative potential.

This pattern of experimentation with technology has been repeating itself with the birth of every media evolution. When the Lumière brothers first invented a magical machine that could create moving images its functionality was its initial attraction. Immediately this tool for creating moving images was simply used to shoot a series of photographs that simulated movement. Shots of approaching trains and women removing their clothing seemed at the time a major revolution (Gerald Mast, A Short History of the Movies). It was not until filmmakers like Sergei Eisentein and D.W. Griffiths began honing their craft that filmmaking fully developed as a storytelling device. They created storytelling techniques inherent to the medium such as montage and parallel editing to build narrative and drama (Bordwell, Wallbott). They saw the film medium as an expressive storytelling tool, as opposed to simply the ability to shoot moving images. The same holds true for radio. This invention itself was stunning as a tool to transmit and syndicate voice. Immediately the usefulness of this tool was to broadcast stage plays and syndicate news, but it was not until Orson Wells' seminal broadcast of *War of Worlds* that its storytelling abilities were pushed beyond the original functionality of the medium. Wells combined the tenets of news syndication to broadcast a fictional story of the coming attack of alien invaders. This broadcast stunned the nation (Richard Hand, Terror on the Air!). Generations of radio listeners were narcotized by radio. Wells wanted to shake this audience up and force them to question the validity of what they were being served in mainstream news and media. We are again seeing this desire to experiment with the media more for its ability to relay story, rather then just as a

technology. No longer are consumers allowing themselves to be force-fed their media, they want to be part of it by being producers and now remixers of the media. Copyright lawyer Lawrence Lessig frames our current situation as being in a Read-Write-Remix culture, as opposed to the Read-Only culture of the 20th century (Lawrence Lessig: How Creativity Is Being Strangled by the Law, Lessig). There is much experimenting with the tools and multitude of media being created daily, but there is only a select group of mash media storytellers that have combined a creative sense and understanding of the media to push the boundaries of what the media is capable of.

4. Research Question and Methodology

In order to answer the singular question "how are these contemporary mash media storytellers fully realizing the potential of the social media space as their storytelling medium," I have charted this notion of mash media against my own work. As a lifelong storyteller working across many disciplines I have always concentrated on character building as the backbone of my work. Now working as a mash media artist I have adapted character-building techniques from other artists as well as tested my own theories on the nature of collaborative character building through mash media. I could not build these characters until there was an understanding of the next generation of storytelling tools being created daily to facilitate this mashing of story. Beyond the tools and character-building techniques, an understanding of the ubiquity of distribution had to be addressed.

In order to contextualize this research, I will lay a foundation of what is broadly considered to be social media. From this base I will track examples of my own work and those of other mash media storytellers across four types of social media stories and character-building techniques. By using Machinima I will show how to tell a fictional mash media story using fictional characters built by game developers. With 43 Entertainment's alternate reality game and my work on *Corporate Hipster* I will demonstrate how to tell a fictional social media story using non-fictional characters. My work on *The Real Banff* and Jonathan Harris' work on *We Feel Fine* will demonstrate the techniques employed to tell a non-fictional social media story with non-fictional characters. Lastly, I will use examples from Barack Obama's presidential campaign, life-caster Julia Allison's life, and my own life to show how to tell a personal story of a non-fictional person in a mash-up of fiction and non-fiction to create a personal online identity. With the base of social media tools and character established I will lastly delve into distribution techniques.

5. Social Media Landscape

In 2004 Tim O'Reilly coined the term Web 2.0 to express an evolution that the end-users of the Internet were dictating (O'Reilly). This second evolution of the Internet, referred to as Web 2.0, has lowered the barrier of entry for content creators giving a larger selection of the population access to mass media distribution channels in order to tell their story.   Where Web 1.0 featured brochure style static websites, Web 2.0 is characterized by a richer social

interaction online. Combine this web evolution with the fact that the quality of consumer electronics is going up, while the price stays the same, and we are beginning to see a new generation of content producers adding to the online conversation. As MIT professor Henry Jenkins said in his article, *What Happened Before YouTube*, "we are entering a new kind of digital literacy, where everyone is a publisher and whole populations have the chance to contribute as well as consume." This evolution has opened up new possibilities for user-generated content, which has chipped away at the foundation of the monolithic structure of mass media communication.

The power to craft and distribute stories to entertain, educate or simply as a form of self-expression has been placed in the hands of the masses. They also now have access to syndicate their content through mass media distribution channels. This gives the power to the individual storyteller to pull in many niche audiences, rather than the traditional form of mass media, which relies on pushing content to a mass audience. This can be seen with Chris Anderson's theory of *The Long Tail*, which shows that with unlimited distribution and storage capabilities, even niche content has the ability to generate a mass audience. With the overwhelming wealth of media that is springing forth every second in this socially networked space it is easy to discount it all as pure media noise with no inherent value. If we see this content as fodder to be used in our own stories, media noise starts to look more like paint in the mash media storyteller's palate. Like any artistic pursuit there must be some awareness of

the technical mechanics of operating within that palette.

6. Puppet Strings and Web 2.0 Tools

Much has been made of the tools and mechanics of Web 2.0 applications. Many have made their fortune on building these applications, devices, and portals. Marc Andreessen cut his technology teeth by building the web browser, Netscape. He has since scaled the social network building tool Ning to be worth half a billion dollars (Arrington). When Facebook opened its developer's platform the tide of social networking shifted and with it came a shift towards the valuation of tools over creative potential. Today there are close to half a million developers using this platform, but these tools are simply that, tools (Facebook). These tools are like instruments used by storytellers- paintbrush, software, printing press. The tools of Web 2.0 are like the strings of the puppeteer. They simply animate the character in conjunction with the story. Knowledge of their operation does not necessarily create a creative story in this space.   That being said there has to be some technical expertise in knowing how they operate. However, with user-generated media comes a user-generated aesthetic. This aesthetic is characterized by a lack of technical expertise. This aesthetic, like the aesthetic of Cinema Verité, adds to the authentic production quality that is essential to being seen as part of social media as opposed to repurposed from a mass media production. Like the puppeteer who is not expected to animate his character with precise human mobility, the social media storyteller is not expected to have precise mastery

over their tools. As a mash media storyteller it is important to know these tools,

but more importantly to know how to source open-source resources that have

already been created. Tapping into APIs already built, then adapting them to

serve the story is the reality of the workflow for mash media artists.

This is exactly how mash media artists Amy Hoy and Thomas Fuchs

created *Twistori*. *Twistori* is a mash-up of three different APIs all combined to

tell the Twittered stories of *Love*, *Hate*, *Think*, *Believe*, *Feel*, and *Wish*. In real

time, emotions scroll up the screen of *Twistori.com*, combined with the

sentences in which they are embedded. The textual story aggregates these

popular emotions telling the additive global story of world emotion. For this story

to come together Hoy and Fuchs needed Jonathan Harris and Sepandar Kamvar

to create the blog data visualization *We Feel Fine*, which was the inspiration for

the site. They also needed Twitter to be created as a micro-blogging platform.

Lastly, they needed the API from *Summize*, which is a Twitter specific search

engine. These confluences of source code and creativity serve to create a

whole new story, without Hoy and Fuchs typing any original content themselves.

In contrast, the combination of Maho no I-Rando's software and the

mobile phone device has spawned a whole new generation of mash media

storytellers who create novels of original content known as keitai shousetsu.

These are authors who compose complete novels in text messages that are

instantly uploaded to a homepage where users can comment directly on the

latest post. These authors, predominately young Japanese women, understand

the tools and in most cases prefer the tools of the cell phone keypad to the

computer keyboard, but they also understand their audience and the type of

stories they want to hear. One of the most popular authors, Rin, said of her

readers; "they don't read works by professional writers because their sentences

are too difficult to understand, their expressions are intentionally wordy, and the

stories are not familiar to them" (The Age). Howard Gardner in his article *The

End of Literacy: Don't Stop Reading* nicely frames this shift in storytelling by

urging us to not:

> Worry for a nanosecond that reading and writing will disappear. Even in the new digital media, it's essential to be able to read and write fluently and, if you want to capture people's attention, to write well. Of course, what it means to "write well" changes: Virginia Woolf didn't write the same way that Jane Austen did, and Arianna Huffington's blog won't be confused with Walter Lippmann's columns. But the imaginative spheres and real world needs that all those written words address remain.

In Japan this new collaborative and device driven form of storytelling has

gained huge popularity in the mass market- so much so, that half of the best-

selling novels were written on a mobile device.

Inspired by the combination of open-source technologies mashed with

very personal stories I created an ongoing online photo essay, *DailyJim.com*,

that chronicles my personal life story. This is a personal photo essay project that

combines the coding work of Pixel Post and my own photographs to tell the

story of my life the way I see it. I shoot the photographs with a mix of analog

and digital cameras to emulate the struggle of living in a purely digital world

navigating my existence online through mediated technologies, and also living in

the analog offline world. By manipulating the source code to create a platform

for the content, I am able to syndicate this story to a mass audience thus

sharing and allowing my pictorial story to be used by other storytellers. Without

open APIs and the access to open-source tools this additive and homeostatic

form of visual storytelling would not have left my own personal photo album.

This allows the story and the character that is depicted to enter the public

domain. This public and collaborative building of character through shared

technologies is where I have focused my own work as a mash media artist.

7. Character and Story

With knowledge of the tools of social media the storyteller now needs to

create character to be the mediator of the participatory connection. With all the

personal profiles that create character on the social web there are many pre-

fabricated characters in the mash media storyteller's palette. Beyond these

personal profiles, there are also characters from other storyteller's stories that

can be used, mashed up, and appropriated. Social media storytelling and

collaborative character building fall into four categories: Fictional stories using

fictional characters, fictional stories using non-fictional characters, non-fictional

stories using non-fictional characters, and a blend of fiction and non-fiction

using personal characters. These four mash media storytelling techniques will

be further explained by analyzing my work and the work of other artists

operating in this space.

7.1 Fictional Story with Fictional Characters

One of the most innovative forms of mash media storytelling is that of Machinima. Machinima was born out of a filmic electronic age but operates in the language of social media storytelling (30, Hanson). Over broadband connections users control pre-designed video game characters to act out short films live in the game world. These films are recorded to a hard drive from which the footage is edited, scored, and produced in a similar tradition to digital filmmaking. These video game characters, pre-made by the video game designers, are accessible to the mash media storytellers as fully rendered characters that just need a voice and a new story. The most popular of these films is the series *Red vs. Blue* where the soldiers of *Halo*, are controlled and voiced by a group of gamers. There is a sharp departure from the narrative of the original game, as the warring soldiers passively pontificate on life, as opposed to saving the world from alien invasion.

With my interest in remix DJs, and Machinima I have taken to mashing up Machinima films with heavily remixed musical tracks. This removes the narrative voice, which has already been replaced from the original game play, and replaces it with the mashed up story of the remixed track. These films become a new form of music video using appropriated characters, appropriated graphics, and an appropriated score. The generation of the creator of the original content becomes twice removed. I became interested in this type of filmmaking after studying fair-use and parody copyright law, specifically around the work of visual artist Jeff Koons. Koons is no stranger to getting sued. However, the damages he has had to pay are far less than the remunerations

and publicity he has received for his oft-appropriated work. In the famous case

of Rogers v. Koons, he claimed his direct sculptural reproduction of *Puppies*, a

photograph by Art Rogers, was meant to parody the kitsch image (Mary Ann

Fergus, Art and Law). The courts did not agree.   In my own installation work I

have often experimented with the notion of appropriated kitsch in a playful

manner. As a nod to Koons' struggle as an artist working with appropriated

content I created *Data Puppy*. This was a work that used individual pixels to re-

create a kitsch work from a common template. I combined this image with

appropriated video, which was then substantially altered enough to avoid legal

issues and copyright infringement. This body of work is meant to raise

awareness of the copyright laws that are ever-changing in this media landscape.

As these laws are being established, personal privacy also becomes an issue for

every individual who shares media. Who is using this media? Who is

monitoring this media? These are questions without clear answers, yet they

remain a contentious issue not only for media artists, but also for anyone who

participates in shared media.

In this post-Napster era this issue of copyright infringement remains a hot

topic to many mash media artists, so much so, that Carrie McLaren has created

illegal-art.org to showcase copyright infringing artwork. One example is Brad

Neely, who has completely re-dubbed *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*

under the moniker of *Wizard People, Dear Reader* (Bill Werde, New York Times).

His work is meant to be a humorous parody of the popular film. The fact that

this mash-up is indeed a parody keeps him safe from the original content

creators and allows him to create more fictional stories from fictional characters. This awareness of copyright law becomes an unfortunate reality for any mash media storyteller, however, these infringements can be avoided by using non-fictional characters in the story.

7.2 Fictional Story with Non-Fictional Characters

The creation of Alternate Reality Games (ARGs) is another great example of the mash media storyteller as puppet master, but unlike Machinima that uses fictional game characters, ARGs use real people as the characters in the fictional story. ARGs are a type of online and offline treasure hunt where the puppet master storyteller seeds clues online that offline users need to collect to piece together the story. These are totally fictional stories where the users become the characters. *Year Zero* was a game developed by 42 Entertainment to coincide with the release of a Nine Inch Nails concept album. The story, told through the game and the album, is one of a dystopian future where the government answers to no one (Frank Rose, Secret Websites, Coded Messages). This is a story that has been told before by many authors, filmmakers, and artists, but never quite like this.

The story began when Nine Inch Nails fans saw that raised letters on their concert t-shirt spelled out: iamtryingtobelieve.com. The discovery of this site lead to four other URLs which all began to create the character of a theocratic government ruling by marshal law. USB keys found at concerts contained files that further explored this narrative and character. Flyers were handed out at

concerts with a call to action to fight against this emerging government force.

These resistant fighters, who are all real people living offline, were invited to

meetings via text messages. At the meetings they were given resistance kits

and became part of a group of militants fighting against a government that only

existed in the narrative of this ARG and concept album. These real people

became characters in a totally fictional, yet plausible story all orchestrated by a

mash media storyteller.

In my own work I created a character partly based on my own life

experiences by using collaborative character building assets. Similar to the Nine

Inch Nails Alternate Reality Game, I used real people to create a fictional

character. I used the power of user collaboration to create a character with the

input of a wide spectrum of real people who I identified as being similar to the

character I wanted to create. *CorporateHipster.com* was created as a social

space where many users could add content to the site in order to develop this

character of a corporate hipster. This collaboratively created character is a

static archetypical character based on the mash-up of two stereotypes. On one

hand this character is a corporate ladder-climber devoted to succeeding in his

chosen career path. On the other hand the character is a hipster whose life goal

is to look his hippest at concerts and maintain his anti-establishment reputation.

This fictional character of a corporate hipster has become part of the pop

nomenclature and from this base has been introduced into the social space as a

mascot for hipsters with real jobs.   The mashing of all these individual profiles

and content into one social portal creates a character built all from user input.

As the storyteller, I simply create the framework and stage for these storytelling assets to be gathered. This technique of creating character collaboratively stems from my work in theatre where as a part of a troupe of actors we would build a play through improvisation. This play-building technique, commonplace in the theatre world, is something I continue to experiment with in the online space. The first stage is to successfully build characters, and then begin to introduce them into conflict with each other to create the drama of classic theatrical narratives. Instead of being together in a theatre this type of collaboration happens over a broadband connection, often with an unknown collaborator.

7.3 Non-Fiction Story with Non-Fictional Characters

Jonathan Harris and Sepandar Kamvar are the ultimate puppet masters, manipulating social data to tell their unique stories through stunning data visualizations gathered from unknown collaborators. Computer scientists by training, Harris and Kamvar create complex APIs that scrape the blogsphere for data based on daily emotions in blog posts. They are creating a global character using emotions from millions of bloggers to tell their story of the emotional landscape of the world on any give day. 15,000 to 20,000 new emotions are added to *We Feel Fine* everyday by thousands of bloggers from around the world (We Feel Fine). These bloggers contribute without knowing it. Being an avid blogger myself I am sure that I have contributed to this emotional mash-up. With 175,000 new blogs created each day, Harris and Kamvar will

soon reach their goal of creating an artwork authored by everyone in the world (We Feel Fine).

I have not been able to accomplish a piece authored by everyone in the world, but the online audience for a project that I shot in Banff, Canada has resulted in the fact that, every second of everyday someone somewhere is watching my content. *The Real Banff* was a project I shot and told online through social media channels using a town as the main character. In this case I was not using appropriated material, but I was creating very specific niche content so other storytellers could appropriate it for their storytelling needs. It was an experiment where I had no guarantees that the story would live on past the hosting channels that I created. However, after just a few weeks the content began to be appropriated by specific niche audiences in over 120 different countries. I was telling a story by creating content of others telling their story, then allowing others to use that content to tell their own story. This is exactly what mash media storytelling is all about. Working as a mash media artist can be about using appropriated content but it can also be about creating content for the specific purpose of having it appropriated by other artists. After proving this model of storytelling works to attract a mass audience, I continue to shoot highly appropriable micro niche content that specific people are passionate about that can be used as fodder for others' stories.

Another name that I have given to this technique of storytelling is: *cloud storytelling*. The technique draws on the notion of *cloud computing* where processing power is drawn from a multitude of technical infrastructures without

the knowledge of the server owner (Stephen Baker, Google and the Wisdom of

Clouds). In cloud storytelling the elements that form stories are not all

generated by the author, but rather appropriated from other servers and

reconfigured by the mash media storyteller. Google has developed applications

to store software and data on servers as opposed to the individual's hard drive,

but they have also unwittingly developed an application in YouTube for cloud

storytelling. They have done this by storing a massive amount of content that

can be used in cloud storytelling. The more specific the content is, the more

attractive it is to be appropriated. This creation of niche content gives the mash

media storyteller access to the specific character they wish to portray in a non-

fiction story.

7.4 Fiction, Non-Fiction hybrid with Personal Non-Fictional Characters

Senator Obama's campaign is an interesting case study of a mash media

storyteller creating a character that is part fact and part fiction. Facebook

founder Chris Hughes left his potentially lucrative position with the social

network to build the online presence of Obama (Brian Stelter, The Facebooker

Who Friended Obama). He did so using all the tools and distribution angles in

his social media storytelling arsenal. Obama has, a Flickr page, a YouTube

Channel, a Facebook profile, and a myriad of other social media network

outlets. *Barackobamaisyournewbicycle.com* feeds visitors with 366 ways that

Obama really cares. Wired writer Matthew Honan, who followed Obama on the

campaign trail, authors the site and subsequent book. Examples of how Obama

cares are: "Obama commented on your blog," "Obama added you as a friend,"

"Obama checked under your bed for monsters." The most noteworthy piece of

Obama content as it relates to mash media storytelling is the Wil.I.Am video *Yes*

We Can. This video, which has reached over 10 million views, mashes up

Obama's *Yes We Can* speech with images of celebrities who share Obama's

views. The original speech can be seen on the Barack Obama YouTube

channel, while this mash-up music video is hosted by dozens of other channel

owners. This video, along with Obama's other social media outlets, has been

credited with bringing the youth vote over to Obama's camp (Peter Feld, What

Obama Can Teach You About Millennial Marketing). Hughes, who is responsible

for Obama's online presence, has puppet mastered the presidential candidate

through the primary by continually giving the community media fodder to spread

the good word of the O brand. Beyond the social network channels,

My.barackobama.com gives users the ability to start their own Obama

fundraising campaign. These fundraising tools are not that different from the

tools that Hughes originally put in place when Facebook was developed. The

success of Facebook lies in the fact that users must attract friends to build their

profile. This creates a platform for each user to create their own character of

themselves as well as to distribute that character to a mass audience. What is

most noteworthy is that the tools used by Obama to spread his Internet fame

and image are at the disposal of any broadband user. This gives us all the ability

to create, manage, and manipulate our own celebrity. This is a lesson that Julia

Allison learned early on and parlayed into her Internet fame. In Wired magazine

she is described as,

> the latest, and perhaps purest, iteration of the Warholian ideal: someone
> who is famous for being famous. Like graffiti writers who turned their
> signatures into wild-style gallery pieces, she has made the process of
> self-promotion into its own freaky art form. Traditionally, it takes an army
> of publicists, a well-connected family, or a big-budget ad campaign to
> make this kind of splash. But Allison has done it on her own and on the
> cheap, armed only with an insatiable need for attention and a healthy
> helping of Web savvy (Jason Tanz, Internet Famous).

Her bio tells of the same Obama formula that she also employs to manufacture

her online image: "Julia has a Facebook account, a Myspace page, a Flickr, a

Twitter, a Friendfeed, four Tumblrs, three Movable Type blogs, two Vimeos, one

YouTube and a photogenic white shih-tzu named Marshmallow" (JuliaAllison).

She constantly creates new content, even if it is as mundane as a photograph of

her getting her eyes checked or a Twitter update stating that she is in a cab. She

then distributes it across a cross-pollinating and self-referential network that she

has built. Her photo tumblr is simply a collection of photographs that she

appears in. This URL story is a mash-up of other people's content all told in an

additive fashion. This dedication to telling the story of herself has resulted in

appearances in a myriad of mass media news outlets, all for doing very little and

accomplishing very little in the traditional sense of celebrity creation.

Seeing this, I decided to jump in as well, by building my own personal

media empire and personal brand. This was partly due to my own obsession

with building my own celebrity and partly to engage in participatory observation

in the anthropological sense. My life in photos is displayed on my Flickr page,

with the best being daily housed on *DailyJim.com*. These pictures are

supported by my Twitter page and personal blog. My musings are also made

public at *IAmUserGenerated.com*. I update and add content to my *Internet*

Movie Data Base (IMDB) profile to inflate my celebrity from a past life as an

actor. I blog for a social media advertising agency and write for a citizen

journalism site all the while search engine optimizing my own name. Lastly, I

maintain a YouTube channel where I create small videos that others can use to

answer popular questions they receive. I made these videos all from

appropriated images to respond to questions that I found time consuming

answering. Most email, text and Facebook messages I received daily could be

generalized into my social sphere wondering what I was doing with my life. My

answer invariably was either: socializing, working or thinking. By creating three

videos based on these three answers I could paste a link reply to the social

query instead of textually writing an answer. These answers are publicly

available as media assets to link to should anyone else's life consist of

socializing, working and thinking. By creating these video assets that others are

using to relate to their friends and family I am becoming part of that story.

Creating these videos is much like a sample DJ pressing a record of just

samples, breaks, and loops. These are small pieces of content available for

others to weave into their story.

All these Internet portals mash together to create my lifecast, as told by

me. The personal content is available for comment on by the Internet

community and in the public domain for remixing. This dedication to online

celebrity creation has resulted in my scoring a 62 on the *Vanity Validator*, a tool that Chris Anderson developed using Google's Page Rank to calculate anyone's online presence. To put the ranking in context, Obama scores a 72 and Julia Allison a 59. These types of online numerical validations are increasingly being looked at as we seek to find value in our lives lived online.

8. Beyond the Curtain and Internet Audience

Personal validation through participation online continues to be an interesting phenomenon to track. At the Vidfest 2008 conference held in Vancouver, Canada, Eric McLuhan discussed the theories behind his father's books and how their meanings have changed over time, specifically in the public domain of The Global Village. He explained that in our heavily mediated technologically driven culture the value of our physical selves is lessened and replaced with the valuation of our ability to perform on the global stage through participation in media (Jarrett Martineau, NowPublic at Vidfest). Allison and Obama heard this proclamation and became major players in the Global Theatre of online participation, which pushed them into new positions of power. As a mash media storyteller this hosting and distribution phase becomes crucial to having other storytellers interact with your stories. This participation is crucial in order to assure that we can collectively, as a society, tell our story. This allows us to not be limited to the silos of author and audience.

As a career storyteller working across many mediums, my greatest frustration occurred in the distribution phase. As a filmmaker I was in control of

the development, pre-production, production and post-production, but when it came to distribution, the story was either taken out of my hands or the project reached its terminal phase. Much like the puppet master who builds his own portable stage the mash media storyteller now has the ability to create a distribution platform that best serves the specific story he is trying to tell. This is a luxury the film medium did not afford me in my career as a filmmaker.   This stage is malleable and ever-changing as new audiences are reached. The ever-changing form of the stage is made possible by the taxonomy of tag structures essential to participatory media. It is these tags that help audiences find the content they seek to participate in (danah boyd, Proceeds of Hypertext 2006). For this reason new audience generation can be as simple as changing a tag or other meta-data.   This tagging structure is what has propelled the form of mash media storytelling even further. Every time the media is mashed with another piece of media the searchable tags for that piece of media doubles. Take for example the work I did with Halo, Machinima and the Sony Bravia commercial. By mashing these pieces of content together the individuals searching for these tags triples the potential audience. This manipulation of metadata is an important step in mash media storytelling that should not be ignored. In traditional storytelling once the story was published, or aired, or distributed it maintained its form. However, by constantly tweaking tags, descriptions and titles of the mashed story the storyteller can reach a new searching audience. This new audience brings a fresh perspective to the work by picking up on certain elements of particular interest to them. This can be likened to having a

book translated into a new language, which obviously opens it up to a new audience who add their cultural biases to the work. The distribution phase of a mash media story must also be seen as part of the creative process that needs to be managed and planned. This phase is of particular importance given the overwhelming amount of content that is produced daily.

9. Conclusion:

Content creation online has risen over 57% in the past three years amongst teens (Pew Internet). It is estimated that 15% of all YouTube videos are either remixes or remakes of other content (Wesch). From this we can draw that the stories being told and media being created is only going to keep growing as a younger generation is born into a participatory media culture. We can look at all this new media creation as media noise or we can look at it as fodder for collectively telling our stories through mash media. More importantly, how do we inspire this new generation of storytellers? Marc Davis who is an assistant professor at the School of Information Management at the University of California Berkeley has built the Garage Cinema Research facility in order to "enable the billions of media consumers to become producers" (Susan Kuchinskas, Cooking Up Social Media). This is just one example of a heavily funded agency attempting to build better tools and more robust platforms to facilitate more media. This is one approach. The approach that I am advocating is to facilitate better storytelling by collaboratively using the content that these tools beget by deploying these stories through the power of collaborative

character building and to redistribute these appropriable stories with Web 2.0

tools through the malleable stage of social media channels.

An example from my portfolio that brings together all my analysis of mash

media storytelling is a social portal that I collaboratively built to help facilitate

"thank yous." Thankyourdonor.com is a storytelling network where blood

recipients can thank their unknown blood donors. These are two tribes who

rarely mix, but thanks to having a shared story experience they can connect on

a personal level. This is not a project that simply creates new tools to create

more content, but rather creates a stage where people who are thankful for the

gift of life can repurpose their story under one theme. Much like a mash-up DJ

selects multiple tracks to form one new piece of music, I am attracting multiple

individual stories to tell one large story based on my creative impetus. This

aggregation of multiple individual stories all housed under one story theme is yet

another form of mash media storytelling.

This type of mash media storytelling can subvert the stereotype of the

lonely artist toiling away by creating community around the act of appropriated

storytelling. It can topple the pre-conceived notions of what mass media

content should consist of on an aesthetic level. The distribution of highly niched

stories to a mass media audience through social channels can subvert the

strangle hold of mass media distribution by creating a new diversity in the

stories the masses are able to interact with. This allows us to connect more

deeply, albeit mediated, through the power of story with our tribe. In Professor

Wesch's presentation on *An Anthropological Introduction to YouTube* he charts

a cultural inversion, in which he "describes the tension that we (in a cultural sense) experience as participants. On the one hand we express individualism, independence and a keen commercialism while desiring community and relationships within an authentic context" (Gavin Heaton, YouTube and the Context of Being Social). It is my belief and hope that by collaboratively connecting through mash media stories we will invert this cultural inversion and build stronger community relationships through authentic living and a shared storytelling experience.

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