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Folk Media Meets Digital Technology for Sustainable Social Change: A Case Study of the Center for Digital Storytelling.

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the movement of oral and written storytelling practices to online digital storytelling. It is the first comprehensive case study of the globally-recognized Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS), focusing specifically on how the CDS model of digital storytelling contributes to sustainable social change while reflecting the media's shift toward citizen-based journalism. The paper engages the complexities, limits and constraints of the participatory model as it informs digital storytelling, and applies the four theoretical approaches to community media (Carpentier, Lie & Servaes, 2003) to the digital storytelling movement to develop an analytic framework for understanding how these stories can be used to give a voice to the voiceless, raise awareness, increase education, and promote democracy.

Introduction

For as long as there has been language, there have been people who have used it to tell

stories. Whether they are elaborate fictions woven together by many, or carved by one from the barest bones; whether they are tiny morsels of truth told with a careful intent and purpose, designed to relay a message, expose an identity, or nurture a community, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the art and activity of storytelling is an ancient and universal part of most of the world's cultures (Hertzberg & Lunby, 2008). As something that transcends time and space, the implications of storytelling's transformation into digital mediatized form calls for some deeper exploration specifically as it concerns its contribution to sustainable social change. By "sustainable social change" this paper refers to a lasting process of empowerment and transformation that aids in the reduction of poverty and makes possible greater social equality and the larger fulfillment of human potential (Quebral, 1975).

The first part of this paper will analyze the movement of oral and written storytelling practices to online digital storytelling, and look at two examples of digital storytelling projects in Africa. Digital stories are being used as a tool in activist organizing and education, as a technique for increasing understanding of social stigmas such as people living with AIDS/HIV and as a way for victims of trauma and violence to speak out about their experiences (Silence Speaks, 2009). Digital storytelling's growing popularity suggests that it is part of a larger shift in the media industry toward grassroots, citizen-based journalism in a new public sphere.

The second part of the paper will analyze the ways in which the participatory method and multiplicity model inform the process of creating the digital story by exploring these critical questions: To what extent can the digital storytelling movement be participatory if the model is based on a unified structure developed in the West? How are cultural differences addressed during the story telling process? For example, in some cultures the experiences of abuse and oppression are private and never spoken about publicly. What are the access issues in relation to the distribution of a digital story particularly in the developing world? Who is going to see it? What are the best ways to know and or measure its impact?

Finally, the third part of the paper will demonstrate that the four theoretical approaches to the definition of community media (Carpentier, Lie & Servaes, 2003) may also be applied to the digital story telling movement (and by movement, I refer to the content, production processes, distribution, and viewing audience) in order to situate digital storytelling within a framework for analysis and to demonstrate support for the idea that the application of digital storytelling in a community and its subsequent effects, will always be in relation to the community itself (cultural), and the relation that community has to the larger society, state, market and structures of power.

The Center for Digital Storytelling: Pioneering a Movement

The most globally-recognized model of digital storytelling was pioneered over 15 years ago by the Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS) in Berkeley, California. CDS is an international non-profit training, project development, and research organization dedicated to assisting people in creating digital media stories by partnering with community, educational, and business institutions to develop large-scale initiatives using methods and principles adapted from their [Digital Storytelling Workshop](#). The center also serves as a library of information and resources about storytelling and new media (storycenter.org, 2009).

It is important to note, that although this paper focuses on one model of digital storytelling, there will never be one way of measuring the effects of digital stories on a community, since just as the stories are multiplicitous and contingent upon the narrator's personal experience, so too are the ways that one will be able to measure the effects. Nick Couldry (2008) notes, "We should not expect a single unitary answer to the way the media transform the social since media themselves are always at least doubly articulated, as both transmission

technology, and representational content (Silverstone, 1994) in contexts of lived practice and situated struggle that themselves are open to multiple interpretations or indeed to being ignored.” (p. 42)

What is a “digital story?”

For the purposes of this paper, the concept of a “digital story” will not be separated from the process of creating it. A digital story can mean many things. The term ‘*digit*’ means number and originates from the word *finger* and counting on the finger (Bratteteig, 2008). Digital also means, “being represented in a digital electronic system, a computer” (Bratteteig, p. 273). Cisler (1999) refers to the process of digital storytelling as a combination of traditional storytelling techniques, sometimes combined with live performance techniques, and with the use of multi-media to provide sound and video to supplement the spoken word. “In some creations, everything is online, and the listener or computer user, explores in a non-linear fashion the mix of narrative, photographs, video clips, and sound archives. The act of creating this can be a single artist working with her computer equipment and memories, or it can be collaborative” (para. 23).

Nick Couldry (2008) refers to digital stories as the range of personal stories now being told in potentially public form using digital media resources...online personal narrative formats such as MySpace and Facebook, textual forms such as weblogs (blogs), the various story forms prevalent on more specialist digital storytelling sites or the many sites where images and videos, including material captured on personal mobile devices, can be collected for wider circulation (such as YouTube) (p. 388).

One example of a digital story which is featured on the CDS website is called *Pralines*

(<http://www.storycenter.org/stories/>). Created by 53-year old lesbian Carol Burch Braun, the three-minute and twenty-three second story opens with the soulful acapella song “You Shall Reap” by Marquez Rhyne and a picture of David Duke, the grand leader of the Ku Klux Klan, whom Carol says was the “first guy she went steady with.” The story, illustrated with family photographs, is a haunting and honest exploration of the ways in which racism and white supremacy shaped her family’s history in the American south.

While it is impossible to know the exact number of “digital stories” on the Web today, the Center for Digital Storytelling alone, has worked with nearly 1,000 organizations around the world and trained more than 15,000 people, in hundreds of workshops. They have traveled to [45 states in the U.S.](#), [5 provinces in Canada](#) and [33 countries](#) to help organizations create their own workshop, production, and distribution processes.

CDS first came to fruition in the early 1990s when a group of radical theatre performers and media artists led by Dana Atchley, Joe Lambert and Nina Mullen, decided to explore how digital media tools could be used to inform storytelling practices. Joe Lambert explained the roots of CDS in dStoryNews (2000). “We wanted to motivate people to change their behavior, to change policy, to change the distribution of power and resources. As such, Digital Storytelling for us was more of an idea than a product, more effecting social behavior than consumer behavior. Not that the two are inseparable, quite the opposite, but the emphasis, for us, was on a simple notion - The tools of digital technology should be used to democratize voice and therefore empower more people than the prior set of analog tools in contemporary communication” (para. 3).

Over the years, their vision has grown into the Center for Digital Storytelling, now based in

Berkeley, California with workshops for educators, health and human service agencies, business professional, and artists all over the world. Its model for digital storytelling, known as the “Standard Digital Storytelling Workshop,” is a three-day intensive where participants design and produce a three to five minute digital story. They craft and record first-person narratives, collect still images, video, and music with which to illustrate their pieces, and are guided through computer tutorials that enable them, with teacher support, to edit their own stories. CDS has developed the primary curricula for creating digital stories, including the [Digital Storytelling Cookbook](#), the manual for the workshop process, and [Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community](#).

Silence Speaks Initiative

Silence Speaks is an international digital storytelling project, housed in CDS and founded by activist and storyteller Amy Hill, which focuses on stories from “communities that have been denied a voice in decision making that affects their lives, such as people living in poverty, survivors of trauma, those who face social stigma due to chronic medical conditions” (Silence Speaks, 2009). Silence Speaks stories are used in training, community organizing, and policy advocacy arenas to promote global health and human rights. For the past nine years they have run workshops that “blend creative writing, oral history, art therapy, and facilitative media production techniques to assist people in telling stories as short digital videos” (Silence Speaks, 2009). Silence Speaks employs a “Story Circle” method: groups of eight to ten participants share personal experiences, offer feedback to one another, and record individual voiceover narrations, gather and/or create still images and video clips, and edit it into short media pieces.

Over the last six years, Silence Speaks has conducted digital storytelling workshops throughout Africa, partnering with organizations focused on gender equality, migrant labor rights, child soldiers, and women surviving obstetric fistula. Admittedly, the effects and consequences of the various digital stories that resulted from these four partnerships are too premature to be able to measure their contribution to sustainable social change in their communities, (sustainable being the operative word). However, the stories themselves may address the possibilities for social change that are situated in both their content and the production and distribution processes.

For the past three years Silence Speaks has worked with the Sonke Gender Justice Network in South Africa. The organization works toward gender equality, and toward reducing the spread of HIV and the impact of AIDS. Silence Speaks helped to facilitate the production of digital stories of people in rural communities living with HIV/AIDS. The digital stories produced through the partnership have served as a counter to stereotyped representations of men, women, and gender-based violence in popular media. The stories are testimonials about survival; others challenge misperceptions about men and masculinity and offer examples of the role both men and women play in confronting forms of injustice (http://www.storycenter.org/cds_sonke.html, 2009).

For example, one of the stories featured under the “Legacies of Violence” section on the Sonke Gender Justice Network website is *Completed Circles* by Dawn Bosman (2007), a survivor of domestic violence. Black and white and color photographs of herself, her home, and the South African landscape flash across the screen while Dawn describes watching her mother get beaten by her father and later reliving the cycle of abuse with her own husband

whom she finally fought back and left. The website where the story is accessed has a note that the story contains explicit content and is recommended for mature viewers age 14 and up and follows with key points for viewers to consider, including ways of presenting the story to others. Silence Speaks helped to develop discussion guides to go along with two collections of Sonke digital stories by youth and adults (in English, or in Xhosa, Venda, or Tsonga with English subtitles). Sonke screens the stories across Southern Africa as a way of educating local communities, training service providers, inspiring policymakers, and promoting sustained community action for change.

Digital storytelling as “public-oriented” citizen journalism

This example is consistent with the move toward a more public-oriented communication model which utilizes new technology to displace the formerly hierarchical, bureaucratic, and sender-oriented approach (Servaes, 1999) with a more Freirian and Marxist inspired vision of a participatory, and receiver-oriented approach. Freirian because the “oppressed” are treated as fully human subjects with the authority and capacity to tell their own stories, and Marxist because the power of the content itself may contribute to fulfilling, at least in part, that the “human species has a destiny that is more than life as a fulfillment of material needs” (Servaes, p. 84). In this instance, an argument may be made that digital stories, insofar as their content may be used, shared, dispersed and replicated to educate and dispel stereotypes in a community, that it is more valuable than relying solely on traditional oral storytelling whose audience will be limited to one time and space or than the mass media, whose messages often come from a source outside the community, and are disseminated throughout (Sparks, 2007).

While the way in which each community interprets the digital stories will be relative to each community, this is true too for the ways in which local people from their communities view digital stories on the Internet even when the story itself does not come directly from that geographically-located community. The potential here for sustainable social change is only just beginning to be explored. Drotner (2008) notes, "The increasing range of communication channels available and the complexity of their uses help push social boundaries of knowledge formation. Established institutions such as the education system, the workplace and broadcast media increasingly need to demonstrate their loci of socially accepted discourses and legitimate meaning-making practices." (p. 65)

When applied in this context, digital storytelling contributes to a reconceptualization of the notion of "community" which formerly referred predominantly to geography and ethnicity as structuring notions of collective identity or group relations (Wellman, Boase, & Chen, 2002). Now that the Internet has made cyber-communities possible, digital stories serve as part of the mirror and glue that both reflects and informs these communities. Such communities that do not depend on geography to define them, and who have used the CDS model for digital storytelling include survivors of domestic abuse, children who have been through the foster care system, and people living with HIV/AIDs. But the list goes on.

A specific example is the Silence Speaks partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). With offices in over 100 countries, IOM is a leading inter-governmental organization promoting humane migration by providing services and advice to governments and migrants. IOM promotes international migration law, contributes to policy debate, and the protection of migrants' rights, migration health and the gender dimension of migration. In

2007, Silence Speaks collaborated with IOM and Market Photo Workshop in the *Digital Stories: Migration Project*. Eight men and women from countries in Southern Africa told stories that highlight the issues and consequences of labor migration (Silence Speaks, 2009).

In one story (accessed here <http://www.youtube.com/iompretoria>), Thandiwe Dlamini, originally from Swaziland, describes her travels from home to find work on a sugar plantation. Her journey is made more difficult because she has HIV. She has limited resources for treatment and is treated like an outcast because of the negative stigma associated with the disease. After finally receiving medication, Thandiwe is able to return to work and is surprised to find that “she is welcomed with open arms.” She ends her story by encouraging others to not be afraid to get tested and to remember that “there will always be life after HIV and AIDS.”

Participants like Thandiwe in IOM’s digital storytelling workshops were provided with disposable cameras, taught some photography basics, and asked to take photos of their homes and neighborhoods. In addition to creating a safe workshop space in which labor migrants and family members could share stories, the project developed a collection of pieces for use in a variety of settings as education tools. A DVD featuring all of the stories comes with a facilitator’s guide that can be used as an advocacy tool to help raise awareness of the issues facing labor migrants (Silence Speaks, 2009). From a grassroots perspective, making these stories public online, makes them available to human rights and labor organizations all over the world as documented real-life data to contribute to engaged research. It also creates a space for the oppressed to speak on their own terms and to be potentially heard by others like themselves in similar situations around the world, thus aiding in the creation of aforementioned communities.

Participatory Method and Multiplicity Models

It is impossible to analyze the framework for digital storytelling without discussing the paradigmatic influences, particularly on the process of digital storytelling itself. As a direct challenge to the notion of mass media information dissemination, digital storytelling signifies a representation from the contributor him/herself, distributed in a public space that makes the story accessible to others in a way it was never before. Daniel Meadows, a photographer and journalism teacher, coordinated the 'Capture Wales' project in cooperation with BBC Wales (Meadows, 2003). A series of digital stories were shown on regional television and several hundred are available at the BBC Cymru (Wales) website (www.bbc.co.uk/wales/capturewales). Meadows notes, "Contributors are not just originating their own material, for the first time they are editing it too. This is what first excited me – and still excites me – about Digital Storytelling, for no longer must the public tolerate being 'done' by media – that is, no longer must we tolerate media being done *to* us...If we will only learn the skills of Digital Storytelling then we can, quite literally, 'take the power back'. Not for nothing is the computer we use called the 'PowerBook'. 'Think Different' the Apple advert tells us. Digital Storytelling isn't just a tool; it's a revolution (p. 192)."

Meadows (2003) reflects the participatory roots of digital storytelling, which is echoed in the words of the Center for Digital Storytelling's founder Joe Lambert (<http://www.storycenter.org/history.html>, 2009): "Corresponding directly to the extension of civil, economic, and political rights in the larger society, the community artists saw the extension of technical and aesthetic training in the arts as a civil right. They focused their efforts on providing arts access to this training to all sectors of the population who were

underserved by traditional education and vocational training systems. At times the emphasis of such projects was on personal voice and the development of identity, esteem, and resilience in the individual; at other times the art making specifically addressed social conflicts and broader political issues. This legacy is at the core of our work.”

The participatory model simultaneously incorporates the cultural identities of local communities and democratization at all levels in the context of working toward sustainable social change (Servaes, 1999). Taking its roots from the Freirian concept that all people have the right to individually and collectively speak their word, the participatory model replaced industrialization and urbanization as the stepping stones of development (Pearce, 1986). Along with these ideas came a shift in the perceived role of the media. Its previous emphasis had been on “telling and teaching” (Sparks, 2007, p. 58) but the new paradigm emphasized a more dialogic mode of media development where the primary aim was no longer the dissemination of information but rather creating media that became the voice *of* a community rather than *for* a community (Berrigan, 1981). Digital storytelling reflects this emphasis in the roots of the movement’s development, and in the process of creating the stories themselves.

CDS as “Expert-Led Media Pedagogy:” Animator and Advocate.

Although the founders of the Center for Digital Storytelling address its roots in the participatory method, to what extent can the CDS-inspired digital storytelling movement be participatory if the model is based on a unified structure, exported from California? The equipment, after all is provided by CDS; all of the narratives are largely under 5 minutes and many rely on music and photos to support the narration. While the stories themselves are

written by the people taking the workshop, the workshop maintains a standard structure. Storytellers must learn the techniques associated with the technology to be able to tell their story in this way. McWilliam (2009) addresses the inconsistency between the intentions of the movement and the reality of the top down expert-led training: "Digital storytelling emerged as part of a wider shift away from one-way, top down models of communication (traditional broadcast media) toward two way, bottom-up models of communication (community and/or participatory media)...Yet digital storytelling is inconsistent with either model: it occupies a middle ground as a user-consulted, but expert-led media pedagogy that developed through and alongside these emerging technologies, but not because of them (p. 146)."

This point is particularly relevant to digital storytelling's role in the context of media development. Hartley (2009) makes a similar argument that engages the complexity of the theoretical paradigms under which digital storytelling operates. Although he claims that digital storytelling fills a gap between everyday cultural practice and professional media that was never adequately bridged during the broadcast era by reconfiguring the producer/consumer relationship, he argues that the dialogic approach to the production of the digital story must acknowledge the asymmetrical relationship between expert facilitator and amateur participant.

Such acknowledgement addresses that this kind of self-made media may be in reality only transforming the 'authenticity' of participants into the 'authorship' of the expert. He suggests that there cannot be an all or nothing approach toward the process of making a digital story: Expert or Everyone. Instead of choosing one paradigm over the other, he argues that Digital Storytelling calls for both on the grounds that knowledge production and acquisition is a dialogic process that comes from our interaction with others. Here digital storytelling is

consistent with more participatory forms of communication for development in that it rejects the linear model of communication and replaces it with one found in dialogue (Hartley, 2009)—a dialogue which in this case, addresses the power relationship head on, and perhaps even goes so far as to recontextualize the role of the facilitator as “translator” versus “transmitter.”

Silence Speaks addresses the process on their website by noting that participants reflect on their own memories and life circumstances as well as on those of others in the group, thus building connections and solidarity. The teaching is facilitative, storytellers are talked through the steps they need to take. Collaborating partners are on-hand to assist with all aspects of the process and to offer expertise in healing, educational, or community organizing strategies. Local assistants are also brought in to provide interpretation and support (Silence Speaks, 2009).

In this instance, the digital storytelling movement can be seen as a micro example of the macro communication for development process—a dialogic blend of empowered participants with a story to tell and expert facilitators who can aid in translating the technical and engage the “embodied and emotional” (p. 193) experience. The facilitator oscillates between the role of advocate and animator (Servaes, 1999)—advocate because s/he is acting on behalf of the community, but is not necessarily responsible for thinking of the ongoing process, and s/he is conducting a workshop with a standardized structure; animator because the structure of the workshop demands the facilitator’s “conscious involvement,” (p. 193) while creating a safe space for the individuals to act on their own behalf, creating their own stories in their own voices.

It is worth noting, however, that there is no mention on the Silence Speaks website of how differences in culture are addressed during the storytelling process. For example, in some cultures the experiences of abuse and oppression are private and never spoken about publicly. Additional research could explore the cultural processes in greater depth as well as the extent to which these storytellers *want* to make their stories public. What is the reason that storytellers want to participate in these workshops? Is the driving force one of social change? A belief that their story will contribute to greater understanding and raise awareness around an issue? Is there full understanding of the consequences if a personal story is published online, in an environment where interactivity via comments has become the norm?

Does it matter that it's digital: Internet access issues?

It is crucial to analyze when and how digital storytelling on the Internet is relevant to a community and when and how it can be used to contribute to sustainable social change. This paper makes two arguments that address this. One: Politically, insofar as one is concerned with contributing to new forms of democracy, participating in a form of public media that is participatory, self authored, and produced, digital storytelling plays an important role in the empowerment of people who have before been voiceless in the public arena. For example, dozens of Silence Speaks stories that were published on the HUB, a participatory media site for human rights where individuals, organizations, networks and groups around the world can upload their videos, audio or photos, or watch, comment on and share what's on the site, have been viewed thousands of times by people all over the world. Nick Couldry (2008) states: "One important reason is that digital storytelling represents a novel distribution of a scarce resource – the ability to represent the world around us – using a shared infrastructure.

Digital storytelling occupies a distinct stage in the history of mass communication or perhaps in the supersession of mass communication; as such, it has implications for the sustaining or expansion of Democracy. (p. 54)”

The implications of these self-represented voices in the public sphere cannot be explored fully without closer scrutiny regarding who has access to the Internet. According to the CIA Factbook, as of 2005, approximately 1,018,057,389 people use the Internet out of 6,790,062,216 people, which is less than 18 percent of the world’s population. In the U.S. alone, according to the CIA Factbook, more than 225 million people use the Internet and the population is more 307 million, which means nearly three quarters of Americans, arguably the most powerful country in the world, use the Internet. These numbers confirm that analysis of the success of these stories for promoting social change should not be measured necessarily by how many people “see” them, it should be measured by how much they influence the people who do see them and who partakes in the process of creating them. Although the era of top-down mass communication has often served to replace the pertinent role of folk media in communities around the world, the tenets of oral culture have actually returned to the technologically savvy digital storytelling movement—and it is these tenets that contribute to positive social change, in the content of the story itself, but more particularly in the personal and community building process that goes into production of the digital piece. While many scholars claim that digital storytelling offers opportunities for new representation not to be confused with the features of oral storytelling (Couldry, 2008; Lundby, 2008), this paper argues that it is actually by returning to more traditional forms of storytelling via digital means that sustainable social change becomes more probable.

Digital Storytelling and folk media

One of the most ancient and useful forms of communication was the tradition of oral storytelling whereby the collective memories, myths, morals, histories, beliefs, victories and defeats of a community were passed orally from one person to another, one family to another, one generation to another. "Folk media," a term applied to a type of information dissemination that existed all over the world long before the written word, incorporated this storytelling in the form of traditional music, drama, dance and puppetry. Each society, race and religion used different kinds of folk media to create, reflect, educate and entertain their community with culturally specific and unique features relative to the context of the group (Cisler, 1999). These traditional live communication processes served many purposes. They contributed both to the preservation and transformation of community identity, were effective in educating and building awareness around issues important to the community, and were more often than not sites for resistance and reclamation (Agovi, 1994).

Digital Storytelling and Folk Media share two roots. One: they both may (but are not required to) rely on art, song, and performance in the context of the storytelling, and two: the story itself is subject to transformation via the participation of a live audience or via the expectation of interaction that is now reflective of a participatory new media culture. Axel Bruns (2007) writes, "Before the emergence of the 'fixed text' model, textual performance was re-creative, collective, and collaborative; we are now returning to a similar textual engagement based on remix, sharing, and mash-up. At either time, such reworking was based in performance built upon performance: an ongoing process of reinterpretation and change; Elizabethan theatre, then, was a pre-parenthetical mirror image of the cultural processes we experience today.

(para. 5)”

The collective space created by the Story Circle as part of the CDS workshop provides an opportunity for participants to share their stories in a supportive environment, listen to others, learn new skills collectively and individually, while providing and receiving feedback. Certainly oral stories underwent transformation as they were passed from one person to another, one community to another, as the needs and desires of the people changed and evolved. So too do these transformations inevitably occur inside these CDS workshops, as people listen to and help one another.

It is also important to note that the capacity for digital stories to contribute to sustainable social change is not entirely dependent on being published and viewed online. As mentioned earlier, copies of the stories are often made into a DVD and accompanied by guides used to facilitate educational discussions and/or screenings of the DVDs in the community. This technological archiving of story and culture is something that can be shared, replicated and dispersed throughout a community and used by advocates to inform policy change, but does not depend on being published online.

Digital Storytelling and the Four Theories for Community Media

The last part of this paper is an argument for the applicability of the four theoretical approaches to community media (Carpentier, Lie & Servaes, 2003) to the role and purpose of digital storytelling, as summarized below and in figure 1. This is important because the four approaches can be used as an analytical framework for exploring the broad range of perspectives found in digital stories, and increase our understanding of the ways they can

offer an alternative for a wide range of hegemonic discourses (p. 52).

Although it is not a prerequisite for digital stories to resist hegemonic discourses in society, as is often the case with the development of community media, the very act of producing and making a digital story public can in fact serve this purpose. The four theories of community media are born from a framework that acknowledges that identities are “relational, contingent and the result of articulatory practices within a discursive framework” (Carpentier et al. p. 52). The first takes an essentialist approach, and argues that community media’s role is to serve the community from which it originates. The second approach claims a more relationalist perspective and views community media as an alternative to the mainstream. The third approach sees the media as part of civil society, and the fourth approach, inspired by Deleuze, sees community media as a rhizome, allowing the incorporation of aspects of contingency, fluidity and elusiveness in the analysis.

Digital storytelling in the context of CDS’s model, draws direct parallels with the first approach as both the process and the story is almost always oriented “towards a community, regardless of its exact nature (defined geographically/spatially or otherwise). A primary goal of the digital storytelling workshop is to create a community among the storytellers, where ideas and narratives can be exchanged, shared, discussed and created in a safe space, in an environment where topics are not chosen by “professional communicators” but indeed by the participants themselves. The end result—the narrative moved to digital form—has the potential to create and sustain communities via cyberspace, that are not bound to geography, but can inform and nurture it nevertheless. This comparison becomes potentially problematic

when considering access issues, as not everybody in the “community” may have access to the Internet, but here again it is important to note that the digital stories are not being used just online, but as part of educational and advocacy packages by NGOs in the local communities, and as part of local screenings accompanied by guided talks.

The second approach emphasizes community media’s relationship to the mainstream media, and defines it as existing as a supplement or alternative voice. Mainstream media is often viewed as large-scale, state or corporate-owned, vertically-structured, voice of dominant discourse and representations (Carpentier et al. p. 56). Community media can represent just the opposite: Small scale, independently owned, horizontally structured with active participation from the community, carriers of non-dominant discourse, emphasizing self-representation.

The digital storytelling movement has, at its roots, an emphasis on self-representation. The stories are made using small-scale equipment, which participants learn how to use during the course of a three-day workshop. I am referring specifically to the standard model of digital storytelling developed by CDS, however corporations have begun using digital storytelling methods to communicate information and ideas to their employees and for branding purposes (Pink, 2007). The fact that mainstream media often imitate what was once perceived as smaller-scale media, independent project is addressed briefly by Carpentier, et al. 2003: “At the same time, the critical stance towards the production values of the ‘professional’ working in mainstream media leads to a diversity of formats and genres and creates room for experimentation with content and form. In this fashion, community media can be rightfully

seen as a breeding ground for innovation, later often recuperated by mainstream media.” (p. 57)

The third approach views community media as part of civil society, holding its position as the ‘third voice’ (Servaes, 1999, p. 260) between state media and private commercial media. If civil society is to be defined as a group of intermediate organizations, separate from the privately owned economic organizations operating in the market economy, personal and family relations, and from the state and quasi-state organizations, (Carpentier et al. 2003), then community media’s relevance and connection to this civil society remains crucial for democracy. If communication is a human right, then community media is one place where that right is exercised and opportunity for participation in the public sphere is realized. Digital stories, when viewed through this approach are an active vehicle, removed from the state and the market, with the potential to promote more authentic forms of democracy by contributing an additional voice to the public sphere particularly, the voices of people who have been marginalized and oppressed, and who largely remain voiceless in the mainstream.

Finally, the fourth and arguably most important approach builds on Deleuze and Guattari’s “non-linear, anarchic and nomadic” (Carpentier et al. 2003, p. 61) concept of the rhizome and uses it as a metaphor to both “highlight the role of community media as the crossroads of organizations and movements linked with civil society.” (p. 61) This approach argues for the contingency and elusiveness of community media, but recognizes the many connections community media has to civil society, the market and the state without having to lose its identity. Taking a less antagonistic (though potentially idyllic) view, this community-media-as-

crossroads approach acknowledges the different types of relationships the media has to the institutions that make up society and emphasizes the importance of the movements of diverse oppressed people to come together in order to allow the “common articulation of, for example, antiracism, antisexism and anticapitalism,” (Mouffe, 1997, p. 18).

The rhizome approach’s applicability to digital storytelling may be found more in the Center for Digital Storytelling itself than in the stories they help to produce. As the central leaders in the standardization of the digital storytelling model, CDS founded the roots out of which many digital storytelling projects around the world have sprung. Their workshops, because they bring together diverse groups of participants, each with a different story to tell, also serve as a kind of crossroads between many different narratives, contexts, and understanding of the world. The center moves from various organizations—some bound by state and market considerations and others that are civil society based in order to conduct its trainings and produce digital stories from various groups in multiple contexts, all under the populist-inspired artistic rubric of a standardized digital storytelling format. The Rhizome approach may also be better able to capture the complexity of relationships each storyteller has to the content of his/her material, the culture from which she/he is speaking, and the political and economic constraints that have surely informed her/his narrative, in a way that is useful for understanding how the story can transform the public sphere and society itself.

Figure 1. Digital Storytelling and the Four Approaches to Community Media

1) Serving the Community 11) An Alternative to Mainstream Civil Society 111) Links to IV) Rhizome

<p>Ideas and narratives are exchanged, shared, discussed and created in a safe community space</p>	<p>Rooted in self-representation as opposed to media professionals speaking for others</p>	<p>Independent from state and market forces and regulation</p>	<p>Digital storytelling is contingent upon the community and elusive as long as it remains independent</p>
<p>Participants decide which stories they are going to tell and how they are going to tell them.</p>	<p>Stories are made using small-scale equipment, which participants learn how to use during the course of a three-day workshop</p>	<p>Potential to promote more authentic forms of democracy by contributing additional voices to the public sphere</p>	<p>The Center for Digital Storytelling is connected to civil society, the market and the state in various ways while still maintaining its distinct identity</p>
<p>Narratives are culturally relative; process provides opportunity for</p>	<p>Because the workshops do support various voices, the content</p>	<p>The voices of people who have been marginalized and oppressed,</p>	<p>CDS workshops, because they bring together diverse groups of</p>

<p>misrepresented, disadvantaged, stigmatized, and repressed to benefit by having voice heard</p>	<p>is more diverse than that often found in mainstream media</p>	<p>and who largely remain voiceless in the mainstream can use digital stories to contribute their voice and experiences to the global picture</p>	<p>participants, each with a different story to tell serve as a crossroads between many different narratives, contexts, and understandings of the world</p>
<p>DVDs and discussion guides around stories are used to raise awareness and effectuate positive social change by and for community members</p>	<p>This potential “breeding ground” for innovation can lead the mainstream to copy it. For example corporations are using digital stories to get their message across</p>	<p>The process of making and publishing a digital story is an exercise of a human right to communicate</p>	<p>The digital stories, though each unique and culturally relative can unite and inform others going through similar experiences (domestic abuse survivors, immigrants,</p>

			refugees, etc.)
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Conclusion

Digital storytelling is a mediatized transformation of a timeless process and a product—the implications of which are just beginning to be explored. At the risk of sounding somewhat contradictory, I want to end this paper by acknowledging Hartley’s argument that digital storytelling be used for more than self-expression (2009). He warns that the cultivation of the personal as sufficient ambition for the majority (while those ‘in the know’ disappear behind closed institutional doors) can lead to the very evils of relativism that experts rail against, encouraging the general public to believe that anything goes, that knowledge is only a matter of opinion, or that self expression is the highest form of communication. (p. 208)

This paper suggests that it is indeed possible to have both a democratic space for the self expression of people who have heretofore been ignored and neglected in the public sphere, AND to use the digital storytelling process to generate new argumentation, new forms of journalism and new works of the imagination. Hartley (2009) goes on to argue that digital storytelling needs to be understood as an extension of the possibilities of knowledge, even while their *experiential* self-expression may be an assault on the closed expert system as such. He suggests that when large numbers of otherwise excluded (or neglected) people are emancipated into the ‘freedom of the internet,’ it will, if successful and if pushed beyond a ‘look at me’ stage, assist not only in self-expression and communication but also in the development of knowledge...” (p. 208) Further exploration is needed of the ways this “development of knowledge” can be used to promote sustainable social change.

By focusing on the Center for Digital Storytelling and its Silence Speaks initiative, this paper engaged the complexities of the participatory model as it informed the intention behind digital storytelling (but not always the reality) and situated digital storytelling as a direct challenge to the notion of mass media information dissemination, signifying a representation from the contributor him/herself, distributed in a public space that makes the story accessible to others in a way it was never before. The participatory model, building on a Freirian notion that all people have the right to individually and collectively speak their word, is reflected in the capacity for digital stories to give people a voice in the public sphere who formerly did not have a voice. Each narrator is responsible not only for his/her story, but for producing it and editing it as he/she sees fit. Addressing the inevitable expert/amateur binary in the context of the participant method as it relates to the digital storytelling workshops becomes of crucial importance in order to create the dialogic community required for the process.

The paper explored Internet access issues and made two arguments for digital storytelling's potential to contribute to new forms of democracy. One: Engaging in a form of public media that is participatory, self authored, and produced, digital storytelling plays an important role in the empowerment of people who have before been voiceless in the public arena. Two: Despite the fact that less than 20 percent of the world's population has access to the Internet, it is important to view the success of digital storytelling and its ability to promote social change relative to the impact the stories and the process of creating them have on the local community that is making them. The Story Circles in CDS workshops share some resonances with oral storytelling as do the digital stories themselves by incorporating music, drama, art and poetry into the process of sharing and creating digital stories. Most ancient societies,

racess and religions have used different kinds of folk media to create, reflect, educate and entertain their community with culturally specific and unique features relative to the context of the group. By returning to that, we are also returning to more horizontal and participatory forms of communication.

The last part of the paper made an argument for the applicability of the four theoretical approaches to community media (Carpentier et al. 2003) to the role and purpose of digital storytelling in order to begin to develop an analytic framework for understanding the multiple ways these stories can be used locally and globally to promote sustainable social change—both in the potential for promoting a more authentic democracy in the public sphere and in the local community-centered processes of creating them in the first place. Storytelling—as art form, media text, and practical means of communicating—will no doubt continue to endure the cycles and various manifestations that come with changing times and technologies. As we are decentered and transfigured by the multiple effects of globalization, the implications of storytelling’s transformation into digital mediatized form necessitates deeper analysis particularly in the context of its potential contribution to sustainable social change.

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