

Digital Storytelling at the BBC: the reality of innovative audience participation

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Digital Storytelling as a specific multimedia form emerged in the US in the 1990s and involves the creation of short, often personal 'stories' on industry standard software and hardware in workshop environments. The form has been adapted for use within the BBC under the banner of 'Capture Wales', and represents an innovative approach to 'audience' participation and interactivity. Ultimately, Capture Wales workshops teach members of the Welsh public how to create their own television, and in so doing, disrupt the traditional value chain of production.

Between 2002 and 2005, I carried out doctoral research at Cardiff University, Wales, which documented the history of the form, the reasoning behind the Capture Wales project's inception, and evaluated the impact of participation upon those people who contributed their stories. In presenting findings from the research, I hope to spark discussion on the reality of utilising innovative new approaches to audience engagement within a Corporation that is simultaneously learning to operate within a global media market.

Introduction: interactive and participatory media forms

The dialogue surrounding the growth of and (both creative and financial) investment in supposed interactive media forms requires large-scale research and systematic enquiry. This paper does not profess to provide such comprehensive analysis, but does seek to locate and discuss the true 'interactiveness' of one participatory media project instigated in the United Kingdom by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), specifically the national service in Wales, BBC Wales or BBC Cymru.

Interactive media forms, and the 'level playing field' upon which their future trades, are said to usher in an increasingly democratic media spectrum (Kawamoto, 1998; Sarikakis, 2004). In the most 'techno-utopian' of the literature, the result is in fact not a spectrum at all, but a complex network of nodes: unique users, content providers.

A medium or piece of content's level of interactivity can be defined 'on the basis of the freedom granted to the user and the degree of interactivity of his [or her] interventions' (Ryan, 2001: 205). An interactive text is 'a machine fueled by the input of the user' (Ryan, 2001. 210). Marie-Laure Ryan's discussion of interactivity highlights various attractions to both 'users' and 'authors' including (for users) being able to shift perspectives on a text or explore the field of the possible, playing games, or partaking in the composition of that text. For authors, the benefits include proposing alternative versions of events, suggesting relations between different segments and providing extra, (perhaps even evolving), background information (Ryan, 2001). This

is especially easy to envision and construct online, and increasingly also through 'red button' television technology.

However, there is, at this stage in the development of two-way communications, much discussion about the true interactivity of much media that espouses itself to be so. If interactivity involves the 'input of the user', then this should perhaps be free of limitations. Current 'interactivity' tends to utilise fields whose parameters are identified and maintained by an 'author', interaction for the user is thus responsive rather than innovative, as Ryan explains:

If the reader or spectator can choose whether Jack will be a hero or a coward, this means that Jack's behaviour, and by extension the fate of the entire fictional world, is determined not by any kind of internal necessity but by the decisions of an omnipotent creator located in the real world. Yet the loss of the sense of the autonomy of the fictional world that occurs at every decision point is not compensated by a gain of creative power, because the choices are all prescribed paths... they [the user] are themselves puppets of the author. (Ryan, 2001: 283)

Perhaps what we are witnessing at the current time is increased comfort with and experience of 'participatory' media forms. The increase in weblogs, newsgroups, forums and instant messaging for example make 'users' 'creators' also, a move that is heralded as having a future stake in the look, priorities and values of journalism itself (Bowman & Willis, 2004; Gillmor, 2006; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001). According to Bowman & Willis:

'the audience has taken on the roles of publisher, broadcaster, editor, content creator (writer, photographer, videographer, cartoonist), commentator, documentarian, knowledge manager (librarian), journaler and advertiser (buyer and seller).' (Bowman & Willis, 2004)

This trend is likened by many of the above commentators and theorists to a 'conversation', as an article in *The Economist* earlier this year did also (Kluth, 2006). This analogy suggests the interchange made possible by new technologies. But, as Daniel Palmer distinguishes, participation and interaction are two quite separate propositions; 'To participate means to take part or share in something, while to interact is to act reciprocally' (Palmer, 2004). Opportunities to enter a genuine two-way communication (let alone actually instigate one) are still fairly minimal within

the mainstream media especially, which is precisely why I propose the BBC's Digital Storytelling initiative is such an interesting topic for observation and analysis.

Disrupting the value chain

Some, such as Sven Birkerts, have viewed increasing experimentation with interactivity or non-linear narratives as being tantamount to a destruction of that which makes us human.¹ In his book *The Gutenberg Elegies* (1994) Birkerts fights for the restoration of traditional mechanisms for reading and writing, as, to his eyes, technology renders story 2-D, unwieldy and unimaginably dull. According to Birkerts, our descriptions of the world and people around us, indeed our art, have nothing to gain from the advent of new technology, but everything to lose. In response, Steven Johnson calls Birkerts' publication "an assault on the forking paths of nonlinear narrative" (Johnson, 1997: 127) which require us to read in new 'nonlinear' ways. Scott Stossel also uses the analogy of an assault or a war:

Birkerts considers himself a foot soldier in an urgent battle, "The Reading Wars," in which technology and the soul are locked in combat, and in which nothing less than the fate of society is at stake. (Stossel, 1995)

Discussion of the nature of reading and the notion of authoring remains an ongoing postmodern concern. Roland Barthes' influential essay *The Death of the Author* (1977) had proposed a transitory future for story which would see the traditional role of the author redundant. Traditional analyses of literature that concentrated on the author and their intended reading of a text were, to Barthes, a simplification of the process of authoring and narrating. In reality, according to Barthes, a disconnection occurs in the moment of utterance, 'the voice loses its origin' (Barthes, 1977). Meaning making thus becomes an interpretive task.

Sven Birkerts also (reluctantly) admits that this process is occurring:

... the overall rescripting of all societal premises is bound to affect reading and writing immensely. The formerly stable system – the axis with writer at one end, editor, publisher, and bookseller in the middle and reader at the other end – is slowly being bent into a pretzel. (Birkerts, 1994: 5)

¹ The link between storytelling and humanity is made frequently in both popular and academic debate (see for example Fulford, 1999: 14; Finnegan, 1997: 70; Sloane, 2000: 189).

What we are seeing is a metamorphosis in what Paterson (2002) calls the value chain. This 'value chain' (created in reference to television, but applicable to any medium whereby content is handed from one source to another through intermediaries), positions contributors and programme makers at the top, and the audience four steps down in the chain, kept at a distance by broadcasters and distributors (Paterson, 2002: 137). But this value chain of traditional producer-consumer relationships is being fundamentally shaken, or 'bent into a pretzel' by developments in technology such as the Internet, and even projects like *Capture Wales*.

Digital Storytelling as alternative citizens' media

Digital Storytelling originated in America as an alternative media form with an ethos of democratisation. Taught in community workshops, the form allows complete control of representation to remain in the hands of the storyteller, and for those stories produced as a result of workshops to be used in any way the maker deems appropriate. Often used as a form of therapy, workshop participants learn, and pay to learn, not only how to use the technology, but also a lot about their notions of self and ability. According to Joe Lambert, Digital Storytelling 'movement' co-founder and Director of the Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS) in Berkely, California, the form is 'wonderfully democratic' by its very nature.² The workshop movement stemmed from the discovery by storyteller and new media enthusiast, Dana Atchley, of a form of communication capable of inspiring observers to want to create their own stories.³

CDS workshops are held with the following principals in mind: Everyone has a 'vivid, complex and rich source of stories to share'; listening is hard; different people have different approaches to story and thus 'there is no formula'; creative activity is human activity (a link I come back to later in this paper); and finally, computers provide 'virtually inexhaustible potential ... for creative endeavor' (CDS, date unspecified). These five principals have informed and shaped the methodology behind the three day workshop process.

² For more information about Joe Lambert and the Center for Digital Storytelling, see www.storycenter.org.

³ The work of Dana Winslow Atchley III is still available online at www.nextexit.com.

During a Digital Storytelling workshop, participants are responsible for providing a story idea, a script, images, their voice, their creative (and often their emotional) energy. They are encouraged to work toward personal stories in the first person, hence the emotional resonance of the stories, and for many the experience also. Over the course of the workshop, storytellers discover the basics of industry standard photo manipulation and editing software and how to use them to their own advantage. They remain completely in control of the story told, the images used to ‘illustrate’ it, the words, the tone, the cadence, and it’s ‘truth’ (or otherwise). After the workshop, participants are able to take a copy of their story and its component parts away with them, and to use it in any way they wish. Stories do not contribute to a publicly available online archive (as with the BBC), although CDS do now offer a StoryPlace which can be accessed via a log in (log in details are only available by contacting the Center).

According to definitions of alternative, citizens’ or radical media (Chris Atton, Clemencia Rodriguez and John Downing’s respective terms) we see that Digital Storytelling is indeed an example of progressive work within the field of participatory media. The form deals with creative expression; promotes democratic processes of production and distribution; blurs the distinction between producers and those uninspiringly referred to as ‘consumers’; shows a commitment to innovation and experimentation; often deals with the opinions of minorities and subject matter that is not given regular coverage; and even allows people to express attitudes that are hostile to widely held beliefs.

But does Digital Storytelling allow for all of these things when appropriated within a public service environment? What happens when a form such as this is taken and used by the BBC? Is it indicative of that which John Fiske identifies as containment? Taking an application and subsuming it in a bid to control its application. Or is it the far less cynical sounding process of incorporation? A process that hints at a genuine form of communication, knowledge exchange and respect between media organisations and those previously lumped together as audiences. In that case we would be looking at a genuinely interactive relationship.

For the most part, radical or alternative media provide facts to the public that might otherwise be denied and “explore fresh ways of developing a questioning perspective on the hegemonic process and increasing the public’s sense of confidence in its power to engineer constructive change” (Downing et al, 2001: 16). In the case of the media, this involves questioning the methods through which we consent to be ‘given’ media, and increasing the belief amongst ‘audiences’ that they could create more relevant and challenging content themselves. As we will see, these debates are central to dialogues surrounding the BBC’s Digital Storytelling initiative, but the extent to which they are enabled and sustained in practice has yet to be fully investigated.

Interestingly, alternative media forms, often considered worthy by their very existence, have received little or no academic attention in terms of actual ‘users’:

It is a paradox, however, that so little attention has been dedicated to the user dimension, given that alternative-media activists represent in a sense the most active segment of the so-called ‘active audience’. (Downing et al, 2001: 625)

It is this discrepancy that has been at the heart of my research into the *Capture Wales* Digital Storytelling initiative.

Does Capture Wales represent ‘wonderful democracy’?

As the nation’s principal public service broadcaster, the BBC (have to) have a vested interest in the progressions, opportunities and limitations inherent to interactive and participatory media forms. It is intended that these forms will ‘enhance the value’ of the Corporation’s output through the provision of ‘non-linear content’, either ‘to’ consumers or ‘by’ contributors.⁴ Under the auspices of New Media, the BBC currently host eight ‘interactive’ channels for television, and red button technology and Internet services 24/7 through BBCi. On the BBC’s extensive website (at www.bbc.co.uk/capturewales) one can choose a Digital Story from within the Challenge, Community, Family, Memory or Passion categories to view on demand. Under one of the red button offerings – Your Stories – a number of ‘Digital Stories’ change daily and repeat on a loop. Occasionally, one also chances upon a Digital

⁴ The current BBC annual report for 2005/6 available at <http://www.bbcgovernors.co.uk/annreport/report06/07.newmediareview.pdf> outlines the BBC ‘line’ on interactive content.

Story on BBC2W (The Welsh regional digital output). All of this Digital Storytelling provision falls within the Welsh national New Media output, and, under the banner of *Capture Wales*, has enabled the creation of over 500 stories since its launch in 2001.⁵

Bowman & Willis identify the benefits of participatory journalism as follows; increased trust in media; a feeling of shared responsibility for informing democracy; the creation of memorable experiences; the formation of a new generation of news consumers who are comfortable with interaction; the creation of better stories and storytellers; an informal virtual staff network; and also, the fostering of community. It comes as no surprise that all of these elements are of interest to a BBC constantly seeking justification in the face of increasing licence fees, a cyclical Charter renewal process and growing competition from an increasing number of sources (locally, nationally, globally). The aims behind the inception of the *Capture Wales* project echo those perceived benefits as outlined above. They were; connecting with communities; opening up new lines of talent; building an archive of the ‘real’ Wales; and providing training opportunities. There was also a desire, expressed by Daniel Meadows, Creative Director of the project and catalyst for Digital Storytelling in Wales, to create a nation of storytellers who were making media themselves not being ‘done to’ by a mass media.

The *Capture Wales* initiative involves monthly five day workshops held throughout Wales with around ten people at a time. During each workshop participants take part in scripting and storytelling sessions, capture images, learn how to use software including Adobe Photoshop and Premiere, record a voiceover, and compile a finished film ahead of a screening on the final day that is attended by participants, their friends and families. Digital Stories in the *Capture Wales* model conform to strict limitations in terms of length and copyright restrictions, stories are roughly 250 words and 2 to 3 minutes long. These restrictions are imposed due to the technicalities of showing stories on the web, and in order to preserve what Daniel Meadows calls the ‘multimedia sonnet’ nature of the form (this perhaps interferes with the ‘interactivity without limits’ arguments outlined previously).

⁵ The ‘Telling Lives’ Digital Storytelling project in the English regions (Hull and Blackburn) was a shortlived ‘pilot’ project fashioned on the *Capture Wales* model. The stories are still available to view

I was able to spend three years following the *Capture Wales* phenomenon both physically, and through its various permutations and trials within the BBC itself. This involved participant-observation of the workshop process, ethnographic study at the BBC in Cardiff, survey administering and analysis, interviewing and archival research. In total, 116 workshop participants were followed up on their experiences, and 152 applications, stories and feedback forms were analysed. At no point has any one narrative of the workshop process been privileged over another.

An analysis of the data shows that workshop participants are, on the whole, representative of the population of Wales, more so than in any other archive produced within the mainstream media, real 'Welsh' people of all ages are getting their opportunity to speak. They are however not solely Welsh and English speaking Welsh people. Both non-UK and English born residents are also well represented. Ethnic minorities actually make up a disproportionately high percentage of participants. This is good news in a media system where legitimacy is too often equated with official 'white', often male, voices.

When asked why they chose to tell their particular story, the given reasons vary immensely and are worth reproducing here for the insight they allow into respondents perceptions of use-value as ascribed to this type of media production. Some articulate their reasoning as a hope that they might be able to pass on a message born of experience:

'We wanted other people to gather strength from the possibility that not all bad news spells doom and gloom for ever.'

'I feel that if my story gives just one victim, man or woman, the courage and incentive to get out of a similar situation and turn their lives around too, then my story will not have been made in vain.'

'If my story can help anyone to come to terms with their depression, then it has been well worthwhile.'

'I hope it acts as a deterrent for other young people who are thinking of following the same road as I did.'

'I wanted to tell this story as hopefully it will be an inspiration for other children with disabilities.'

'I hope this film will give people like me the inspiration to kick the habit.'

'I wanted to tell this story in the hope that it might inspire people and make them realise that life is there for the taking.'

at www.bbc.co.uk/tellinglives. The project, never given the same level of financial or resource investment as *Capture Wales*, ended in 2005.

‘The focus of my story is not looking back reminiscing, but look forward... I can’t change my past, but I can let it have a positive effect on my own and my children’s future.’

Others expressed a desire to self-medicate or enact some kind of catharsis through the workshop process and the story’s telling:

‘Yes I had a story to tell and in a strange way telling this story would be putting the past to sleep, a moving on process.’
[The story intends to] ‘officially announce the end of my dream – a bit of self-therapy if you like.’
‘Telling my story felt as though I had lifted a heavy burden from my back. The slate was clean and I could move on. That period of my life now had a line drawn under it.’
‘It allowed me to come to terms with the loss of my grandson and my grandmother. Boosted my confidence no end.’
‘Telling and making the story was a kind of a catharsis.’
‘It was a very emotional and cathartic experience.’
‘Personally I gained a lot emotionally from my experience because of the story I told. It was therapeutic for me and my family.’
‘In a way I won’t go into detail over, it has helped to lay a personal ghost.’
‘Yes, it took a lot of courage to write my story and admit that I had been ill.’

Another common reason for the telling of a particular story is the storyteller’s wish to commemorate a life, to pin it down before it is lost to others, and even to themselves:

‘I needed to sanctify what was a very small, and very short life, which would have gone otherwise unnoticed.’
‘I wanted to reclaim my uncle’s story and make something positive out of it.’
‘It’s a tribute to my mother.’
‘A celebration of my mother’s life. I wanted to show that you can be thankful and celebrate life without being overwhelmed by grief.’
‘I wanted to capture and relive something of the memories of my father.’

Other stories centre on storytellers’ passions. They are love stories with often interesting or surprising subjects; human or otherwise:

‘I’m pathological about spreading the word of the multiple benefits that yoga brings.’
‘I was going to tell a story about my mental health problems, but after the storytelling workshop I decided to make it more personal and tell my own love story.’
‘because I like motorbikes.’
‘I chose to tell this story because its [sic] one of my obsessions.’
‘The story is about introducing myself to Wales, saying, ‘I have arrived and my God – I love this place’.’
‘My story is about a chair in our dining room at home which is featured in every photo we take.’

Stories of passion for a ‘thing’ often prove to be stories articulating feelings for family or friends through that object, as is the case in the final quote above. Other stories centre around a wish to describe childhood events or portray family/local history. Some participants express a wish simply to entertain the audience through comedy, and yet another treats the question itself – Why this particular story? – with humour, and a rather accurate understanding of broadcast limitations; ‘I chose to tell this story

due to the fact that my initial idea – about a number of prominent Hollywood actors in compromising positions was rejected immediately”.

Integral to decisions appertaining to the story’s focus and content is the workshop process as a whole, and the ‘story circle’ in particular. The ‘story circle’ day involves the playing of a number of ‘games’ in order to get to the participant’s true voice and a story idea, all the time promoting a ‘group conference’ approach to feedback on both (Kamler, 2001). The experience of story‘making’ in its wider workshop context is looked back on overwhelmingly positively by respondents in retrospect. Both the group dynamic and BBC team rate very highly, as would perhaps be the expectation when we are dealing with fairly intimate workshops held by a prominent local and national broadcaster at no cost to participants. 80% of respondents rated the whole experience as a positive one, with 79% saying that the workshop experience would have a lasting effect on their lives. This is commonly because of the perceived therapeutic nature of the workshop process, or resultant changes in their working lives. The therapeutic angle is one that I had not anticipated in its voracity prior to the data collection, and there remain questions to be asked about the involvement of a corporation like the BBC in ‘rehabilitation’ on this level with what remains a relatively small proportion of the licence payers. Nowhere within the literature about public service broadcasting and the BBC have I seen a recommendation to carry out work that insights a response akin to therapy. However, this is perhaps a natural by-product of any creative endeavour whereby people are encouraged to think about events in their lives in such a way, and the emphasis is on photographic elements and often ‘the past’ (Kamler, 2001; Dwelly, 2001; Rodriguez, 2002; Crossley, 2003; Lambert, 2004). A total of 27 per cent of respondents volunteered information about the therapeutic or cathartic nature of the workshop process (unprompted by the researcher). This ultimately has implications for how individuals formulate and articulate their ideas of self.

In his 1989 book *Understanding Popular Culture*, John Fiske highlights jeans as Capitalism made material, and their ‘ripping’ as an act of resistance, and refers to both literal and metaphorical ‘tearing’ of cultural artefacts from their traditional symbolism and ideological power. In the case of *Capture Wales*, the ‘tearing’ is not only of traditional media hierarchies (temporarily), but of notions of self also. The

‘new loci of speech’ (Poster, 1995: 614) enabled by new technologies creates not only an active, democratic, reappropriated ‘audience’, but new selves. Mark Poster’s 1995 study of postmodern virtualities goes beyond the questions raised by Downing and Fiske about alternative media and their affects on the public sphere, active groups of people and power structures, investigating how oppositional activity fundamentally affects our notions of reality and self. Reality, in the new media age is problematised and multiplied, altering the conditions under which we form our self-identities. Texts are polysemic, meaning is plural, there is no one truth, power and resistance are everywhere. The way we perceive ourselves is changing as a result:

For what is at stake in these technical innovations, I contend, is not simply an increased ‘efficiency’ of interchange, enabling new avenues of investment, increased productivity at work and new domains of leisure and consumption, but a broad and extensive change in the culture, in the way identities are constructed. (Poster, 1995: 611)

A number of questionnaire respondents and interviewees articulated that the *Capture Wales* workshop experience had impacted in some way upon their sense of self. One storyteller even entitled their story ‘self’ and within its context explores personal expectations, fragmentations and confusions. A variety of responses hinted at this kind of re-evaluation:

‘It allowed me to be proud of myself and who I am.’
‘Actually putting your self out there when you read the script, kind of revealing yourself...’
‘I learnt a lot about myself and the BBC.’
‘I found I had something to offer despite my disability.’
‘It was uncomfortable initially to be so open about yourself with a group of strangers but it was an incredibly beneficial, self developing experience, in my opinion.’

Even one respondent who regretted having changed her story idea during the workshop process professed to have learnt something about herself; ‘I thought I would have been stronger and would have stuck to my story the way I wanted to have it made’. Being able to order events and express feelings about passions, loved ones and situations that have been overcome enables individuals to consolidate who they are, the act of construction gives them a sense of unity and peace (see the work of narrative psychologists including Dan P. McAdams and Michele Crossley). The nature of the workshop set-up however, and the affordances of the technology being utilised mean that the story remains “ a highly crafted text – rather than an anguished

outpouring of self' (Kamler, 2001: 58), again we are reminded that these are 'considered narratives', 'multimedia sonnets' (Meadows, 2004).

The technology is the most mixed topic for response. Many profess to have struggled with the technology during the workshop, and 'thank god' for the team. But, interestingly, of those who have struggled, many have gone on to have a further relationship with the technology far surpassing their previous limitations. This is true not only for younger participants, but for those older participants also, who, although not going on to make more stories are enabled to advance their use of such things as computers and digital cameras. They are not however, on the whole, becoming a nation of digital storytellers:

- 'I would like to but have been short on time.'
- 'I don't have anywhere to use it.'
- 'No unfortunately, do you know how much it costs?'
- 'No access to programmes.'
- 'No equipment but would love it.'
- 'Sadly no, acquired the software but need a more reliable computer, as soon as that is dealt with, I will have a few more tales off my chest.'
- 'No, I'm not computer minded.'
- 'No time or need. As time goes on, I am less confident.'
- 'No, but I would love the opportunity to do so.'
- 'No, but maybe in the future.'

As can be seen above this is in part due to lack of access to the tools of production, but it is also in part due to a feeling that they are privileged. A lucky few (as indeed they might be) who have received a one-off gift in the form of an opportunity to create media. They do not leave the workshop environment feeling that this should be their right. Nick Couldry also identifies this phenomenon when looking at the interventions of 'non-media people' within mainstream media. He outlines a number of problematising factors, not least (as with *Capture Wales*) the fact that the work remains framed as 'infrequent' or 'exceptional' and continues to take place in spaces and contexts that remain strictly controlled. However, Couldry holds that this does not negate the significance of the intervention: '...just because a social process is relatively rare does not mean that it is insignificant' (Couldry, 2000: 275). We have seen that the Digital Storytelling process is of great significance to many *Capture Wales* participants, but how significant is firstly, its presence within the 'media' (in terms of penetration), and secondly, it's philosophy for a Corporation like the BBC?

Does Capture Wales constitute innovative audience participation?

Those voices heard as part of *Capture Wales*, and the participants who provide them, certainly represent a wider spectrum of viewpoint than has previously been available in the media in Wales, although it is debatable how much these stories have penetrated the media in actuality. Osmond (1995) and Cameron (1999) both agree that historically, representations of the Welsh within the media have been either stereotypical or entirely absent. At the heart of the BBC's investment in Digital Storytelling is an interest in 'ordinary life'.⁶ At the same time as there is increased concern with and dedication to Globalisation (within the BBC also), the BBC continues to see benefit in investing in projects operating on a more local scale – New Media and interactive services seem to offer the Corporation a perfect 'catch-all' for these kinds of operations.

Research shows that the *Capture Wales* project is succeeding in being absolutely about those things that were at the forefront of its inception; 'connecting with communities', digital literacy, creating content and building an archive. It is also, no doubt, about public relations (66 per cent of respondents professed to have a more positive view of the BBC in retrospect). But, by accident, it also encompasses a number of other themes, not least therapy and achievement on a personal level. In this respect it can be (but is not universally) life-altering stuff. Most of the people I have questioned and talked to do not tend to go on and make stories of their own, but they do feel differently about the technology, their limitations and abilities, and the BBC.

But Digital Stories' current audience online is both hard to measure, and dependent on access to resources unavailable to much of the Welsh population. At the present time, 52 per cent of Welsh households have access to the Internet (National Statistics, 2006), the principal outlet for the stories' dissemination. For Digital Stories on television (mostly BBC2W) the potential audience is much higher - digital penetration in Wales was 80 per cent by the close of 2005 – the highest in the UK (OFCOM, 2005). During the data collection period however, the quantitative impact of the stories on BBC2W in terms of output and audience was impossible to distinguish (the data being too scarce, and the numbers apparently too small).

⁶ In the vein of past BBC projects such as *Video Nation* in the 1990s, *The Radio Ballads* in the '50s and the recordings of Olive Shapley in the '30s

More recently, Digital Stories are being offered nationally as part of the Corporation's red button content. The latest BBC Annual Review cites the 'Your Stories' option as a service highlight, and part of the Corporation's interactive strategy. But how reciprocal is this relationship in actuality?

Participatory in spirit (sharing stories, supplying content and literally working alongside BBC professionals), being a *Capture Wales* 'participant' does engender a two-way 'conversation' with the Corporation at least for the lifespan of the workshop. In this sense it is a genuinely innovative interactive project. But the ways in which the content is used post-workshop rarely resemble a dialogue. In this sense the workshops represent one-off interactions that can have no real lasting impact upon the 'media' as we know it. They do not leave a more democratic media system in their wake. Raymond Williams asserted in 1974 that interactivity represented merely 'reactivity', working within somebody else's model of choice:

... we have to distinguish between reactive and interactive technology. Nearly all equipment that is being currently developed is reactive; the range of choices, both in detail and in scope, is pre-set. (Williams, 1974: 139)

It appears that not a lot has changed.

In the future, as the BBC are learning, interactivity will mean giving licence payers real space to voice their stories, not only as part of a 'user-generated content' catch-all but in a respectful form of knowledge-exchange, like *Capture Wales*. This way, through incorporation of alternative media forms that stress agency, diversity and creativity as being the only proper way forward for a multimedia world, the BBC will be able to challenge those who espouse public service as obsolete in a multi-channel broadcast environment.

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