The Web as a Story Medium

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Hello, I'm Paul. I studied History at UCL, Information Systems at Brighton, and joined Siemens on their graduate scheme in late 2006. Through Siemens' relationship with the BBC, I was fortunate enough to work on the original iPlayer before it was launched.
Hello, I’m Marshall.

- Birthday: 21st July
- New Media are first populated by the forms of older media.
- To fully realise the potential of a medium, we must understand the affordances of that medium.

Thursday, 16 August 2012

iPlayer is a classic case of Marshall McLuhan's analysis that when a new medium is born, the first thing we tend to do with it, is stuff the forms of the older media into it. And that's exactly what we've been doing, in news, too. We write articles (or source them) and distribute them through the Internet.
Hello, I’m Sir Tim.

* Birthday: 8th June
* Use URIs to represent concepts
* Use Semantic Hyperlinks to link concepts together in a meaningful way (‘triples’)

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So, the Web, that’s a thing, right – how about we apply McLuhan to the Semantic Web?
There's nothing wrong with that. But I've always wondered what else we could do. From 2008-2010 I worked on /programmes, a platform that aspires to give every single programme the BBC has ever broadcast (and even some it hasn't) a permanent presence on the Web. Why? Well, there's economies of scale - programmes, although the content may be very different, share some very similar attributes. Secondly, it provides a minimum decent user experience - watch/listen to a programme? You can find something about it online. And thirdly, it points to what I believe is the start of a truly web-native form.
“It’s like there are two views of the world - the solid one around us and the Matrix-style flowing green lines one. In this second world, until you give a thing a name - until you can point at it in greenspace - it simply doesn’t exist...Until we can point at, until we can pick up, until we can handle, we will never be able to use these concepts around us effectively.”

Tom Coates, The Age of Point-at-Things, April 26th 2005


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So, there I was, working on /programmes, and I was thinking - well, this is all very nice, but once you've got the basic information, the audience isn't interested in the programme - they're interested in what's inside the programme itself - the story, the narrative - the characters and the things that happen to them. So, why not give them URIs?
…and when you start to do that, you realise that the old media form - be that audio, visual, text, whatever - is irrelevant. What you begin to do is represent the story in a truly web native form - a set of URIs and hyperlinks. and *that's* what I'm interested in doing.

It's worth digressing briefly here to say that it's not just a case of experimentation (though I do believe that is important) - as we increasingly move onto hundreds of different platforms, and even on to a Web without screens, the most important thing is the Web of data, from which you can build all representations from. what's the skeleton beneath an article, a video etc.

As I say, the traditional media form becomes irrelevant, but so does the genre, to some extent - be it drama, entertainment, history, sport or news - it's all narrative.
A story is a Web – but different parts of this Web can be revealed to the audience at different times.
There’s three layers in this model – the first layer is the Story World, where you establish the characters, the events, the places – and the relationships between them.
For instance, in the Doctor Who universe, we have a story that spans two broadcast episodes - here you can see the significant plot events laid out in the order in which they are revealed to the audience.
We can pick an event – and notice that it’s part of the story web – it refers to an event from a much older story...
....and indeed, that event refers back to something even older.
The Web is the story

Thus, the Story is a Web – and the Web is a Story.
Next, the second layer, the Story Telling – this is the path that the author traces through the web.
Storybox (http://storybox.experthuman.com) was an attempt to experiment with this – revealing information to the audience in a defined order...
Moments in time, different points of view, 24 style.

There are two cappuccinos, half-slurped, on the table in Café Grec. Carl smiles shyly at Martha, who gazes into her coffee as she stirs the foam. Her hair catches the sunlight from the window behind her.
The data underpinning this could be represented in lots of different ways – text (‘cos it was cheapest!) but could be video...audio...
Then there’s the issue of how much the audience knows – i.e. spoilers.
At the end of each episode, you can see what we know about the characters so far.
And you can click on a character and see how much we know about them so far.
Spoiler alert – at the end of episode three, we’ve encountered a mysterious woman....
and by the end of episode Nine, we know she’s someone we’ve already met...

Same character, but information is only revealed progressively.
So, how could this apply to news/journalism?

The articles that we write are the finished product, rendered in a print form. What would it look like if it was web shaped?

Inside out Journalism...

rather than all the good stuff locked up away inside the article (like an app), why not create story webs?

tagging is a start, but that’s about aggregation, not about diving within the article.
Start by making Time addressable.

Then the events.

Then create stories as ordered lists of events.
Of course, we have people (and places) involved in events
And then your journalists interpret the events, with sources, hopefully!
Live blogs are an interesting step towards this – it’s an evolving document, still a document, but can be augmented with URIs – as in the World Cup site...
Everything is linked, Everything is clickable

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Inspiration of Football manager...
Who Knows Who, a story web...
Don’t just use Storify. Try these...

Canon & Interpretation (plural point of view)

Worth saying that it's URIs all the way down - very much an editorial choice. But it doesn't have to be final or perfect - this is an ever growing thing. What's important is that it's creating things for people to then go and play with. Without the URI, it doesn't exist on the Web.

This isn't about robots taking our jobs and telling stories for us (though of course Weavrs is an interesting counterpoint) - if anything, it's telling stories to our computers.

A conversational browser…spoilers etc.

Fun data!
(small demons vs storify, story bricks too)
Thank you.

http://www.r4isstatic.com

Twitter: @r4isstatic

http://www.slideshare.net/r4isstatic

https://speakerdeck.com/u/r4isstatic

http://www.contextus.net/stories

http://storybox.experthuman.com

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