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Practice Section Panel Proposal for MeCCSA 2008: The (Mal)Content Generation: Media Practice in the Digital Environment

The internet and convergent digital technologies have had huge implications across a range of media practices, including citizen journalism and "vanity publishing" sites such as lulu.com; internet film distribution (from *Blair Witch* to YouTube.com); mobile phone distribution (blip.tv); peer-to-peer networking (MySpace.com, FaceBook.com) and photo-sharing (Flickr.com); music distribution (iTunes.com); digital radio; video and podcasting; interactive digital TV and 360-degree broadcasting, not to mention gaming and the possibilities of new media. These in turn are changing the business models of media production and "threatening" traditional industry structures in print journalism, publishing, broadcasting, music and cinema distribution. The profusion of screens and contexts for consumption of various types of media is matched by the supposed democratisation of media production, in tandem with the technological means for peer-to-peer distribution and user-generated content.

As practice researchers and teachers we are at the coalface of emerging trends in digital content, but this word "content" begs many questions: What does the term "content" imply? And what does it suggest about the "work of production" that goes in to producing specific media texts? Is the attention span of today's audiences becoming too jaded to engage with content that is more considered or crafted? What are the aesthetic/ontological implications of digital media? Is the technology dictating content? Are we dealing with anti-content? Is anything validated as content just because it is recorded? Is "authenticity" still a useful concept?

How are we as practitioners using the demotic/democratic possibilities of these new technologies to advance our own research and/or teaching? How do these changing technologies demand us to be self-reflective about our assumptions of what is "content" in our own practice and teaching?
What are the ethics of "content"? As teachers, how do we engage the "click – shoot" generation in debates about content, philosophy, social issues and responsibility? What are the issues in terms of intellectual copyright and cross-platform exploitation? What are the emerging business models? How is the industry adapting to this new digital environment? How are broadcasters reacting to the threats and opportunities presented by digital culture?

The panel will take the form of three presentations with an introduction by the Practice Section Chair, Charlotte Crofts, and a discussion chaired by Laura Sims and Sarah Jeans.

Speakers:
Victoria Mapplebeck (RHUL)
Dr Tom Abba (UWE)
Adnan Hadzi (Goldsmiths)

TEXT ME: A Cross platform documentary project in development with Matt Locke, Commissioning Editor in New Media, Channel 4
Victoria Mapplebeck, RHUL

Text Me is an online documentary, exploring the lives of young people via their mobile phones. Each subject will allow us a glimpse into their world via their phone. Who's in their contacts? What text stories are in their message box? Who features in their photos and videos? Each subject's phone will provide a map of their lives and relationships. Each text or photo will lead us onto another relationship dynamic and story.

How do subjects navigate their relationships with the fast track intimacy of SMS but also its avoidance of face-to-face contact? When and why do we send a text rather than make a phone call? SMS seems perfect for 'I'm running late', 'c u at 7'. How do we manage the trickier, more contentious relationship issues in 160 characters? How effective is the medium for the message? SMS is on one level ephemeral and yet we archive these messages. With increasingly large phone memories, texts are stored in our phones for months before we move onto another upgrade. Text me will look at these archives in forensic detail. Each subject's mobile phone texts, photos and videos will be featured in their portraits. Ongoing observational films of each subject will be regularly online. Each short, a montage of observational footage and mobile phone content, sent texts, photos and videos. How do subjects interrupt, interpret and interact with each other's lives via mobile technologies? Text Me will investigate the language of SMS. This research will explore how SMS is constantly changing ideas around communication, privacy, and intimacy.

Why Openness Matters: the Deptford.TV Project
Adnan Hadzi, Goldsmiths

Deptford.TV (http://www.deptford.tv) enables participants and those traditionally excluded from the mainstream media, upload and share their films and video blogs online using free and open source software, such as Broadcast Machine. Deptford.TV is a research project on collaborative film - making initiated by Adnan Hadzi in collaboration with the Deckspace media lab, Bitnik collective, Boundless project, Liquid Culture initiative, and Goldsmiths College. It is an online media database documenting the regeneration process of Deptford, in South- East London. Deptford.TV functions as an open, collaborative platform that allows artists, filmmakers and people living and working around Deptford to store, share, re- edit and redistribute the documentation of the regeneration process. The open and collaborative aspect of the project is of particular importance as it manifests a form of liberated media practice. In the case of Deptford.TV this aspect is manifested in two ways:

a) audiences can become producers by submitting their own footage;
b) the interface that is being used enables thecontributors to discuss and interact with each other through the database.

Deptford.TV is a form of 'television', since audiences are able to choose edited 'timelines' they would like to watch; at the same time they have the option to comment on or change the actual content. Deptford.TV makes use

of licenses such as the creative commons and gnu general public license to allow and enhance this politics of sharing.

This presentation will introduce the Deptford.TV project, which aims to democratize peoples' capacity to upload and share video on the web. The paper argues for the importance (in terms pf policy recommendation when funding and developing projects) of:

a) The use of open source software, which ensures the users continued control over the infrastructure for distribution;

b) The capacity building participants in the technical aspects of developing an on-line distribution infrastructure that they themselves can operate and control, empowering them to share and distribute production work both locally and internationally.

Meigeist: Emergent Story within Embedded Narrative
Dr Tom Abba, University of the West of England

Making use of a mix of virtual environments and the real environment in which we live, Alternate Reality Games (ARGs) are the latest incarnation of player-led internet narratives. They present a fictional reality with a narrative played out over a period of time, over a series of linked websites, posing as real businesses, organisations, blogs or other sources of information. ARGs are developed for a variety of purposes, such as promoting summer blockbuster films – but in a recent collaboration with Licorice Films and HP Labs, Dr. Tom Abba of UWE's Faculty of Creative Arts led a five month project to research the possibility of producing a high quality independent game, free of commercial constraints.

The resultant project, /Mei/geist, funded in part by the AHRC's Knowledge Catalyst fund, ran over 8 weeks in early 2007. With 30,000 participants world-wide, the game involved 10 bespoke websites, 40 puzzles, hundreds of emails, letters and phone calls, all with a high level of personal interaction between the players and the story characters. The project was intended to become a model for game development outside of the established route of studio sponsorship, demonstrating the potential of this form as a model for developing interactive narratives. Dr. Abba will present an overview of the game structure, and consider the potential of the ARG form for cross disciplinary practice-led teaching in Higher Education.

Licorice Film's archive of the key sites featured in the production of /Mei/geist is available at: http://licorice-media.com/Meigeist.html