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## Digital Storytelling: The Application of Vichian Theory

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**DIGITAL STORYTELLING: AN APPLICATION OF VICHIAN THEORY**

by

Karen Edwards Pierotti

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of English

Brigham Young University

April 2006

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Karen Edwards Pierotti

This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis of Karen Edwards Pierotti in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

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## ABSTRACT

### DIGITAL STORYTELLING: AN APPLICATION OF VICHIAN THEORY

by

Karen Edwards Pierotti

Department of English

Master of Arts

Storytelling is often looked at as something archaic or something that simpler cultures engage in. However, in our sophisticated and highly technological world storytelling swirls about us though we may not always recognize it.

This thesis looks at the phenomenon of digital storytelling that functions to create community on the Internet. In order to ground this phenomenon in theory, I examine the works of Giambattista Vico, the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Neapolitan philosopher/rhetorician, who lived on the cusp of the Renaissance and the Age of Enlightenment.

Furthermore, as a teacher of rhetoric to youth, Vico admonished young people to study the arts of poetry, painting, and oratory. These three arts are part of digital storytelling with the story line, visuals, and voice over. Digital storytelling, therefore,

reaches more people because these arts are easily understood and accepted by people of all ages and education.

Marshall McLuhan, the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Canadian scholar was an eclectic critic of technology and culture who anticipated the Internet. McLuhan used Vichian theory as the basis for some of his writings on technology.

My study synthesizes and makes connections between McLuhan's writings on technology and the particular technology of digital storytelling. The new technologies bring back a secondary orality as well as more visual communication such as the radio and television in a print saturated culture. Today we are living in a world where writing, the spoken word and music, and visual images blend together in the digital milieu of the Internet. Digital storytelling is just one way that technology is being used to enhance an ancient genre. As one of its goals is to create community, this genre is trying to achieve what McLuhan suggested in the coming together of a global village.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to sincerely thank the members of my graduate committee—Gary Hatch, Greg Clark, and Grant Boswell—for all the dedication and time they spent in guiding me as I not only completed this thesis but pursued graduate studies. Their encouragement and support helped me meet the challenge of completing the thesis especially at times when I felt overwhelmed. They are exceptional teachers and scholars, and I am grateful that I had the opportunity to learn from them both inside and outside the classroom; they inspired and pushed me to enlarge my own scholarship in ways I had not thought possible. I especially want to thank Gary Hatch whose own interests and studies inspired the topic of my thesis.

Many people in my neighborhood were also supportive and encouraging including my home teachers, Hal and Janet Stock, and friends, Lori Raymond and Becky Buxton who supplied not only chocolate and aromatherapy at stressful times but a listening ear. Joyce Baggerly and Lou Ann Crisler also kept me going when writer's block hit.

I dedicate this thesis to my husband, Leon Peter Pierotti, and my children, Gian, Chiara, Anna and Angelica. I hope my children will learn from my own experiences that in spite of an uneven and disjointed education over the years, it's never too late when one perseveres and has good mentors.



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## Chapter One: Digital Storytelling

This place was very different 70 years ago but so was I . . . (Sheen). So reads the caption above a small black and white photo of a group of children and a smiling woman. When I click on the title AFlashback@ under the photo, a window opens up in a QuickTime movie program and then the story begins. First I see a blurred black and white photo of a small square white building with a dark grey roof as a man's voice narrates the words in the caption. As the narrator Ieuan Sheen reminisces about his school days that he spent in a tiny school in a small mining village in Wales, the photo of the school changes to close ups of the different children in the photo that was shown on the introductory page. Each new view fades in and out on the different children's faces as Ieuan's voice relates a few anecdotes about that time in his life. They were not significant or dramatic: the arrival of the daily bottles of milk provided for school children, the lighting of the oil lamp, and his reluctance as prince to kiss Sleeping Beauty because his brothers were watching. The sound of Ieuan's voice with its Welsh accent and the cadence that comes from Welsh syntax, though he is speaking in English, not only adds to the charm of the story, but reveals the personality of the speaker. What I have been describing is a typical digital story that uses multimedia to present a personal story on the Internet.

As the Internet became established and new technologies supporting it became more accessible, it has become not just a giant encyclopedia with a huge collection of facts and figures, but a venue where stories are told using multimedia technologies. With the proliferation of computers in ordinary homes in first world cultures as well as

emerging cultures and the relative cheapness of more sophisticated multimedia technologies, more and more people worldwide are using multimedia to express themselves. Storytelling on the Internet seemed to evolve naturally as people began to be involved in digital communication. For example, stories, especially anecdotes, told via emailing and blogging are disseminated extensively on an informal basis, but there are also more formal forms of telling stories in the digital world in which multimedia is used in a more sophisticated manner. The more sophisticated stories are categorized as digital stories. However, digital storytelling is an umbrella that covers a variety of different genres that use digital technology. The digital story genres that I will examine in this thesis are those that were specifically organized to create community.

The idea of creating community through storytelling is as necessary today as it has been for thousands of years, but digital storytelling also has to deal with the new technologies. There is a sense that these new technologies cause problems by alienating us from others because they are in the hands of a few people. For example, in the European medieval chirographic or script and print media times, only an elite few had access to books that consequently gave them power over the majority of people. The founder members of the Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS) recognized that multimedia today was also in the hands of an elite few, in particular corporations and government institutions. Joe Lambert sums up the *raison d'être* of this organization:

We believe we can use media, ironically to overcome the more troublesome residual effects of our consumer media culture. The digital storytelling community has described the Internet and new media explosion as a release to a

century of pent up frustration at being involved in a one way discourse, electronic media speaks at us but we could not talk back. (Lambert xix)

### **The Emergence of Digital Storytelling**

The rhetorical and social situation that spawned the idea of digital storytelling began with an awareness in the early 1990s that there was a need to revive cultural ties in a world that seemed to be more and more fragmented partly because of the technologies that affect our lives.

Educators, business people, creative designers, and community activists all found themselves drawn to idea, as author and storytelling consultant Richard Stone has described it, of the Arestorification@ of our culture. Stone sees modern culture, and many of us would agree, as having clear-cut away our use of story as cultural glue. In traditional cultures, the intermingling of personal stories, communal stories, myths, legends and folktales not only entertain us, but created a powerful empathetic bond between ourselves and our communities. (Lambert xviii)

In using Aempathetic bond@ here Lambert recognizes that narrative uses the predominant rhetorical appeal to emotion or pathos. It is interesting that this movement began in the 1990s, the time when the Internet and the World Wide Web came into being. Now there was not only the awareness of the need for storytelling but a technology that could foster the spread of storytelling to bind together communities. There is the assumption in this statement that we have lost our cultures in this modern age; the technologies seem to have created a homogenization. And yet, as Lambert explained, the very technologies that have created a distance, can also be used to recreate community. This illustrates how technology both enables and disables.

## The Center for Digital Storytelling

As the CDS web site and Joe Lambert's book, *Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community* tell us, the organization started from a series of meetings of various people who became the founders of CDS. In the late 1980s, Joe Lambert had been involved with experimental theater that had its roots in the performance art experiments in the 1960s visual arts communities, the community theater artists= connecting with and claiming the folk tradition of 'storytelling' (Lambert 5). Lambert eventually met and began his collaboration with Dana Atchley, who also had a background in theater but was also a trained graphic artist acquainted with videotaping (Lambert 6-7). Lambert acknowledges that the first digital story, as the CDS would define it, has a relationship to Atchley's multimedia autobiography, *Next Exit*, which is still linked as an example on the CDS web site. In 1994 Lambert, Atchley and Nina Mullen founded "the San Francisco Digital Media Center. The Center was built around a unique training process, the Digital Storytelling Workshop" ("History" Center for Digital Storytelling) Atchley died suddenly in 2000 but his wife still plays an active part in CDS.

Though the people originally involved in CDS came from a theater or artistic background, several people involved now have backgrounds in education, business and social services. This change is reflected in the list of areas where CDS has been involved in workshops from oral and local history, community arts, education, social activism, to organizational development and marketing/branding. ("Programs and Services"). The founders of CDS still are involved in activist movements that was also part of their

background. Thus digital storytelling is definitely rhetorical in nature, addressing social issues through the power of narrative.

In October 2005, CDS celebrated its tenth anniversary. Since 1995 digital storytelling has found its niche on the Internet. If one were to type in the words Astorytelling@ or Adigital storytelling@ or Astorytelling by computer@ in the search feature on a computer using Google or any other search engine, one would come across thousands of entries for digital storytelling.

Several of the web sites are run by universities, some with degree programs in the field of interactive computing. I mention only one to show the scope of digital storytelling in the realm of a mediated environment. That there are university degrees available now is evidence of the acceptance of digital storytelling that is being used in various forms in business, social organizations, and entertainment. One such masters program at the University of Indiana gives a description of its program on its web site. MIME (the Masters in Immersive Mediated Environments) is about

art, music and storytelling designed for New Media, along with every media ever invented or used by humankind. . . . from cave wall etchings to Gibson's stimsims and virtual light. We strive to meld the digital with the traditional, be it film, radio, television, print, or any other medium. MIME recognizes that the explosion in digital convergence has come from applying human talent and imagination to technology. We therefore look to bringing content and creativity, whatever form they take, to digital and virtual platforms, resulting in New Media products that cover the gamut from computer games and internet development to virtual reality environments. (MIME)

It is a pretty comprehensive endeavor. In fact, students (or as they are called, Mimesters) have the option of getting an MA degree with an emphasis on telecommunications and the inclusion of fine arts or an MS also with an emphasis on telecommunications but with a heavier emphasis on computer game design. Both programs require a class in Applied Cognitive and Emotional Psychology as well as Art, Entertainment and Information, thus the mimesters are given background on how to know the psyches of their clients or audiences, a blending of psychology and entertainment. It's something that Gorgias and other ancient rhetoricians would appreciate. This would be especially true of Plato, who in the *Phaedrus*, defines rhetoric as the art of knowing different kinds of souls. Ultimately, the graduates from this program will use their multifaceted talents to enter the business or entertainment world. It is a highly practical degree that also seems to include the rhetorical situation of the culture of selling. Here is an example of the melding of artistic talents with the sophisticated tools of multimedia technology. Ironically, according to Marshall McLuhan, it is the artist, not the "computer geek" who takes the technology and uses it to better effect. As he noted, the artist is the person who invents the means to bridge between biological inheritance and the environments created by technological innovation (Laws 98) These artists are taking the possibilities of the technologies of the digital world, and there is no longer the idea of the artist in the garret but people who are truly immersed in the commercial culture of the western world. But it has ever been so. Michaelangelo and Da Vinci and other Renaissance artists had sponsors who were often from the merchant class.

## Digital Storytelling Genres

Digital storytelling, like any other genre, has subgenres. Not all digital storytelling includes all multimedia and tells stories the way that CDS trains people. The method of storytelling depends on what the organization or community wants to achieve and also the limitations of the technology used. In other words, it depends on the rhetorical situation. Gaming, MOOs, blogging, psychogeography and the multimedia stories generated by CDS are all involved in digital storytelling but they use different technologies and have different goals. Psychogeography is closer to the multi-media digital story genre, therefore, I will give more detail into this form of digital storytelling and only briefly mention gaming and MOOs. Psychogeography and CDS digital storytelling are similar because they elicit and encourage people to tell stories rather than stories being told spontaneously or generated through interactive game playing within a smaller enclave.

**MOO.** There are several acronyms for various forms of communication on the Internet. MOO comes from MUD Object Oriented which has another acronym (MUD) embedded into it. MUD stands for Multi-User Dungeon/Domain/Dimension. A MOO according to *Wikipedia*, the web encyclopedia, is a text-based online virtual reality system to which multiple users are connected at the same time” (1). The encyclopedia entry continues “MOOs are network accessible, multi-user, programmable, interactive systems well-suited to the construction of text-based adventure games, conferencing systems, and other collaborative software” (1). Though they are commonly used for virtual reality games, they are also used for distance education and collaboration. Some



storytelling takes place in this text-based environment though the majority of interaction is dialogic.

**Interactive Games.** Gaming can be as simple as a game played on a text-based MOO or as sophisticated as a *Dungeons and Dragons* game with its virtual reality technology. Though the primary motive of computer games is to create entertainment, they also use storytelling that indirectly builds community among participants in gaming. Gaming sites proliferate on the Internet. Society has concerns about this genre as participants spend an inordinate amount of time in this virtual environment in which they not only play a game but take upon themselves characters in the game. In game studies, this is called an “avatar.” Typically they will have their own names, thus giving themselves a different persona. As shown earlier there are now degrees from universities in which a student acquires a background in immersive mediated technologies and many of the students graduating with these kinds of degrees will probably be involved in creating games, though not primarily structured through narrative.

**Blogs.** According to *Wikipedia*, the free online encyclopedia, A weblog or blog (derived from web + log) is a web based publication consisting primarily of periodic articles (normally, but not always, in reverse chronological order)@ (“Blogs” *Wikipedia*). Blogs though not strictly digital stories started as online journals. They called themselves Aonline diarists, journalists, journallers, or journalers. A few called themselves escriptionists@ (“Blogs” *Wikipedia*). The storytelling mode is weaker in blogs with narrative being subsumed by declarative and reflective writing, but a diary or journal is often part of a autobiography and personal events often are told in story format. Blogging has become a place for private opinions in a very public forum. Blogging is not just a

written journal but includes multimedia such as photographs, audio including music and voice overs. The blogs typically begin with the latest date and we would need to read backwards to get a full picture of what informs the current blog. Furthermore, there is a place for other bloggers or even non-bloggers to comment on an entry. There are also links to other blogs. Blogging thus forms a dynamic, interactive community.

Joe Lambert of CDS lists some bloggers in one of the appendixes in his book, *Digital Storytelling*, and the CDS web site also has links to bloggers who are involved particularly in storytelling.

**Psychogeography.** One aspect of the Internet is the ability to give the impression of being at a certain place. It is more than just the ability to use a global positioning system (GPS) to pinpoint a certain place, rather the motive of the web sites that foster psychogeography projects, includes the human factor, people who live or pass through a particular place. When we put together the stories told, we do not get merely the insight into a particular person's life, but also a sense of the larger community that passes through a particular location. We thus get a sense of place that I believe connects us not only to that place, but also makes us aware of our own surroundings, not only in its present state but the history behind it.

Many web sites, especially places where tourists are likely to visit, have web cameras in which a changing picture gives the viewer the opportunity of seeing what is happening in that part of the world. For example, there are several web cams on San Juan Island, Washington, in which one can see a picture that changes every ten minutes. But this does not make it a digital story. I suppose in some respects the web cams tell a silent story that can be made into a story in the mind of the viewer if one were to spend time

returning to look at the changes in the scene. Some sites have a “shot of the day” that provides, over the course of several days, a narrative through sequential images. The Utah State Forest Service has a camera in certain areas that shows the changing colors of the leaves in fall. Although someone writes a description about what is happening, this is not exactly a digital story. On a smaller scale, the Harold B. Lee Library on Brigham Young University campus also has a panoramic web cam in which a user can see a 360 degree panorama of part of the library. Other sites use 360 panoramas to embellish facts on historical events, but these are not necessarily digital stories that build community. What is needed is the interaction and impressions of people who were there, the personal rather than the public or corporate point of view.

Digital stories that are part of the psychogeographic movement have more interaction from viewers who use cell phones or public telephones to phone in a story. There are projects in Grand Center Station, New York (*StoryCorps*), and the [*Murmur*] project in Toronto, Canada ([*Murmur*]) to name a couple. To give an idea of what these psychogeographic sites do, I will use the [*Murmur*] project because it was through this project that the term psychogeography was explained.

[*Murmur*]. In a parkette in Toronto, Canada, a young woman recalls one lunch time when a naked man, pursued by two policemen, ran down the street next to the park. This is her impression of this park, but another storyteller told a different story from the perspective of his background as a biology professor at a university; he describes the plants and trees that grew in that parkette. Both stories together then give a glimpse into that part of Toronto. The web site shows a picture of the park but the stories bring it to life.

When we go to the [*Murmur*] web site we see six photographs of two areas: one called The Annex and the other Kensington Market. If we click on one area, for example The Annex, we are taken to a map that has red dots on it. These dots indicate where a story has been recorded and when we click on the dot, a photo of the area, (in this example the parkette where the above stories were told) a number and the name of the location 278663: Seaton Walk Park, and below that one or more audio stories. The map is interesting because it is illustrated as though it were drawn by a child with uneven lines for the roads and the houses and trees drawn flat and one-dimensional from the streets. The houses are multicolored in muted shades that suggest watercolors or crayons which also adds to the childlike feeling of the map. The drawn map thus takes away from a corporate image of the city if a typical topographical or political map had been used. This adds to the message that the [*Murmur*] project is trying to convey: it's anti-establishment, though ironically supported by city government. But the city does not add to the content, rather ordinary citizens tell the stories, giving the city a more vibrant personality .

As the article about the [*Murmur*] project reported, digital storytelling by phone seems to have developed as a reaction to commercial advertising. One of the founders of [*Murmur*], mentioned that the project is not about selling more stuff about experiences and people; selling you your neighbors@ (Pugh par. 3). It is interesting that he uses the commercial term Aselling,@ paralleling the way commerce works. But [*Murmur*] not only gives ordinary people the opportunity to tell stories, it is linked to particular places in the city of Toronto. Perhaps it has also come about for our need to have connections and be aware of real places has come about because we may feel we are so often lost in cyberspace. It is an oral version of the graphic, AKilroy was here.@ In sharing our

experiences of a particular place the digital storyteller makes what McLuhan calls a bridge. For him bridges are powerful connections: Bridges are intervals of resonance as much as means of connection. Like any resonating interval, they transform both areas they touch@ (“Pro-log” 362). The digital stories transform the city, storyteller, and listener.

This project has elements of newspaper reporting, especially the kind of reporting done through new journalism or creative nonfiction. The storyteller is a sort of roving reporter, giving snippets of slices of life in a particular place. As the article explains, this activity is termed A >psychogeography,= a movement that grew out of the -50s Situationist art, which intervened and commented upon everyday physical spaces@ (Pugh par. 7). The developers of [*Murmur*] also see the digital storytellers as *flâneurs* (the feminine form is *flâneuses*)Ca French word that means loungers, saunterers, strollers, loiterersCthat has links to the 1848 Paris newspaper, *Le Flâneur* which asked their readers that while strolling Alet us not forget our rights and our obligations as citizens@ (Pugh par. 8). The [*Murmur*] project is not merely storytelling to entertain but a way for ordinary people to claim back the city. Like the Parisian *flâneurs*, they experience the city through walking, not driving, through it. It has political and sociological overtones. The [*Murmur*] project seems to embody another way for ordinary people to gain control of their environments that seems to have been taken over by government or commerce.

**StoryCorps: Recording America.** This project is sponsored by NPR (National Public Radio) and is similar to the BBC projects in that they are doing anthropological and social work in collecting stories of Americans throughout the country. Their website

states, “StoryCorps is roaming the country, collecting the stories and legends of everyday America. The first-person accounts that emerge are a record of the way we live today—and how we got here” (*StoryCorps*). This project started about 2003 with a booth at Grand Central Station and on one of the web pages we are told that in 2005 that there was an opening of a “new recording booth in New York at the site of the World Trade Center. An initial piece of planned memorial, the booth will provide a way for those who lost loved ones on September 11, 2001, to share their stories” (*StoryCorps*). This organization also has two mobile booths, one for the Eastern and one for the Western United States, and blogs (for East and West) in which the mobile booth teams show photos with short captions on their experience in a particular area.

It is narrative’s rhetorical power that is consciously being used. The bridge of communication not only helps the original storyteller to see the city in a new light but any listener who comes to the [*Murmur*] or *StoryCorps* websites becomes acquainted with the cities and their inhabitants too. Psychogeographic projects have components of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* in which Stephen Dedalus is the *flâneur* who reveals Dublin in the minutiae of experiences during one whole day, June 16, 1904.

**Multimedia Digital Storytelling.** This kind of digital story gives us visuals and orality, as well as text. This is the kind of story that is typically produced by CDS. The *Capture Wales Digital Storytelling* site is one of the most accessible web sites which archives these particular digital stories. The digital story described at the beginning of this chapter was archived on this site and this genre will be described in more detail using *Capture Wales* as a typical multimedia digital storytelling site.

### **BBC *Capture Wales***

There are many digital storytelling sites on the Internet many of which have the goal of encouraging the creation of community. For this thesis I will focus on one site to show a typical digital story that uses multimedia, the BBC *Capture Wales* project. To show that this is not the only way digital stories are recorded, in a later chapter on technology I will briefly look at other digital storytelling genres that use different technologies. *Capture Wales* is already part of a community of other digital story web sites that have links to each other. The BBC project has a close association with CDS personnel who originally trained BBC Wales employees. In fact, Daniel Meadows, project manager for BBC Wales, is the keynote speaker at the conference that commemorates the tenth anniversary of CDS.

The digital story described in the first paragraph is an example of a digital story that is archived on the *Capture Wales Digital Storytelling* web site that is sponsored by BBC Wales (the Welsh region of the British Broadcasting Company). When we click on the link, [What is Digital Storytelling](#),<sup>6</sup> there is a definition of digital storytelling and what the project hopes to achieve.

Digital stories are "mini-movies" created and edited by people like you - using cameras, computers, scanners and their own photo albums. Everyone has a story to tell and new technology means that anyone can create a story that can show on a website like the ones you see here. The idea is to show the richness of life in Wales through stories made by the people of Wales. It's you who decide what those stories are. (*Capture Wales*)

As the web site intimates, the purpose of collecting stories from ordinary people is to make known the richness of Welsh society by collecting stories of ordinary people who make up that culture. The BBC Wales project seems to have archeological and folklore aspects as stories are collected that reveal the culture and way of life of ordinary people in Wales. This project thus fulfills the motto found on the first page of the web site of the CDS: "Every community has a memory of itself. Not a history, nor an archive, nor an authoritative record . . . A living memory, an awareness of a collective identity woven of a thousand stories" (Center for Digital Storytelling). The stories then make up a collage or montage of a culture.

The notion of piecing together stories to reveal a larger picture is appropriate for the digital world since the Internet is made up of short individual pages of visual texts and aural sound bites. Digital stories are usually only two to three minutes long thus staying within the limitations of the attention span of Internet audiences. However, it is difficult to say if it is the actual attention span of the viewers who are now in the habit of expecting short bursts of information, or whether it is the limitations of the technology itself that necessitates the brief visual information. It takes too long to download more sophisticated and larger visuals. Web pages have formed certain conventions to keep an audience connected to a downloading web page. One way is to include short Flash-based visuals that give the impression of instantiation when pages are downloading before one's eyes. These Flash visualizations hold a person's attention while the main page that uses larger computer memory gradually appears in the background. Digital stories give the impression of a slowed-down movie as the photos or parts of photos gradually appear as



the story is being told. They also follow Internet conventions of keeping a person's attention moving along so they become involved in the story.

**Analysis of a Digital Story.** The example of the story given in the first paragraph follows digital storytelling conventions. Like any story, we are drawn into the events of Ieuan's life but instead of merely reading words on a page with an accompanying illustration of the school children, the focus on each individual child as a background to the anecdotes engages our visual senses. Only one photo is used but it is used in a creative way to evoke a mood of long ago memories as each child is spotlighted as the anecdotes follow their linear plot lines. Would we receive this story differently if we did not see the children in the photos? Would we relate to the photo differently if the story was printed next to it? Would our eyes roam over the faces of the children in the story on our own or does our reception differ because the program leads us to linger on each child in turn? Though the voice over does not explicitly tell us, we can guess by the way the children's faces appear that the photo of the girl who played Sleeping Beauty appeared at the time Ieuan was talking about the time he, as prince, had to kiss Sleeping Beauty. The last face to come into focus is a small boy with a shock of black hair and a lopsided grin in a thin face with a pointed chin. This we surmise is Ieuan. However, he doesn't explicitly tell us but we have further clues. The final photo shows three small cameos from the larger photo: Ieuan, one of the girls in the photo who I assume is Sleeping Beauty, and Miss Harris. As with any photo where there is no caption, we are left guessing why he would cameo these three faces and not choose to finish with the photo of the school house that he began with. There then is the sense that there are more stories

still to tell. And, of course, this is only natural. A digital story is not just a slice of life but less than a crumb of the storyteller's life.

This particular digital story ends in an artistic way because it was shaped to some extent by the professionals who ran the workshop. Their job is to guide the participants in the workshop to use the particular photographs that a participant has brought with him or her, and shape a story around it. Though the professionals have been influential in framing the story, they usually leave the final choice of what to leave in and what to leave out to the storyteller. Because of this, the stories are unique and come across as sincere as well as polished.

The *Capture Wales* project also adds another dimension to a digital story which can really only be done in the digital world rather than a codex (book) world. On the page where the story begins, each storyteller tells a little bit about herself or himself as well as a synopsis of the story or why that particular story was told. There is an opportunity for the storytellers to reflect on what they were doing. Furthermore, they are asked to reflect on the experience with the digital storytelling experience itself. Most, of course, are people with little computer skills and remark on the opportunity of being guided to use the technology. But a majority of them also remark on the experience they had meeting other people in the workshop. The experience itself becomes a bonding moment, a sense of community. Also on the web page is a place where people who read the story can make comments, writing their own thoughts and feelings about the story. Thus the story is added upon in some respects by readers, giving the possibility of interactivity which is an important aspect of the Internet.

Though Sheen's story uses multimedia to convey the story, there is no difference in our reception of the story. The story itself still functions to keep community together, as audience and storyteller make connections. We are often unaware of how stories function in our lives because we use them as a natural way of communication.

**Digital Storytelling and civic dialogue.** Unlike early traditional stories with its princes and heroes, the motive of digital storytelling is to focus on ordinary people. Daniel Meadows of the *Capture Wales* program, emphasized that this project collects stories of ordinary people rather than relating stories of heroes or movie stars by experts (movie makers or authors) who finely craft a story ("Remarks" Meadows). In many respects this project encourages the *vox populi*, but in its literal translation, people's voice, not merely the modern day connotation of a civic or political opinion. However, in many respects there is a civic dialogue going on because the people who tell their experiences are situated in a social setting and unwittingly give a commentary on and reveal social issues as they tell their stories.

### **Digital Storytelling: Where next?**

As mentioned earlier, the *Capture Wales* project is one of many that CDS has fostered. As noted earlier, CDS conducts workshops for many different kinds of communities. This change in the CDS image is indicative of the way communities change over time because of changes in circumstances. *Capture Wales* has had a long established sponsor in the BBC and a local university so the focus is more anthropological. Until recently CDS did not have a sponsor but relied on the proceeds of workshops and donations from individuals.

Since CDS is now sponsored by a corporation, KQED, a San Francisco radio station, their website has changed and become more business-like. The web page colors and fonts changed from a warmer more folksy feel to a more minimalistic black and white sophistication. Even the language has changed. One page has kept the idealistic, community-building ethos which was quoted from above but the language of other pages, especially the one describing digital storytelling and their services, has changed to a more corporate tone.

Many individuals and communities have used the term "digital storytelling" to describe a wide variety of new media production practices. What best describes our approach is its emphasis on personal voice and facilitative teaching methods. . . . As leaders in the field of digital storytelling, we have experience in issues of human interface design, interaction design, story and dramatic theory, non-profit organizational planning and development, event production, software product development, web design, on-line community building, training curriculum development, and the development and management of community and educational technology programs and centers (*Center for Digital Storytelling*).

To ground the idea that community can be achieved through storytelling and digital storytelling in particular, I will give background on the Vichian theory of *sensus communis* or common sense. Giambattista Vico, the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Neapolitan rhetorician/philosopher, theorized about the development of human culture based on philology. He suggested that poetic language, which I interpret to mean narrative or storytelling, was the first language of primitive human beings. Through this first language, communities were formed and though language changed to become more

sophisticated as the needs of societies grew, the most fundamental language we have is narrative. According to Cecilia Miller, Vico “considered abstract knowledge to be the highest form of truth, *sensus communis* the lowest. The important point is not the ranking of *sensus communis* as the lowest form; rather the issue is that Vico considered it to be a form of knowledge at all—indeed for Vico it was the basis of knowledge” (45). The founders of digital storytelling movement already knew that narrative is an important part of creating community because of studies and theories about traditional storytelling (Lambert xviii). Vichian theory will add another lens through which to view the practice of digital storytelling and it how it builds community using the technology of our time.

## Chapter Two: Vichian Theory

*Hwaet, we Gar-Dena in geardagum  
 þeodcyninga þrym gefrunon,  
 Hu þa æþelingas ellen fremedon!*  
 (Lo, praise of the prowess of people-kings  
 of spear-armed Danes, in days long sped,  
 we have heard, and what honor the athelings won!)  
 (*Beowulf*, Witherspoon 15-16)



What can we say about our grandmothers?  
 That they were nice to us,  
 that they sang to us,  
 that they smelled of juicy fruit  
 and Pond's cold cream  
 and watched the 'Wheel of Fortune.'  
 That they wrapped everything in plastic baggies  
 and pinched our thighs.  
 What about what they did to our mothers?  
 (Weinshenker qtd. in Lambert 43)

What do 8th-century Anglo-Saxon villagers and a 21st-century computer user have in common? We can imagine the villagers sitting round a fireside on a cold winter's night listening to a bard singing the tales of Beowulf and his nemesis, Grendel. But we can also picture a lone user in her comfortably warm, central-heated home sitting before a metaphorical digital fireside, experiencing the story of someone talking about his grandmother. Though the cultures are far apart in time and sophistication and both are involved in storytelling, what they experience is a sense of community because of the stories they experience. To the Anglo-Saxons, the story comforts them that there are heroes who have overcome great odds and the story thus talks not of just past heroics but

encourages the current generation of men of that culture to be like Beowulf and protect the community. For the 21<sup>st</sup>-century audience of a digital story, the sense of community comes not so much from a particular community, but the more general feeling of being connected to another ordinary person who had a relationship with his grandmother. For example, my relationship with my Scottish maternal grandmother was different and removed culturally than Daniel Weinschenker's relationship with his mid-western American grandmother. But I can understand his ambivalent feelings he has toward his grandmother who was nice to him but, as the story later revealed, was mean to his mother. The underlying universal topic is the difficulties and joys of family relationships. We have all felt them. People who experienced Ieuan Sheen's digital story from the *Capture Wales* web site could relate to certain aspects of the story as witnessed by the remarks that each responder gave. And although each responded to a different aspect of the story they made a connection to the story from their own lives.

How and why do we connect with other people through hearing their stories? How is storytelling a way to keep community? And is storytelling different when on the World Wide Web? The theories of Giambattista Vico, an 18th-century Neapolitan philosopher/ rhetorician may answer these questions. As a rhetorician familiar with the rhetorical appeals, Vico knew that if logic didn't work in a speech, appeals to emotion may be necessary. "*Quare, ut orator omnium animos pertigisse certus sit, omnes argumentorum locos percurrisse necesse est*" (Vico *Opere* 799). ("Consequently, in order to be sure of having touched all the soul-strings of his listeners, the orator, then, should run through the complete set of the *loci* which schematize the evidence" (Gianturco's translation). Vico thus tells us that to really reach an audience the orator or

storyteller needs to find the *loci* or areas of argument that will touch “the soul-strings” of an audience (Vico, *Study Methods* 15). “Soul-strings” is a term coined by Elio Gianturco, who, in 1965, was the first person to translate this work from Latin to English. “Soul-strings” comes from the Latin “*animus*” which has multiple meanings: mind, soul, heart. Though Vico in this instance is talking about rhetorical oration, narrative or stories connect people in a special way because they appeal to emotion that comes from our common experiences as human beings. Storytelling is an intrinsic part of human communication that can connect soul to soul.

In order to understand why we resonate more easily to stories and how stories build community, I will explore Vico’s theory of common sense or *sensus communis* that is part of his theory of human history that he based on philology. According to Vico, cultures changed as the technology of communication developed. In Vico’s view, community and the technologies of communication are intertwined, thus his theories give an interesting angle to storytelling with its modern digital technology.

Since Vico and his theories are not widely known, this chapter gives some background on his life and studies which inform his theory of civic history based on philology. It is also important to follow how his ideas were disseminated because they continue to show up in modern thought, especially when recording memories is concerned.

### **A Genetic Autobiography**

In 1728 in Venice a five-hundred page volume of a quarterly called *Raccolta d’Opuscoli Scientifici e Filologici* was in circulation. In the middle of this publication of various scientific, philosophical and literary writings was a proposal: “A Proposal to the



Scholars of Italy to write their autobiographies for the edification of young students and with a view to the reform of school curricula and methods” (Fisch and Bergin 2). The model for this kind of autobiography was the longest article in the quarterly. This model was the first part of Giambattista Vico’s autobiography originally published in Naples in 1725. Vico would eventually publish a second part in 1731 called the “Continuation by the Author.” Vico died in 1744 at the age of 76. His last years were recorded by the Marquis of Villarosa in 1818, thus completing the autobiography. That the autobiography was completed 75 years after Vico’s death attests to the importance that his autobiography had on the intellectual culture of Italy in the emerging 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Giambattista Vico, in his own words, “was born in Naples in the year 1670 of upright parents who left a good name after them” (*Autobiography* 111). He was 57 years old when the first part of his autobiography was completed in June 1725; the first edition of his seminal work *New Science* was also published in October that same year. These two works seem to be closely tied. Max Harold Fisch and Thomas Goddard Bergin, translators of the 1944 English edition of Vico’s autobiography noted that editions of the autobiography “followed upon a succession of editions of the *New Science* . . . Thus Vico’s autobiography and its two continuations are intimately connected with the publication of the successive editions of the major work in which his life found its fruition” (“Introduction” Fisch and Bergin 18-19).

From his autobiography we learn that as the son of a bookseller, Vico was surrounded by books at a young age. His schooling was sporadic because of an accident in early childhood and he had frequent ill-health so he spent many years studying on his own.

Vico’s ambition was to become a rhetorician and lawyer so he spent a most of his time

studying “the texts of civil and canon law alike” (*Autobiography* 116-7). However, when he was about 16 years old he spent a year and half studying poetry, a break from philosophy and law (*Autobiography* 116-7). Though it didn’t really further his career as a professor of rhetoric, this hiatus perhaps inculcated the idea that young minds should not spend too much time in heavy philosophical or metaphysical studies but should keep alive imagination by being immersed in the arts of poetry, painting and oratory. He makes this statement several times, the first time being in his *On the Method of the Studies of Our Time* which he published in 1709 when he was 41, and in his autobiography he mentions this phrase again, quoting from an annual lecture that he gave his pupils (*Autobiography* 123-5). Since he spent much of his career as a teacher, this statement could be part of his pedagogy which came from his experience with training young minds. But, the significance of this statement is developed in his *New Science*, especially the idea of poetic language being the first language of the progenitors of the human race. The three arts (poetry, painting and oratory) appear together in the modern digital storytelling.

Vico’s autobiography was important as it connects with *New Science*, but it is also interesting to discover that it also a new genre that came about because the community of his time wanted to encourage school boys to become immersed in their studies (Fisch and Bergin 2). In his autobiography which he relates in third person, Vico concentrates on the books he studied as well as the people who were his sponsors rather than personal family life. This is what is termed a “genetic autobiography” (Fisch and Bergin v). In fact, during Vico’s time there were no models for such an autobiography and the original title of his book was *Life of Giambattista Vico by Himself*, the term autobiography being

coined later from *periautography* suggested in 1720 by Father Carlo Lodoli, Venitian censor of publications in 1720 (Fisch and Bergin 4-6). According to Catherine Hobbs writing this kind of autobiography in third person can be traced back to Vico and, though now written in first person, this genre was used “especially by successful men, for three centuries” (Hobbs *Elements* 25).

Since it is a genetic autobiography, Vico acknowledges his debt to the ideas of others especially Plato, Tacitus, Sir Francis Bacon and Hugo Grotius. In fact, Vico explores disparate humanistic knowledge which he comes across in his studies and we can trace the ideas studies in his own theories. His autobiography thus shows the genesis of his scholarship which in some respects is carried on today in how we cite our sources of information. A genetic autobiography and scholarship resembles the concept of intertextuality that Julia Kristeva introduced in 1967, the idea that “all texts (films, plays, novels, anecdotes, or whatever) are made out of other texts. . . . [The texts coming] out of a pre-existing cultural web of expressive forms” (Abbott 94). In my research for this thesis, I have also seen examples of this cultural web as the same people are referred to in diverse publications because they are following similar ideas though the scholars may come from various disciplines: rhetoric, philosophy, and sociology.

### **The Dissemination of Vichian Theory**

Though he was not well known, Vico has become more well-known during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is important to talk about the dissemination of his thought, because it relates particularly to how people related to and found insights from his theories, especially as it relates to personal histories. Vico’s writings were at first not widely known outside of Naples. According to Fisch and Bergin, modern-day translators into

English of Vico's autobiography and *New Science*, Vico's ideas were first disseminated from Naples to the rest of Italy, and from there they spread into Germany and France, the most notable disseminator of Vichian theory being French historian Jules Michelet who wrote a history of France at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In England, Samuel Taylor Coleridge was the first person to pay attention to Vico, though it was at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that more attention was being paid to Vichian theory in England. It was a time of social change in England when Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and John Stuart Mill were writing their treatises on the social issues of that period (61-97).

“A new era of Vichian studies, in England as elsewhere, was inaugurated in the first decades of the twentieth century” by the critical works of Croce, Gentile, and Nicolini (Fisch and Bergin 96). It was after these translations that more scholars became aware of Vico. Vico was not read solely by scholarly philosophers and social activists, literary figures such as James Joyce and William Butler Yeats were influenced by Vichian theory of history, Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* being based on Vico's theory of the rise and dissolution of cultures (97-99). Today there are several centers for Vichian studies with philosophers and rhetoricians doing critical work on Vichian theories. The main one in the United States is housed at the department of philosophy at Emory University.

In tracing the dissemination of Vico's writings from Naples to France to England and to the United States, it seems as though he is discovered and his theories gain prominence during times of social change. Is this a coincidence? Michelet wrote his history of France in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century following the upheaval of the French Revolution. As mentioned earlier, England was experiencing social change during the

Victorian period, and the larger movement of Marxism adapted elements of Vichian thought for their cause; Croce's 1913 translation was used after the First World War by English scholars who began to disseminate Vichian thought (Fisch and Bergin 98-99). Yeats discovered Vico in 1938 before the Second World War. Marshall McLuhan, the guru of pop and multimedia culture, also discovered Vico when he turned to his study of the impact of mass media in the 1960s. Now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I am applying Vichian theory to the multimedia phenomenon of digital storytelling which also is motivated by the need to address social issues.

### **Philology and Human History**

Vico lived at a time when the humanistic views of the Renaissance were being replaced with the scientific and philosophical ideas of the Age of Reason or Enlightenment. Literacy was becoming more prevalent in society. I see the request for scholars to write a genetic or philosophical autobiography as evidence of this. Though Vico was critical of Cartesian method of discovery which he acknowledged was useful for scientific enquiry, he doubted that it was useful or efficacious for the study of humans.

This was an age when literacy was becoming more wide-spread in society, therefore, it is no surprise that Vico was interested in the development of language. He noted how the power of language shaped societies and, consequently how societies changed because of their modes of expression. Vico's New Science, then, was counter to Cartesian methodology that is still in effect today. It is one reason why Vico's ideas were not well-known until the 20<sup>th</sup> century when social issues were studied as well as physical science.

*New Science* is a sprawling book with repetitive ideas and phrases being found throughout. Rather than citing page numbers to find a particular quotation, scholars use paragraph numbers since each paragraph is numbered in publications of this text. For this thesis, then, I have followed this convention by inserting “par.” when I refer citations from *New Science* to differentiate between his numbered paragraphs and the more conventional page numbers.

Vico categorized the development of societies as starting first with poetic language—the language of the gods or religion—then came the heroic age which used visual or symbolic language of archetypes or “imaginative universals” (par. 933) which Vico calls “resemblances, which is the heroic language” (para 173). The last development was the “alphabetic or vulgar language of men . . . by means of conventional signs for communicating the common needs of their life” (par. 173). Cultures eventually become more intellectual and consequently the language became more eloquent. Vico anticipated the witty, elegant prose of the Age of Enlightenment. As a teacher of rhetoric, Vico strove to inculcate eloquence in his students. But according to Vico, cultures don’t remain static, they are cyclical. Even eloquence can become corrupt. In his readings of ancient civilizations, Vico also noted how cultures arose and fell. Besides the three philological developments (poetic, heroic and human), Vico describes a time when language takes on a “barbarism of reflection” (par.1106) in which there is a breakdown in the sense of community. People become extremely selfish and self-absorbed. They “are accustomed to think of nothing but their own personal advantage . . . live like monstrous beasts in the utter solitude of their private wills and desires [and] . . . use flattery and embraces to plot against the life and fortunes of their intimates and

friends” (par. 1106). It is not just the “barbarian at the gates” but the barbarian within that brings down a culture. According to Vico, cultures do not necessarily disappear, but in their extremities whether absorbed or changed by conquest or through natural disasters such as famine, a culture will revert to the simpler poetic mode of communication (par. 1106). Perhaps all that a conquered people have left would be the stories handed down from the older generation to the new so that they could keep their identity, in spite of their losing political power. Natural disasters would also return a culture to its beliefs in providence or religion (par. 1106).

At the beginning of Book I, “Establishing Principles” of the *New Science*, Vico inserts a chronological table “based on the Egyptians’ Three Epochs of World History: The Ages of Gods, Heroes, and Men” (Marsh 32). Vico explains why it is there. “My Chronological Table gives an overview of the nations of the ancient world from the Jews to the Chaldaeans, Scythians, Phoenicians, Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans. On it, there appear the most renowned people and events, as they are commonly assigned by scholars to specific times and places” (par. 43). Because of the growth of science and mechanical inventions, drawings and engravings began to appear in books. By this chart Vico codifies and gives a visualization of his theory of history, thus impressing upon his readers the scientific nature of his study.

Some of Vico’s theories may seem strange to modern readers. Just as he suggested that his contemporaries should not judge an ancient culture from the view of 18<sup>th</sup> century (par. 429), so we too need to take into consideration Vico’s own culture and available scholarship. He tried to reconcile and synthesize his classical philosophical background with the philosophical and scientific thought of past scholars and new

information from his own period into his *New Science*. Basing his theories on philology, Vico saw the beginnings of community coming from the common sense of early humans.

### ***Sensus Communis* or Common Sense**

*Sensus Communis* is not a term peculiar to Vico. John Schaeffer summarizes its earlier use noting that it has deep roots in Greek philosophy. “*Sensus communis* is frequently given as the translation for Plato’s term *doxa*, the common opinion of the ordinary man” but for Aristotle and St Thomas Aquinas, it is “an epistemological principle” (2). Schaeffer continues that the term was also used by Horace and Seneca but that “Descartes is the source of the most common meaning of *common sense* today: practical judgment. . . . This meaning can be traced to the *bon sens* of Descartes” (2). In his writings, Vico used the Italian *senso commune* rather than the Latin *sensus communis*. In English translations, *senso commune* is translated as “common sense” which at first reading may suggest Descartes’s practical judgment because that is what we connote by that term, rather than Vico’s idea of senses that the human race holds in common.

However, there are times when Vico does mean common sense in the Cartesian sense. “Words are carried over from bodies and from properties of bodies to signify the institutions of the mind and spirit” (Vico qtd. in Hobbs *Modernity* 84). For Vico *sensus* is not merely sensuous in terms of touch, taste, smell, hearing and seeing, but also intellectually as judgments and perceptions that affect the civic life of a community. When Vico says that “words are carried over from the bod” this does not necessarily mean only chirographic or printed texts but “words” also includes oral and even pictorial modes of communication such as hieroglyphics. Vico seems to anticipate the multimedia world of today which incorporates poetic, heroic, and vulgar (human) modes of



expression to a higher degree than at any other time.

The idea of keeping together a civil society comes from a consensus within a group. Vico tells us “whatever is sensed as just by all or by the majority of men must be the rule of sociable life” (par.360). Vichian theory thus suggests that language or communication is at the basis of community because it is the *sensus communis* or common sense of the community which ultimately brings about the laws of the community that have been generally agreed upon, a coming to consensus. Though most scholars focus on the community sense, Vico also suggests that senses are common to humanity in general. He states, “Common sense is judgment without reflection, shared by an entire class, an entire people, an entire nation, or the entire human race” (par.142). However, individual senses come before community sense, and they inform us about our relationships with others. We live together in communities. Vico concurs, “the human race, as far back as memory of the world goes, has lived and still lives conformably in society” (par.135).

The first sense of communication begins with what Vico calls poetic language—the first language—in which imagination created a fearsome god. Poetic language is related somewhat to narrative because there was a cause and effect: the thunderstorm frightened these early humans and they consequently retreated to the caves. Although man has evolved from these early beginnings there is still within us the basic senses that are common to all: love, joy, fear, hatred. Much of these senses are related to what our corporeal bodies experience: touch, taste, smell, sight, sound. Like the primordial giants, we try to find meaning in our lives which are bound by our bodily sensations and experiences, including our relationships with others.

Gerard Hauser seems to agree with Vichian theory of sense making when he states, “More significant than our skill as our understanding of what happens to and around us is the narrative structure we bring to our experiences in order to make sense of them” (187). Narrative is related to common sense in that “we make sense of the episodes and events of our lives by situating them within our respective value systems. This act of sense making commonly involves placing occurrences within a context of our individual lived histories and those of our group” (Hauser 185). Just as the giants made a story or myth about their experience with the thunder and lightning—the terrifying sounds and sight of bolts of light streaking through the sky—we too make sense of our experiences by the stories we tell ourselves.

But as Vico has intimated, these stories are not just for our own self-knowledge, the stories are shared with our communities. Poetic language or narrative works to draw people into the story and identify with the teller, thus building understanding and community. We think of stories as merely something to entertain, but as Catherine Hobbs has explained, “life narrative is rhetorical; that is, it attempts to persuade the reader, either overtly or subtly. . . . Memoir relates and explains but also works to persuade the reader of the truth of a life, an experience, or an insight” (*Elements* 18). As she further explains, memoirs follow the classical Greek rhetorical triangle of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* (*Autobiography* 19). Autobiographies are therefore rhetorical because they disseminate ideas that may change our society; they are more likely to appeal to emotion and touch the “soul-strings” of others. Underneath our rational selves lurks the emotional, and since that is a fundamental part of humans it is the most easily understood because it elicits an empathetic response. Storytelling as a mode of bringing

understanding between diverse cultures is something that CDS is consciously trying to do. They are doing rhetorical work to persuade others to learn about each other, and ultimately to change society.

A modern philosopher/rhetorician Kenneth Burke was also interested in how communities function. He calls his version of *sensus communis*, identification. It is how we identify with others that binds us together. He seems to agree with Vichian theory of sensuality and physicality as part of the experience. “For substance, in the old philosophies, was an act; and a way of life is acting-together; and in acting together, men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them consubstantial” (Burke 1326). Consubstantial has the connotation of physical reality, the community being made up of bodies who act in response to shared ideologies. Human relations are the way they are because of our basic human characteristics. This idea seems to come together in Shakespeare’s Shylock who said, “If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh?” (Merchant III.i.54-5).

### **Poetic Language: The Basic Language**

In *New Science*, the largest section of the book is called “Poetic Wisdom.” It is here that Vico enlarges his philological theories, but the same ideas are repeated not only in various parts of *New Science* but can also be found in his other writings. Poetic language for Vico, does not mean merely speech but includes gestures, visuals, and alphabetic writing. Vico theorized that in primordial times the world was inhabited by giants. “After the flood, these giants were scattered throughout the earth. We have seen that such giants are found in Greek mythology” (par. 370). Not only does he cite Greek mythology and the Bible (Genesis), but he apparently knew of physical evidence of such

giants. He tells us that in the mountains “huge skulls and bones have been found and are still being found” (par. 529) though in my readings I have not found what his sources are for this information. Whether these were actual human skulls from the Cro-Mangum period I don’t know; archeological finding were not categorized until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The character of these giants (brutal, stupid and violent) may have come from Greek myths, which I will later show, Vico believed to have a basis of truth. It was from these giants that gentile nations had their beginnings. Vico persistently differentiates between gentile and Jewish histories because the Jews had the word of God and because of this remained a cohesive group. “Jews were the first people in the world, and that in their sacred history they have truthfully preserved traditions dating from the beginning of the world” (par.54). Vico thus is able to reconcile the secularity of his studies with his own Catholic beliefs.

Poetic language began with a metaphor based on experience. It was the beginning of community and the formation of pagan religions. As Michael Mooney explained

Hearing thunder sound in the heavens, they raised up their eyes, became aware of the sky, and “saw” it as a great animated body, Jove. In this action, no longer mere reaction but act of “noetic” imagination, of the transfer of meaning (*metapherein*) though the “ingenious” discovery of relationships heretofore unnoticed, the *grossi bestioni* quit their spiritual isolation, established their “collective sense” (*sensus communis*) of Jove, life in society began. . . . this act of the rhetor is here generalized, made the common, universal, the necessary act of the ancestors of the race. (210)

*Metapherein*, the Greek root of metaphor, means to “carry across.” Metaphor, therefore, is a special way of knowing, understanding or explaining experiences.

Religious beliefs that nature was imbued with power that must come from a god, are inextricably tied with a metaphorical way of thinking, as well as the beginning of consciousness of themselves as individuals, and the need for each other. All this came about, according to Vico, before there was any real speech or language. Kenneth Burke seems to concur with Vico’s idea of story as the beginning of language for primitive humans when he observed, “We assume a time when our primal ancestors became able to go from SENSATIONS to WORDS. (When they could duplicate the experience of tasting an orange by saying, ‘the taste of an orange,’ that was WHEN STORY CAME INTO THE WORLD)” (qtd. in Fisher 65).

Mooney tells us “the first human act, then, was a fully mute poem grasped by the body and expressed with the body. In this it is as more childlike than the actions of children themselves.” (211). I’m not sure what Mooney means as being “more childlike” than actual children. From reading Vico’s autobiography, I believe he used his observation of his own children as well as the youth he taught as models for primitive people. He noticed the gradual formation of linguistic abilities of children. Body language or gestures is the most primitive language. For example, when we try to communicate with someone who does not speak our language, we naturally use what we hope are common gestures to communicate. Furthermore, we unconsciously respond to body language; it could be as subtle as a smile or frown, or as expansive as raising arms to the air or backing away from a perceived opponent. Vico would also have been aware not only of the cultural body language of his country, but as a teacher of rhetoric was

familiar with the gestures that came with delivering of speeches. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries when schools taught elocution, there were choreographed gestures based on classical delivery of speeches to give emphasis to the words spoken (Austin 899-897). It is not surprising that Vico would assume that the giants would respond first with body language, because his theories are based on the genesis and evolution of language and gestures are the most primitive. We still have this mode of expression even within our more sophisticated speech and life styles.

Eventually humans began to speak and then created a way of recording and preserving that communication: “Now from the theology of poets, or poetic metaphysics, by way of poetic logic sprung from it, we go on to discover the origin of languages and letters” (par. 428). Vico tells us that in spite of what some scholars thought, language and letters were “distinct from the origin of languages, when they are in fact inseparable by nature” (par. 429). He goes on to say that “scholars have failed to understand how the first nations thought in poetic characters, spoke in fables, and wrote in hieroglyphs” (par. 429). Once more Vico links three different aspects of communication of primitive people: metaphoric prelanguage (poetic characters or gestures), oral stories (fables), and writing (hieroglyphs). A digital story often contains these simple communicative modes with visuals, voice-overs, and movies.

### **Homo narrans**

Earlier I looked at Vico’s ideas of human history as it relates to philology and how the first communities or cultures were created by the poetic language of primitive beings. This section now examines the particulars of poetic language and how it relates to storytelling and how modern scholars see narrative working within society.

Maker is an archaic term for a poet in the English language which is a direct translation from the Greek. The word “poet” comes from the Greek *poētē* or *poiētēs* which means maker. Therefore, when Vico talks about the giants using poetic language what they are doing is *making* language, *making* meaning [my italics].

As Vico suggests, poetic language is the first type of language. Though we do not call it poetic language, modern scholars have pointed out how narrative is inextricably part of our human nature. One scholar, Walter Fisher, goes as far as to create a new label for humans:

Many different root metaphors have been put forth to represent the essential nature of human beings: *Homo faber*, *Homo economicus*, *Homo politicus*, *Homo sociologicus*, psychological man, ecclesiastical man, *Homo sapiens*, and, of course, rational man. I propose that *Homo narrans* be added to the list. (62).

He quotes philosopher, Alasdair MacIntyre, who wrote, “Man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, is essentially a storytelling animal” (Fisher 58).

According to Donald Verene, Vico in his *New Science* links meditation and narrative which reads in the original Italian, “*chi medita questa Scienza egli narra a se stesso.*” Verene criticizes Marsh’s translation of *New Science* because Marsh translates the passage thus: “anyone who studies my Science will retrace this ideal eternal history for himself” (“Critical” 101). Although Vico is talking about how to read his *New Science* in this particular sentence, it is also in this paragraph (par.349) that he further states “*Ove avvenga che chi fa le cose esso stesso le narra, ivi non può esser piu certa l’istoria*” (par. 349). Translated by Fisch and Bergin this sentence reads “And history cannot be more certain than when he who creates the things also narrates them” (104).

Marsh's translation: "For there can be no more certain history than that which is recounted by its creator" (Marsh 129). This is an important discussion because this axiom is central to Vichian theory not so much about how we are to understand Vico's *New Science* but how we view and create our own stories. Verene goes on to say that this axiom is based on Vico's famous principle of *verum ipsum factum*. [what is true is made] Vico's method . . . is Socratic, a form of self-knowledge, not a study (Critical 101). A digital story or any autobiographical work is also an exercise in self-knowledge.

This axiom has been adapted by Marxists who incorporated it in the idea of bringing power to the proletariat. It is one axiom that Vico is particularly noted for. The genesis or inspiration of this axiom came from Vico's readings of Bacon and the Baconian theory of history (Guardiani ). William Butler Yeats quoted it thus "We can know nothing that we have not made" (Fisch and Bergin 99). Vico was quoted recently in which he is specifically named for coining this maxim. Though translated slightly differently, the maxim has the same connotation. "Man can only understand that which he has done," appears in a document written and archived on the web site of the National Chicano Summit in 2004. Vico's axiom is quoted in a section "Historical Memory" ("Chicano: National Identity and Controversy" 12). In this document, the writer encourages Chicanos to write histories from their point of view. This idea, of course, is equally important to people involved in encouraging people to tell stories, digital or otherwise; it is especially so for those who have not had a voice in their communities.

Vico also used this axiom in the earlier *Ancient Wisdom of the Italians* "Let me illustrate my point by a simile: divine truth is a solid representation of things, like something moulded; human truth is a line drawing or two-dimensional representation,



like a picture. And just as divine truth is what God orders and produces as He comes to know it, so human truth is what man arranges and makes as he knows it. In this way knowledge is cognition of the genus or mode by which a thing is made and by means of which, as the mind comes to know the mode, *because it arranges the elements, it makes the thing*” (qtd. in Pompa 52) [my italics].

The problem with this idea is that we could become suspicious of stories wondering how “true” they are. We have to rely on the ethics of the storyteller, returning to the ethos or character of the storyteller in the rhetorical triangle. But these stories will ring true for us if they are reasonable to us. As Gerard Hauser reminds us “Their [narratives] contexts provide us with sense-making perspectives that we invoke to make connections among events and draw inferences that follow them about what is reasonable in our lives. This placement of specific occurrences, problems, and even persons and thoughts within a storyline is a communicative activity, an act of rhetorical invention, sometimes called framing” (186). This explains why sometimes people cannot understand each other because their frames of reference or experiences do not have a point of connection.

### **Myths: Our Fabulous Histories**

Something needs to be said about myths, a particular kind of narrative that underlie social structures of communities because these particular stories are what Vico based his theories of poetic language on. There is also an added interest in myths in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; people recognize the need for myth in our time. Vico’s poetic language includes fables or myths;. He tells us, “The definition of  $\mu\upsilon\phi\acute{o}\varsigma$  [mythos] is ‘true narration’ but it has continued to mean ‘fable,’ which everybody has hitherto taken to

mean ‘false narration,’ while the definition of λόγός [logos] is ‘true speech,’ though it is commonly taken to mean the ‘origin’ or ‘history of words’” (par. 249). Vico suggests that fables are based on true events that are built into the fabric of a culture. They persist for a reason. “If all gentile histories have therefore preserved their fabulous origins, . . . the fables must uniquely contain historical accounts of the oldest customs, orders and laws of the first gentile nations” (par. 93). Thus Vico’s idea of myth differs from modern-day connotation of myth: “a traditional narrative usually involving supernatural or imaginary persons and embodying popular ideas on natural or social phenomena, etc. . . . a widely held but false notion” (Concise Oxford Dictionary 784). Once more we come back to the metaphor-making and myth-making giants.

Ironically, during the time I was writing this thesis, there seems to have been several television programs on myths and legends. A rerun of a mythic journey lead by Joseph Campbell was on PBS television in November 2005. Also in November a series of “docu-histories” by the British historian, Michael Wood, also were aired. Woods tried to find evidence of four archetypal myths: the woman of power (Queen of Sheba), Paradise (Shangrila), Hero (King Arthur), and a quest (Jason and the Argonauts). What was interesting about this program was Wood’s premise that there may be some truth behind the myths and legends. Shades of Vico! On one of the pages of the PBS web site gave a description of myths that suggests Vico’s theories: “Myths are more than mere stories and they serve a much more profound purpose in ancient and modern cultures. Myths are sacred tales that explain the world and man's experience. They instruct, inspire, console, and warn. They embody the wisdom of a culture and serve to pass that wisdom to the next generation” (“Myths” PBS).

But myths can be false in that it was the perceptions of the first myth-makers that made the myth in the first place. Vico reminds us that “the world of the gentile nations has certainly been made by men” (par. 40). Unlike God who is omniscient and omnipresent, and unlike the Jews who have the word of God, gentile nations can introduce misconceptions because of our limited, finite knowledge. And as new knowledge comes to us through different discoveries of the nature of things, myths may lose their power or even their meaning. It is why myths often appear strange to us but if we look at them as Vico did, as extended metaphors, we can still get the gist of their meanings. This theory illustrates the Vichian idea of how nations rise and fall because we make our histories. Things change over time.

When Vico talks about “fabulous” he uses the word in its old meaning, coming from the Latin root word, *fabula*: fable or story; he is not necessarily using it to mean incredible or unbelievable as we think of that word today. His logic suggests that though we have lost the original meaning of myths, there is what he calls “imaginative universals” or archetypes that have endured because they are important to the culture. For example, Hercules would be an “imaginative universal,” a hero who symbolizes strength.

In examining the beginnings of community through language, Vico recognizes the “imaginative universals” that come through the myths and fables of cultures, especially during the time of “heroic” linguistic phase. In some respects he is a precursor to Joseph Campbell and others who study myth as a unifying cultural force that pervades cultures. Joseph Campbell sees a hero with a thousand faces; Vico sees that each nation “had its Jove and its Hercules, all the gentile nations were poetic at the start and that divine poetry was born first among them” (par.200).

Joseph Campbell was not the only person to see the importance of myth. The philosopher Rollo May (incidentally a correspondent of Marshall McLuhan's) wrote a book called *The Cry for Myth* in which he speculated that American culture needs to have myth to keep the culture alive. "The myth leads people to give their attention to one possibility rather than another, and hence to change the direction of their intentions and their dreams. . . . Since myths are beyond time, they could all be formed into one glorious narrative" (May 93). But myth is not just for a country or community but for individuals: "Myths are our self-interpretation of our inner selves in relation to the outside world. They are narrations by which our society is unified. Myths are essential to the process of keeping our souls alive and bringing us new meaning in a difficult and often meaningless world" (May 20).

Another modern philosopher, Sam Keen, who was a colleague of Joseph Campbell's, collaborated on a book on writing personal histories, *Your Mythic Journey*. He recognizes that it is not just the Greeks whose world view was influenced by myths. "If we look at the panorama of the twentieth century, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that our recent history has been shaped as much by unconscious myth as by conscious science" (Keen and Valley-Fox x). He then goes on to talk about the problems of mythical thinking (myths of race and nation and various "isms") (x-xii). The book has many quotations from philosophers and writers about myth and storytelling. Philosopher Alexander MacIntyre, (who seems to come up in the writings of Hauser, Fisher, McLuhan, Schaeffer and others) blends the idea of narrative with the metaphor of the quest which has a relationship to a legend or mythical story: "The unity of human life is the unity of a narrative quest. Quests sometimes fail, are frustrated, abandoned or

dissipated into distractions; and human lives may in all these ways also fail. But the criteria for success or failure in a human life as a whole, are the criteria of success or failure in a narrated or to-be-narrated quest” (qtd. in Fisher 78). In spite of the fact that people believe myths to be false, philosophers and writers recognize that we understand ourselves better if we can put ourselves in the context of our culture and community. It is what digital storytelling is attempting to do on the Internet.

Scott McCloud, author of *Understanding Comics*, also uses the metaphor of a journey. In an interview with Mark Meadows he said,

Whatever its core appeal, narrative clearly speaks to something ancient and possibly unchanging in us. I don't know to what degree we live our lives by that roadmap, but we seem to have a need to look at the map again and again to see if the map has changed. Narrative is one of those ways that we can check the road we're on—not only where it's going, but how it's shifted in the last day or in the last year. Our landscape changes. The landscape of our lives changes. Narrative is a map and a diary. Our landmarks don't remain constant. (Meadows 127)

His roadmap seems to suggest the idea of following a mythic journey and he seems to address Vichian theory of the intrinsic nature of “poetic language” in our progenitors that narrative is “something ancient and possibly unchanging in us.”

## **Conclusion**

Vico grounds early communication in storytelling or myths or fables., noting the differences that languages went through within a culture: prelinguistic gestures to poetic to print media. But those languages were also affected not only by the rhetorical situations of a changing society but by the tools available within that culture (par. 932-

936). Now that we are in the computer age, what can we learn from Vico studies of past writing technologies that are paralleled in the multimedia milieu of a digital story? In the next chapter, I examine the technologies that affect digital storytelling, but will first give some background on the history of language technologies as viewed from our time. And, like Vico, will show how these technologies affected community or society.



## Chapter Three: Technology

About 35 years ago I attended a cybernetics exhibition in London with a friend who was studying mathematics at Manchester University. His university had an exhibit, a computer that generated poetry. I can't remember how effective that was, but one exhibit I remember was a computer in which multicolored patterns appeared on a computer screen when someone made a sound (speech, song, a noise) into a microphone. As I sit here typing at the computer I'm listening to music. In the corner of the screen is a miniscreen in the shape of a heart, the skin mode of a music program, in which a visual that looks like multicolored flames pulsates to the sound of the music playing on my computer. This technology that was restricted to a university research unit 35 years ago is now a commonplace feature of today's computers. Sight and sound have come together to give us a multisensory experience that is more than real life because in this instance we can now visualize sound.

When we think of the word "technology" we are more likely to think of technologies such as the computer. However, we have always lived with some kind of technology. The invention of the wheel happened several thousand years ago and changed the way society functioned, helping us to move or carry items both quicker and further. The way we communicate has also been affected by different technologies that in turn affected cultures. Though the digital storytelling community's motive is to create community through storytelling, the technologies that the organizations use affects how the communities form and interconnect. We need to understand how technologies affect our way of communicating which in turn affects culture.



In the previous chapter, Giambattista Vico theorized that societies go through three different kinds of communication technologies: poetic (metaphor), emblematic (imaginative universals and visuals), and writing. He also explained how primitive humans created community through a shared common experience, and how fables are the basis of cultures. Marshall McLuhan, the eclectic guru of multimedia, seems to take Vico's idea of the shared physical experience to a different level, linking our physical bodies to the electronic technologies. Walter Ong, a pupil of McLuhan's, in his book, *Orality and Literacy*, looked at how cultures changed because the technology of writing changed oral societies. McLuhan concentrated on how electrification changed society. Now we are in an electronic age that McLuhan anticipated. The multimedia technologies have brought a new visual aspect to the way we communicate, adding another dimension to orality and literacy. Thus the three arts that Vico suggested was important for youth to study—poetry, painting and oratory—come together in digital storytelling. This chapter examines the theories of Marshall McLuhan as it relates to Vichian theories of *sensus communis* and communication in a multimedia world.

### **McLuhan: A Mosaic**

Like Vico, McLuhan's background and theories need to be explained first. McLuhan's writings have been described as axiomatic and epigrammatic (not unlike Vico's) and that his writing is not linear but mosaic in that tangential ideas jump in and out of his writings. His style of writing would work well in the Internet environment; tangential ideas could be made into various links. The byline on the interview in *Playboy* magazine calls McLuhan the "high priest of popcult and metaphysician of media." (Gordon 1). That McLuhan, a scholar and a devout Catholic, was even interviewed by

*Playboy* is unusual, but his theories of how technologies have changed society and the eccentric pronouncements and style of his writings caught the attention of journalists in the 1970s. His axioms the “global village” and “The medium is the message” are still known today though most people may not have heard of the name of McLuhan. In fact, a book, *McLuhan for Beginners*, starts off with this premise (Gordon 1).

Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) was a Canadian professor of English, his field of study being the Renaissance. However, he began to look at the phenomenon of mass media technologies and how they affected culture (McLuhan and Zingrone 1-3). The book that caught the attention of university students was *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* published in 1964 (Gordon 4). Though McLuhan did not publish a genetic autobiography, we can trace his ideas from people who influenced him. McLuhan studied under Cambridge University professor I. A. Richards whose “literary criticism approach focused on the meaning of words” (Gordon 17-19). Gordon also lists other people who influenced McLuhan: “the French symbolist poets of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Irish writer James Joyce, the English painter and writer Wyndham Lewis, Anglo-American poet and critic T. S. Eliot, literary critic F. R. Leavis, and Canadian economic historian Harold Innis” (Gordon 19). One person missing from this list is Giambattista Vico.

However, for this thesis, McLuhan’s link to Vico shows how Vichian theory was reshaped to fit the technological world of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. McLuhan’s scholarship then seems to echo Vico’s interest in philology, the science of language, and how it affected society. That McLuhan should be linked to Vico is not as strange as it may seem. Since he was a Renaissance scholar, he was acquainted with Vico’s writings. In a letter to

Harold Adam Innis in 1951, McLuhan wrote

One major discovery of the symbolists which had the greatest importance for subsequent investigation was their notion of the learning process as a labyrinth of the senses and faculties whose retracing provided the *key* to all arts and sciences (basis of myth of Daedalus, basic for the dreams and schemes of Francis Bacon, and, when transferred by [Giovanni Battista] Vico to philology and history of culture, it also forms the basis of modern historiography, archaeology, psychology and artistic procedures alike). (“Letter” 73)

Furthermore, McLuhan wrote a book, *Laws of Media: The New Science* with his son, Eric. In an endnote in *Essential McLuhan*, Eric McLuhan claimed that the book completed a longstanding project: one begun in the seventeenth century by Sir Francis Bacon in his *The New Science*, and resumed in the eighteenth century by Giambattista Vico in his *The New Science* (McLuhan and Zingrone 393). In a parallel to Vico’s genetic autobiography, McLuhan pulls together the relationship of Baconian and Vichian theories and reforms and reinterprets them for today’s multimedia culture.

I recently discovered that I am not the first person to link Vico and McLuhan. Francesco Guardiani did this in an article in 1994 in the publication, *The Imaginative Basis of Thought and Culture: Contemporary Perspectives on Giambattista Vico* which is part of the Media, Communications and Culture Studies series published by the University of Toronto. Guardiani, an associate professor of Italian at the University of Toronto, is also co-editor of the journal *McLuhan Studies*. It was inevitable that he would write an article linking Vico and McLuhan. Guardiani’s article “zero[s] in on the concept of ‘natural law,’ as it is conceived differentially by Vico and McLuhan” (71). I will zero

in on parallels between Vichian theory and McLuhan's reinterpretation of them for our understanding of our relationship with multimedia technologies and how these affect culture.

### **Community = Global Village**

McLuhan's ideal interactive world suggests real communication, a real sense of community. One of the aphorisms that McLuhan is known for is "the global village." He explained it thus in an interview in *Playboy*: "There have always been a multiplicity of ideas within smaller communities and though the idea of the global village in which 'the human tribe' can become truly one family and man's consciousness can be freed from the shackles of mechanical culture and enable to roam the cosmos" (Gordon 103). It has always been this way. It's just that because of the Internet, we are more aware of the disconnections and well as the connections. Part of community building is living together, making meaning together. Gordon paraphrases McLuhan's thoughts on this: "electronic technology does not depend on words and since the computer is the extension of the central nervous system, here is the possibility of extending consciousness without verbalization, getting past the fragmentation and numbing effects of language, a way to universal understanding and unity" (82-83). In McLuhan's mind we are connected in more ways than one. Physically through the computer that extends our touch we meet the touch of other computer user at the other end of the electronic highway .This gives a new dimension to an advertisement jingle for the telephone company, "Reach out and touch someone," making it a truly McLuhanesque aphorism. But this reaching out and connecting with others also relates to Vico's "soul-strings," in which people emotionally and mentally connect. As there is the possibility of multitudinous *loci* on the Internet, it is

hardly surprising that someone, somewhere will connect in a variety of ways.

In 1965, McLuhan gave an address at the International Center for the Typographic Arts University at Carbondale, Illinois. Though there was not the proliferation of personal computers and the experiences of virtual reality that is the key word for multisensory experience through digitized multimedia, his words seem to be prophetic. “The computer will be in a position to carry out orchestrated programming for the sensory life of entire populations. It can be programmed in terms of their total needs, not just in terms of the messages they should be hearing, but in terms of the total experience as picked up and patterned by all the senses at once” (“Address at Vision 65” 228).

A recent book, *Persuasive Technology: Using Computers to Change What We Think and Do*, studies how we interact with computers, not just through them. One of the author's premises is that when people use an interactive technology, they often respond to it as though it were a living being— noting that people get angry or swear at the computer when it doesn't deliver as expected, or offer thanks when the computer comes through in a pinch (Fogg 26). Communicating is such a strong part of human life that it seems that we are programmed to relate to things as an extension of another human being. Personification is a well-known and widely used literary device; it is not surprising that we personify our tools of communication. After all there is the premise that somewhere out there there is a human being at the other end be it a sloppy programmer whose program has bugs that cause angst, or a more specific person at the end of an email or blog.

If we are inclined to relate and put human faces to technology, we are more likely to respond to stories about other people. As Vico suggests, poetic language or storytelling is the simplest form of communication being understood by children and illiterate cultures. Storytelling incorporates and disseminates the mores and values of a culture, helping the listeners see how they fit into the culture. It is for this reason that storytelling is so powerful because it can be used for good or ill building up a community in ways that can be inclusive and exclusive of other cultures or communities. Examples of negative exclusive communities can be found on the Internet for such groups as neo-Nazis, etc. Ancient philosophers saw the need of ethos or ethical behavior on the part of the speaker or writer as being an essential part of the rhetorical triangle. It is needed even more so today because our communication now has even more far reaching ability to shape global cultures.

As mentioned earlier, though today's technologies are highly sophisticated they incorporate ancient communication technologies. Vico theorized that a culture may still have components of an earlier time. The dumb express themselves through actions or objects which bear some natural relationship with the ideas they wish to signify. This axiom is the principle of the hieroglyphics in which all nations spoke during their first barbarism (Pompa 178). A return to hieroglyphics in today's multimedia society could be seen in emoticons [ :) ] used in emails. Jay Bolter explains the effect of these ASCII characters that form iconic faces as adding some ironic nuance to a message and that such icons are meant to put the verbal text in context, as the writer tries to enforce a univocal interpretation on prose that is otherwise open to many interpretations (72-73).

Emoticons are another indication of Fogg's premise of personifying technology. That the name of these icons have their roots in the word *Æmote* shows that the technological world is still interested in reaching people through the one of the rhetorical appeals, pathos or appeal to the emotions of an audience, but the person using the emoticon also reveals his or her ethos or character in the communication. After all, behind all the technology that gives a sense of remoteness and isolation are people who are merely using a modern-day mode of communication. The effectiveness of these emoticons is such that whatever language we speak most cultures will recognize the human face and the hieroglyphic emotions such as :) for a smiling face and :( for a sad face. In many ways, in order to communicate and relate to a larger and broader range of people, we include the basics of visual communication, Vico's *Æfirst barbarism*. Emoticons are also metaphoric and metaphors were one of the earliest ways man communicated ideas and concepts.

### ***Sensus Communis : I Sing the Body Electric***

For Vico, a metaphor based on a sensational experience began community. His *sensus communis* or common sense includes the physical sensations of the body that then move out to connect to others in the civic world. McLuhan translates this idea into how we interact with technology. Earlier I suggested that we have always had technologies in our lives that affect how we do things. McLuhan explains that these technologies are literal extensions to our senses. Gordon further links McLuhan's ideas about the making of meaning to Richards, but this statement also has undertones of Vichian theory. He quotes McLuhan

Nothing has its meaning alone. Every figure [consciously noted element of a structure or situation] must have its ground or environment [the rest of the structure or situation which is not noticed]. A single word, divorced from its linguistic ground would be useless. A note in isolation is not music.

Consciousness is corporate action involving all the senses (Latin *sensus communis* or ‘common sense’ is the translation of all the senses into each other).

The ‘meaning of meaning’ is relationship. (“Take Today” 30 qtd. in Gordon 20).

McLuhan too connects the physical senses to community. When he talks about “corporate” action, he could easily have said “corporeal” action but “corporate” brings together the sense of the physicality of a body as well as the sense of a group.

As we learned earlier, Vico divided the communication technologies into three kinds: poetic, emblematic, and written. These ages have been translated from the philological terms of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Vichian theory to the 20<sup>th</sup>-century technological terms. McLuhan also suggests that there are “three ages of man: 1. The Preliterate or Tribal Era—when the spoken word was king and the ear was queen—II. The Gutenberg Age—when the printed word was king and the eye was queen—III. The Electronic Age of Retribalized (that’s right!) Man—when FULL sensory involvement (especially touching) is believing—when all the senses are jesters at the royal court—(and there is no king or queen)” (Gordon 33). His “court” metaphor links the linguistic changes with the civic or cultural changes. Vico included the pre-oral world of primitive humans that included pictographs and hieroglyphs as well as speech; there was a type of writing though not alphabetic. McLuhan’s Gutenberg Age equates to Vico’s “vulgar” or human period. The Electronic Age seems to include Vico’s *ricorso* (par. 1106), a return to the



poetic age that includes once more the pictorial and hieroglyphic and the awareness of touch or physical sensations.

The interviewer in *Playboy* summed up this McLuhanesque statement thus.

McLuhan contends that all media—in and of themselves regardless of the messages they communicate—exert a compelling influence on man and society. Prehistoric, or tribal, man existed in a harmonious balance of the senses, perceiving the world equally through hearing, smell, touch, sight and taste. But technological innovations are extensions of human abilities and senses that alter this sensory balance. (“*Playboy*” 233-34)

McLuhan continues Aa theory of cultural change is impossible without knowledge of the changing sense ratios effected by various externalizations of our senses@ (*Gutenberg* 42).

So what are these sense ratios as McLuhan sees them? McLuhan added a further metaphor to explain his idea of the extension of the human physique by technologies: He brings together the idea of *sensus communis* or which, for clarification, I will translate into “common sensations” with the community sense or relationships. The relationships are more like connections between people using the technology. We connect in a real way because the technologies are an extension of ourselves. Computers and multimedia that pervades our society has thus changed our sense ratios. We are indeed affected by our technological as well as social environment because they are inextricably interconnected. We are not unlike Walt Whitman’s child who Awent forth@ and absorbed into himself things he encountered that day.

McLuhan saw how certain multimedia technologies were in control of institutions and corporations; information was disseminated to them. But there were other

multimedia that gave people the opportunity to interact with and through the technologies. The non-interactive technologies he termed “hot” and the interactive technologies he termed “cool.” He explains, “A hot medium is one that extends one single sense in ‘high definition.’ High definition is the state of being well filled with data” (*Understanding* 162). There is nothing in this state for the reader/audience/viewer to contribute. This idea of leaving gaps for audiences or readers to fill in is similar to the classical Greek philosophers’ enthymeme, in which an omitted premise between two statements is filled in by the audience. Though this is used in logical argument, it also suggests the unspoken common knowledge between speaker and audience. It becomes a kind of bond or link. In McLuhanesque terms, speaker and audience are on the same wave length. In other words, McLuhan suggests, “Any hot medium allows for less participation than a cool one, as a lecture makes for less participation than a seminar, and a book for less than dialogue” (*Understanding Media* 23). For McLuhan “hot” media would include: film, radio, alphabet, photography, letter, corporate website; “cool” media are TV, telephones, ideograms, cartoons or comic books, email, blogs, *Wikipedia* (the online encyclopedia).

In McLuhan’s technological world where technology is an extension of our bodies, a physical, tactile and kinetic memory sometimes is stored more in our fingertips than in our verbal abilities. For example, I am more likely to remember a keypad number code by the pattern used, not necessarily by the numbers themselves. Socrates decried the fact that writing destroys memory (Ong 78) but in some respects memory is merely changed as in the example of the kinetic memory of my fingertips. The memory is ingrained in the tactile synapses of the brain, not in the oral part; it’s merely a different

kind of memory from the memory needed for an oral society. Our memories adapt to the technologies of our cultures; McLuhan seems to be right, we indeed are changed by our technologies. Most of the Western world has been so immersed in print media that we no longer rely solely on our mental powers because we can recall things through re-reading (print), re-listening (oral recordings), and re-visioning (photographs and videos),

McLuhan blends the mechanical things that humans have made with our physical bodies. What we make becomes part of us. A language is a metaphor in the sense that it not only stores but translates experience from one mode into another<sup>6</sup> (*Gutenberg* 5).

This statement is reminiscent of Vico's giants who through experience with the thunderstorm translated the experience to the metaphor of an angry god.

AThe personal and social consequences of any medium—that is, of any extension of ourselves—result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology<sup>7</sup> (*Understanding* 7).

We talk of living in a digital world. I think our world encompasses not just the idea of the binary numeric digits that comprise computer technology but also the idea of our fingers (digits) reaching out to communicate. If looked at this way, computers embody not just a Cartesian mathematical equation but the Vichian sociological and human equation. If we agree with McLuhan's view, we are in many respects bionic beings or even types of cyborgs every time we use a tool.

McLuhan's ideas are sometimes contradictory. For example, he talked about TV as being a "cool" therefore interactive medium but later noted "a strange paradox: TV viewers' high involvement with the images projected on the screen minimized rather than

heightened the need of viewers to respond to what they see on TV” (Gordon 91). He gave the example of the 1963 John Kennedy funeral that involved “us in moving depth, but it does not excite, agitate or arouse” (Gordon 91). However, perhaps it is not so much the medium that’s at fault but the event itself. Witnessing the two planes slamming into the Twin Towers on September 11, did indeed excite, agitate and arouse people. It was the unexpectedness of it that aroused the emotions. It’s a matter of *kairos*, the immediate situation. The funeral was an epideictic event past the immediacy of the moment of John F. Kennedy’s assassination. Viewing the actual assassination aroused the emotions: shock, horror, disbelief. The technology allowed people worldwide to share these experiences and these shared experiences brought a sense of community as witnessed by the outpouring of support that the United States received after the tragedy of September 11.

Furthermore, McLuhan suggests that the old technologies are still there but have changed so that there is a hybridization of technologies (*Understanding* 48-49). These hybrid technologies do not conform exactly to McLuhan’s “hot” and “cool” metaphor. For example, he sees the radio as “hot” because it disseminates information from a corporation or institution; there’s no interaction. However, modern radio has talk shows where the public interact with each other through a host commentator, thus making it a “cool” medium. If I were to make my own metaphor for how we interact with multimedia, I would look to the yin/yang symbol of Eastern religions, the yang being McLuhan’s equivalent of “hot,” and the yin being the equivalent of “cool.” With this metaphor, the yin is contained with the yang, and the yang within the yin. Technologies usually contain both. For example, in digital storytelling there is the element of yin in the

interaction with the story, but it also has the yang element of its being archived in an unchangeable form on a web site. But the overriding factor that makes it interactive is the genre, storytelling, that touches us more than mere data.

For this reason, I would like to suggest that a terminology change for someone experiencing a digital story. A person surfing the Internet is called a user. However, it is difficult to use the word “user” for someone who is involved with a digital story. We could say listener or audience because she is listening to a story, but she is also a viewer. And there is also the sense of touch involved as we have our hands on the mouse giving us control of whether to speed up or slow down the story or repeat it, or to move on to another one. In speaking then, of digital storytelling I would prefer to use the term “participant” since there is more interaction and connection to something that is a real life experience rather than a quick, superficial visit to gather and use data.

### **Thunder on the Right:**

In his book, *Cliché to Archetype*, McLuhan, gives a new perspective on language when he stated, “Language is a technology which extends all of the human senses simultaneously” (McLuhan and Zingrone 321). Technology comes from the Greek *tekhnologia* meaning “systematic treatment” but the root of this word is *tekhnē*, art in the sense of skill. Though it appears that McLuhan is making a human characteristic into a mechanical, mechanistic element, language could also be related to creative human skills, a technique that we use to explain events in our lives. McLuhan shows an extension of Richard’s idea of making meaning: “All media are active metaphors in their power to translate experience into new forms. The spoken word was the first technology by which man was able to let go of his environment in order to grasp it in a new way”

(*Understanding* 57). To show the importance of this statement, it is reiterated and rephrased by Gordon “in language, a metaphor is an extension of consciousness, a medium in the broad sense that is fundamental for McLuhan. When we look beyond language, all media are active metaphors, or technologies for transforming human experience” (Gordon 72). These statements about language return us to Vico’s giants and their making of metaphor.

Vico’s primeval humans translated their experience to personify the storm into a god; thunder became a metaphor for power and mystery. In the Old Testament thunder is symbolic of God’s power to destroy as well as to bring revelation. Many other cultures from Greek to Celtic, Aztec to Hinduism also link godly power and inspiration to thunder and thunder bolts (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1001-6).

Vico theorized that primitive people created a metaphor to give meaning to their lives. And this “poetic language” is something that is still an innate part of us. Furthermore, Hauser has explained how narrative helps give people a sense of where they belong in a community (190). This axiom of making meaning is used by McLuhan but in a slightly different way. He relates it to interactivity between the reader of a newspaper and the content of the newspaper. He tells us, “But the reader of the news, when he goes through his dateline apertures, enters the news world as a maker. There is no ‘meaning’ in the news except what we make—there is no connection between any of the items except the instant dimension of electric circuitry” (“Address” 227). Vico’s *ingenium*, the making of knowledge, is as much if not more at play in a multimedia world as in an oral or literary world because more senses are being used. To use a McLuhanesque term, it’s how we’re wired, the human brain’s synapses being equated to electric circuitry. And, to

put this in computer terms, we are programmed to make meaning or make sense of our experiences as we make connections without our memory bank..

Like Vico, McLuhan repeats and rephrases his ideas in his various books. This repetition that carries the theme and thread of his ideas throughout his writings also reveals how important those idea were to McLuhan. But though Richard's epistemological theories about the making of meaning appear in McLuhan's writings, this same idea of language, especially metaphor changing a person's environment could easily have come from the Vichian theory of the creation of culture by the primordial giants. The giants experienced the post-diluvian storm and translated that experience into poetic or metaphoric language, a new technology. McLuhan seems to translate what Vico called poetic language to technology. It is apparent in this statement by McLuhan: ALike Isidore of Seville, Vico saw the history of cultural evolution in the etymologies of words as recording responses to technological innovations@ ("Cliché" 332). What happened in Vico's primeval world was the introduction of language and a metaphoric epiphany that created community; the modern-day thunder is the multimedia technologies that also change perceptions and invite us to make new metaphors—new meanings—that also change culture.. McLuhan certainly thought so.

### **Simply Fabulous: Mythic Digital Connections**

Vico theorized that the first language that the primeval humans developed with poetic in that they created a fable or myth—an extended metaphor—from their experiences. McLuhan also sees fable or myth as part of our relationship with multimedia, especially computers. Though McLuhan died before the World Wide Web and the Internet were developed, he still anticipated the possible impact of the computer.

In 1966 he wrote, "The real job of the computer in the future is not going to have anything to do with retrieval. It's going to have to do with pure discovery, because we use our memories for many purposes, mostly unconscious . . . When you can recall things at a very high speed, they take on a new mythic and structural meaning that is quite alien to ordinary perception" ("McLuhan Sourcebook," McLuhan and Zingrone 295).

It is interesting that McLuhan talks about the mythic meanings that come from the speed of technology. Myths give perceptions and perspectives to primitive cultures showing the villager his or her relationship to the community because the patterns are seen to be repeated over time. The Internet makes connections and links to seemingly disparate things on such a vast scale and with such speed that we have the mythic sense of connecting to a world wide community. But what does that do to us? McLuhan explains further explains how it tribalizes us:

The main effect of electric process, McLuhan discovered, is to retribalize the structure of psychic and social awareness. The Global Village of corporate consumer values stimulates local peoples to retrieve who they used to be as a protection for their fading identities, for electric process makes us all nobodies desperate for identity. (Gordon 19)

Digital storytelling does turn a corner of the Internet into a tiny village or, as McLuhan has predicted, a tribal community. Ironically, the electric process may make us all "nobodies" but the digital storytelling community does try to make people into "somebodies" as the stories of ordinary people are archived on the Internet. McLuhan maintained that the "language of a people is not only the resonant bridge that binds them in space and time; it is also the medium that shapes and processes their sensory and



mental lives” (“Pro-log,” McLuhan and Zingrone 363). In the next chapter, I will show how digital storytelling includes features of both Vichian theory and McLuhan’s aphorisms.

## Chapter Four: The Praxis of Vichian Theory

On a trip to Scotland, a couple of my children and I visited the ancient megalithic tomb or barrow of Maeshowe on the main Orkney island. A standing stone or menhir placed several yards away from the cave entrance stands like a sentinel and measures the length of shadows during the seasons. We stooped low to walk through the passageway and eventually were able to stand upright in a large stony cavern. The story of how the tomb had been built so that a shaft of light hit the back of the tomb on the day of the winter solstice was interesting, but there was a lot of conjecture since there were no records of what the tomb represented to that ancient community. But there was some communication carved into the stone walls: Viking runic graffiti. The original prehistoric tomb builders had left no record, but the runes revealed something of 11<sup>th</sup>-century Viking culture. For one thing, the runic marks with their straight lines were appropriate for the tools available to that culture: axes. Furthermore, according to the *Orkneyjar*, *The Heritage of the Orkney Islands*, web site, there was further insight into the Viking's visit. A tale from the *Orkneyinga Saga* told how "in the darkness of an Orkney midwinter, a group of Viking warriors sought shelter from a terrible snowstorm." Most of the graffiti consists of the names of the Vikings, but others tell a story. "Crusaders broke into Maeshowe. Lif the earl's cook carved these runes. To the northwest is a great treasure hidden" (*Orkneyjar*).

Humans want to leave their mark. William Faulkner addressing a university audience, concurs: "Really the writer doesn't want success . . . . He knows he has a short

span of life, that the day will come when he must pass through the wall of oblivion, and he wants to leave a scratch on that wall—Kilroy was here—that somebody a hundred, or a thousand years later will see” (*Faulkner in the University [1959], Session 8, Bartlett 838*). But it’s not just professional writers who leave their marks, but ordinary people such as a man named Lif who was the cook of a Norwegian warlord .A digital story is more than scratchings on a wall, but like the Viking graffiti it gives a glimpse into the lives of ordinary men and women, and their stories taken together reveal the communities and cultures they live in.

Through the study of language, Giambattista Vico saw patterns in the rise and fall of nations from the marks, paintings or writing that the nations left as they recorded their histories. Marshall McLuhan concentrated on electric technologies, seeing them as ways of extending human senses and changing culture. Now we are in an era of electronic technologies and the fast connections of fiber optics; we are more connected through technology now than ever before. Unlike McLuhan’s electric world, we live in a digital world, not analogic. The term “digital storytelling” seems to have connections to both Vico and McLuhan. Storytelling or poetic language, is the intrinsic mode of communication and the beginning of consciousness of community, and “digital” has the double meaning of the binary system used in computers and the Latin name for finger or toe, *digitus*, thus suggesting the sense of touch, the McLuhanesque extension of one of the five senses.

### **Vico + McLuhan ≈ Digital Storytelling**

Digital storytelling is a phenomenon of the digital age. But how does it connect to Vichan and McLuhanian theories? Giambattista Vico’s theory of *sensus communis* gives

an underpinning to the need that the founders of the Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS) sensed was an integral part of humankind. Vico based his theories about human history on philology, showing how social and civic changes developed because of language. CDS also seeks to build community through a particular mode of communication: storytelling. For Vico, the progression of cultures was based on the development of language and language tools, and the modes of expression depended not just on oral or written language but on visuals as well: gestures, orality, paintings, hieroglyphics, chirographic writing, and eventually print. Digital storytelling incorporates all of these elements in video (gestures), voice overs (orality), visuals (paintings that includes chirography, and through icons, hieroglyphs) and the script (print). McLuhan brings Vichian theory to the modern day technologies which are the tools used by CDS to create that community. This chapter looks at particular applications of shaping history, creating community or *sensus communis*, and poetic language that includes not just narrative but Vico's "poetry, painting, and oratory" to digital storytelling.

### **Shaping Our Histories**

This practice of revision shows a relationship to Vico's axiom that we create our own stories or histories. We remake ourselves, not just by reframing our stories but also because the technologies give us the power to make multiple revisions. Today many countries are seeking national identity, and there is a world-wide focus on social issues. It seems fitting to use Vichian theory as groundwork for what digital storytelling is hoping to achieve in bringing awareness of individual and cultural identities through storytelling. CDS has links to organizations and people doing social and cultural work within their own communities, but it also has the capability of networking disparate communities

world wide and through these connections thus forms its own community. And many of these communities seek to make social changes, especially in giving a voice to ordinary people.

We are literally re-visioning ourselves when we tell a digital story because the multimedia programs give us so many options of how to tell our stories. In the CDS workshops, the instructors "observed that as people not only look, speak and write about the material they have drawn from their historic archive, but manipulate, colorize, zoom in and around, re-composite and create collage out of these valued images and artifacts, that the material comes to life. This re-animation and the plasticity of change . . . help the participants to actually manage their meaning@ (Lambert 106). So storytelling or narrative itself that makes meaning, has even more facets to manipulate than a traditional story even though the traditional storyteller will vary the way she tells it each time it is told.

For example, if I were to make a digital story about my father's experience in RAF Bomber Command in World War Two, I could relate the storyline but in the background I could choose different kinds of music to evoke a different mood. I could choose to use the stirring, patriotic "Men of Harlech" march-like song that links early Welsh battles for freedom from the English with the 1940s battle of freedom from the Nazis. It would give a positive view of war. Or, I could show the same pictures of my father and his mates in their flying gear, and play the Welsh song, "David of the White Rock" with its lyrical, sad song about a bard laying down his harp and saying farewell to his soon-to-be widow. It could suggest that ordinary people, some poets and painters, are sent out to fight battles and so not live to their potential. It would then have an anti-war message. This latter example would have the same effect in the scene of the movie *Platoon* in which Barber's

“Adagio for Strings” was played as background music for the dying marine.

Earlier in the chapter introducing digital storytelling, I quoted Daniel Meadows of the *Capture Wales* project who remarked how digital storytelling gives common or ordinary people a voice because they have stories to tell. From these stories we get a better picture of societies rather than illuminating only the rich, famous and powerful. Vico’s theory of history gives our progenitors a voice that comes from their imagination and produced fables. David Marsh in his introduction to his translation of *New Science* tells us that “French historian Jules Michelet fell in love with Vico’s evocation of the terrible creative power of ordinary people” (xiii). Giving a voice and power to ordinary people is something that Marx, Engels and Mills recognized in Vichian theory to suit their purposes. I do not know if the people who create digital stories have a “terrible” creative power, but when these stories are put together, we get a glimpse into the make up of a culture in which people reveal the personality traits, their humor, quirkiness, and often their courage in dealing with various vicissitudes of life in their culture.

A link of digital storytelling and Vico is the idea of autobiography that relies on memory. History is an autobiography of humans in the larger scheme of things, but in creating that history are the lives and experiences and memories of individuals who are part of the history of a particular culture. What is often left over from an ancient culture in archeological digs is not always the treasures of the rich and famous but the cooking pots, the mundane things of life, the Viking graffiti. What the Internet and digital storytelling does is give ordinary people a voice. The two or three-minute digital stories are the pieces of a tapestry or a pot from an archeological dig. What the stories do that the pots or tapestries cannot do is put them in context. Vico was concerned that the

historians and archeologists of his time were misreading ancient civilizations, thinking that they had some mystical knowledge because we could not understand their writings (par. 412). Vico refuted this idea suggesting instead that it is because no one any longer has the ability to read or understand the writings today because they no longer make sense to us. The writings themselves were merely recordings of everyday events or stories. The writing itself was not mysterious to the Egyptians though there were few literate people at that time. This idea goes along with the new historicism critical theory that we have to put the readings in context and not read them from our own modern point of view.

Though the topics of some digital stories appear insignificant, they still draw us in and make connections. Ieuan Sheen's anecdotes about his early school days make us aware of our own school days. The idea that topics for a digital story do not need to be earth-shattering and that ordinary, small subjects don't have to be boring is suggested by a writer who was trying to define creative non-fiction ASusan Orleans referred to what she called . . . a type of writing that chronicles «the dignity of ordinariness,» a phrase that reminds [him] of James Joyce's definition of *epiphany*, «the moment in which the soul of the commonest object . . . seems to us radiant» (Pearson 318). In digital storytelling the epiphanies come not only from the objects and experiences but also there is an additional epiphany not necessarily from common objects, but as we read the stories of other people. This relates also to the idea of *ingenium*, that Vico tells us is the “power of connecting separate and diverse elements” (Vico, *Ancient Wisdom* in Pompa 70). This is an important feature of digital storytelling because this is the place where ordinary people

can reflect on their place in their culture, and helps others be aware of their own stories.

Some people lead very difficult lives and need to change the way they feel about themselves. Their myths are flawed by misconceptions. It is also particularly important for those areas of digital storytelling that use the media to help people heal from abuse. Today therapists recognize that storytelling or narrative therapy can be a way to heal. Our concept of ourselves, the myths we grow up believing about ourselves can be destructive, not as May suggested, a process of keeping our souls alive. Narrative therapists help people retell their stories to change how they perceive themselves and therefore deal with past and present abuses. They can create new stories, new myths to give a new meaning to their lives.

Joe Lambert of CDS gave an example of the way a digital storytelling forum is helping women overcome victimization when he interviewed Amy Hill, coordinator of *Silence Speaks: Digital Storytelling for Healing, Resistance, and Violence Prevention*, one of the digital storytelling links from the CDS web site (Lambert 151-160). Hill explained that narrative therapy addresses both the general power of re-writing the life story you carry with you, as well as the specific impact that the writing process has in reflection and feedback in a therapeutic environment (155). This idea connects with Vico's theory of humans making their own history, or as Grant Boswell has noted "perceiving what they record, or perceiving what they make (*poem*) when they record."

### ***Sensus Communis and Community Building***

As Catherine Hobbs reminds us, autobiographies are rhetorical, giving insights into the experiences and lives of the storyteller. We do not live in a vacuum; our stories come from our communities and cultures. Though the giants created a primitive society,



they were driven to action to create and maintain that community from their experiences. We are reminded by John Schaeffer that Vico's idea of community is always the civic community and language community (120). Thus Vico's idea of *sensus communis* is appropriate for digital storytelling that has a very public forum, though its language uses multimedia. Naturally, the rhetorical nature of storytelling involves appeals to emotion are most prominent, *ethos* is shown by the digital storyteller's sincerity, the only agenda is sharing of oneself and an experience. *Ethos* also has the root of the word ethical and we expect these stories to be sincere. Just as Vico's autobiography was the result of a social need a rhetorical situation the new genre of digital storytelling appeared because the organizers of CDS also responded to a social situation: the need to create community using today's multimedia tools of communication.

In the chapter introducing digital storytelling, Joe Lambert one of the founders of CDS quoted Richard Stone who saw the necessity of integrating stories into our lives. They recognized that the personal stories, communal stories, myths, legends and folktales forged an empathetic bond between people and their communities. They seem to recognize the effects of Vico's barbarism of reflection that suggests the dissolution of civic society. Because of our modern way of life people have lost touch with each other. We live in a culture of Wordsworth's getting and spending ("The World Is Too Much With Us"), in which it is not civil, community building that is the focus but individual pursuits, the buying of "things." Vico's *ricorso* of society begins again with a return to the poetic nature of humans who become sociable and, returning to the primitive simplicity of the first world of peoples, are again religious, truthful, and

faithful@ (par. 1106). Though CDS does not suggest a return to religious values, they do believe in ethical and truthful stories, even those that will be used in industry or the more rhetorical social issues forums. Storytelling itself seems to give that cachet of sincerity because it is hard to refute someone's experience or even their perception of what the experience meant to them.

Our memories, of course, can be flawed. It is what we pay attention to at the time of an experience. And some of our memories are impressionistic rather than vivid. People have been suspicious of new technologies because they change old technologies. Plato believed that the new technology of writing would affect memory and recollection. Plato told us in the *Phaedrus* of the perceptions the ancient Greeks had about letters from a conversation between philosophers Thamus and Theuth "This discovery of yours [Theuth] will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves. The specific which you have discovered is an aid not to memory, but to reminiscence and you give your disciples not truth but only the semblance of truth" ( ). The irony of this statement is that Plato's words were written down; that's why they have been preserved for us today.

So what is wrong with reminiscing? Does the oral mode of expression only give truth? Vico gives another view of memory that includes reminiscing. When telling stories we are more inclined to evoke images and sensations that are common to our human experience. It is our imaginations from our own experiences that reach out to the universal in a story. Vico suggests that we cannot know or imagine what we don't already know through experience. In analyzing Latin words in section III, AOn Memory and

Imagination<sup>@</sup> in *On the Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*, Vico theorized

In Latin, *memoria* [memory], that which stores within itself the perceptions of the senses, is called *reminiscentia* [reminiscence] when it discloses them. But it also meant the faculty by which we form images, which the Greeks called *phantasia* [imagination] and we call *immaginativa*. For where we commonly say *immaginare* [to imagine], in Latin they said *memorare* [to remember]. *Was this because we can neither imagine something unless we have remembered it, nor remember anything unless we perceive it through the senses?* (Pompa 69) [my italics]

Once again, it may be necessary to clarify translations of Vico because different translations change the meaning slightly. *On the Ancient Wisdom of the Italians* was written in Latin by Vico and published later in an edition of Vico's works, *Opere Filosofiche*, that has Latin on the recto (right) page and an Italian translation by Paolo Cristofolini on the verso (left). The chart shows Pompa's translated sentence that I recorded in italics in the block quotation, and compares it with Cristofolini's Italian translation, the original Latin and Grant Boswell's translation from Latin.

Italian Translation of Latin	My literal translation from Italian	Latin written by Vico	English translation from Latin by Grant Boswell
<i>Forse pensavano in tal modo per aver osservato che non possiamo immaginare che cose ricordate, e che ricordiamo solamente le cose che abbiamo percepite?</i> (115-116)	Perhaps it must be observed that we cannot imagine those remembered things, and that we remember solely those things that we have perceived or felt?	<i>An quia fingere nobis non possumus nisi quae meminimus, nec meminimus nisi quae per sensus percipiamus?</i> (114)	Or is it because we cannot give shape to ourselves except what we have recorded, except what we may perceive by means of the senses?

It is worth analyzing the differences in translation because as Grant Boswell has pointed out in a handwritten note that accompanied his translation, “‘memorare’ has the sense of ‘record.’ The Roman notion of history is that great deeds are of no more importance than the historians who record them. I think Vico is very much aware of this sense, and for him ‘memoria’ includes a linguistic act of recording.” It is interesting that Boswell sees a collaborative act going on between deed doer and historian, the ethos of the historian being as important as the event. Nevertheless, the translations all suggest that our records or memories come from our senses which I translate to mean perceptions that come from experiences. We cannot perceive something unless we have experienced it. Writing an autobiography or a short digital story give shape or substance to our experiences and ultimately to a knowledge of ourselves.

Looking back can give us different views from where we are right now. Human affairs are chaotic and changeable and there are more probabilities than truths. Our past experiences affect our present perceptions. In a Greek city several thousand years ago, truth through dialectic philosophical thought may have been easier to achieve in a small culture. Life is more complicated now as ideas or truths come from all over the world. Vico differentiates between human truths and natural or scientific truths. Memories are not necessarily only triggered by what we hear or read. All our senses are engaged. What we smell, touch, hear, see and taste bring back certain memories. The memories return because it is what we concentrated on at that time that gives recall of an experience. Though the Internet uses multimedia which involves many of our senses there are still senses that we cannot have such as smell and taste. However, our memory works in such a way that the description of the memory brings back that memory even if we are not

experiencing that actual smell or taste. It seems to go back to Vico's maxim about narration as a form of self-knowledge (Verene 439). It is what we narrate to ourselves.

Though many of the stories on the *Capture Wales* and other web sites where digital stories are archived would be considered reminisces, they are still doing rhetorical work as explained by Catherine Hobbs (*Elements* 18-19). But some examples are overtly statements on cultural and social issues. On the *Capture Wales* web site is a story told by a young man whose family moved from India and who tried to fit in with the Welsh community, has civic implications. But the apparent intention of the storyteller was not necessarily to criticize or change the culture overtly. He and his family did find acceptance, but the story also shows the struggle that any outsider has to feel comfortable in a community.

Furthermore, for many factions of the digital storytelling community it is not just a matter of sharing but also a matter of overt persuasion especially for those entities that use digital storytelling as a means of addressing social issues. *Silence Speaks*, a link from the CDS website, is one forum that uses digital storytelling to change society, giving a voice to abused and victimized women.

Because digital stories are available to any Internet user anywhere in the world, the stories will have to appeal to a multi-diverse audience. How would *sensus communis* work for stories on a World Wide Web where people come from diverse cultures? How can such a wide audience come to consensus? Perhaps we can become connected by what experiences we share in common as human beings. For example, one person from Connecticut, USA, commenting on Ieuan Sheen's digital story remembered how he too had waited for snow even though he lived across the pond@ (Sheen). Ieuan's experience

with the frozen milk in the bottles brought back my own memories. I also went to village schools in Fife, Scotland, and Yorkshire, England. In our schools the teachers did not defrost the milk for us, we either drank what was defrosted or held the bottles in our gloved hands to melt the ice a little. What others who did not have this experience cannot realize from Sheen's description is that the bottles were small in size and made of glass and had a gold or silver metallic foil top. Since the milk in the United Kingdom was not homogenized like it is in the United States, the cream would often cling to the top of the foil lid and most of us licked off the cream even if we were not going to use the lids for Christmas baubles. For me, this story evokes more specific memories.

Another example of how people connect or identify with others was demonstrated at the 2005 Conference of the International Society of the History of Rhetoric (ISHR). One presenter, Laura Card from BYU, showed visuals of a newspaper written by Japanese inmates of a concentration camp in Utah during the Second World War. During her presentation she mentioned that in 1943 the male Japanese inmates were given the opportunity to serve in the United States military forces, but first they had to sign and swear allegiance and loyalty to the United States. At the end of the lecture, I spoke with a man from the state of Bengal, India, who talked about Laura's presentation. He identified with the experience that the Japanese inmates had had. He told me that his first language was Bengali because that was the predominant language in that state. Like most Indians he also spoke Hindi and another Indian language. However, all Bengali speakers had to periodically swear allegiance and loyalty to India because Bengal borders on Bangladesh and the predominant language in that country is also Bengali. Though the details of the experiences were quite different, the implications of the situations were similar. The

present-day Bengali was able to identify with the 1945 Japanese interns in a more personal way.

In oral societies, stories are told over and over again but in a literate society techniques to help people remember stories are used to cement stories into the reader's memory. It has been said that the best study method to commit things to memory is to use all faculties: reading (visual) the material, reading it out loud (hearing) and following the words read with one's finger (touch). Three main faculties are engaged: the ear, eye and hand in digital storytelling. Vico endorses the idea of using the underpinnings of primitive modes of expression to meet consensus. We should in no way blunt talents for those arts in which imagination, memory, or both, play a big part, e.g. painting, poetry, oratory or jurisprudence (Pompa 38). Though for Vico these arts are important to young people or primitive societies, the poetic phase, where man is more childlike and open, they are just as important in sophisticated societies. In fact, in our day, fine arts in painting, sculpture and music are seen as separate and cultured than the mundane crafts of items used every day.

How do we connect to each other? We know that in written text using metaphors and other literary devices draws the reader in so that the reader fills in the gaps (Abbott 111-112). How does that work with visuals? I was struck with this suggestion when watching a program on Broadway. An African-American woman talked about the Broadway stage version of *The Lion King* in which the cast were all African-Americans. She remarked that black audiences would react to the production differently than white audiences. She talked about how the African-American would see a black person as a king, and thus be lifted up. But, she maintains, a white person's reaction to the spectacle,

especially the costuming would be different. We would have to try to reconcile the spectacle of a person wearing the head of an animal; the trick was to see both (*Broadway* PBS). We could enjoy the spectacle but miss the sociological and cultural implications. When we have a visual representation does that mean that we lose our connectedness because we are less likely to bring our own imagination, our own experience with us because we experience visuals differently from a narration?

Though pictures and photographs do tell stories, we sometimes need written or spoken background to explain them. Sometimes we have to guess the implications. If digital stories were merely slide shows even with musical backgrounds (a common feature now at LDS wedding receptions), we would miss the full meaning of the story.

Today in developed nations, our common sensations revolve around the digital technology that pervades our cultures. Everything is amplified and omnipresent: perpetual sound whether it be music, talk radio and merely the hum of traffic as background noise; multiple images from not only the things that we encounter as we leave our homes for work such as attention-grabbing billboards, to screen savers on our computer screens, to television and movies; even the food we eat in the Western world is multi-gustatory as immigrations of peoples from other cultures have become part of the countries. Is it any wonder that our senses become satiated and we have to choose to tune out the sights, sounds and scents. And yet it is what we pay attention to during the day that constructs our reality. Digital storytelling gives us the opportunity to control the cacophony and visual blitz and distill the essence of an experience.



## Poetry, Painting and Oratory: Script, Visuals and Voice Overs

These three arts: poetry, painting, and oratory combine together in digital storytelling. I am not suggesting that digital storytelling is only for the young, but that these three arts are understood by everyone because they came from what McCloud noticed, something intrinsic in us. People will understand the pictures and will be able to understand the verbalized story even if their reading skills were minimal. Vichian theory of the beginning of language and civil society gives a basis to how and why these three arts work to connect people

Vico assertion that young people should be taught poetry, painting, oratory and jurisprudence comes together very nicely in digital storytelling. In digital storytelling, these arts are inextricably tied up with the multimedia technologies that we use today. But first I would like to give some background of philosophic and scientific thought that influenced Vico.

### Poetry / Script

Literacy or written language has dominated Western society for centuries. Even original oral stories such as *Beowulf* have been preserved in writing. And that's a good thing, but the voice of the storyteller has been lost until our recent technologies. The digital story example that paralleled the *Beowulf* excerpt, reverses the procedure. The script which naturally comes from our literate culture was written first and then narrated. Originally it was actually written in paragraph form but I broke the words to make short lines like a poem to show the rhythm of the piece. Joe Lambert who used this script as an example of a digital story in his book, *Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community*, commented that the author was "both trained as and considered himself a

poet”and that in the final production of the digital story the author “made it sing”(Lambert 44). Lambert verifies an element of storytelling that goes back to ancient oral societies that Vico saw as using poetic language and song as their first means of communication (Pompa 179).

The script of a digital story is not always seen. For example, you have to click on another link in order to read the script on the *Capture Wales* site. But it is important nonetheless. It is particularly important to our culture because we are a highly literate society. A digital story works the same way as a traditional story in that it helps the storyteller put a new perspective on a small part of her life. Because the story is written it takes on a more literate flavor than if it were told orally without reflection. Lambert unwittingly links storytelling with primordial human’s first language—poetry—when he remarks that some people love the wonderful mystery and elasticity of language, and what they mean by story is what I might mean by poetry® (40).

Both Vico and McLuhan see poetry or narrative in terms of the simplest of stories: fables or myths. McLuhan talked about the mythic quality that the Internet gives because we are able to see patterns on a much wider scale because of the speed of the Internet. McLuhan equates myth with Vico’s primitive societies. The myth, like the aphorism and maxim, is characteristic of oral culture. For, until literacy deprives language of its multi-dimensional resonance, every word is a poetic world unto itself, a ‘momentary deity’ or revelation, as it seemed to non-literate men® (*Gutenberg* 25). A digital story could in some ways be seen as aphoristic because it is so short. We are also more likely to experience more than one digital story once we have reached the site, picking and choosing from among the options there. What we get when we read the

various stories is a sense of myth because we begin to see a mosaic of a culture as the individual stories create a pattern. Tied in with storytelling is the idea of memory and imagination. As we learned from Vico's well-known maxim that "we can neither imagine something unless we have remembered it, nor remember anything unless we perceive through the senses" (Pompa 69) Thus our sensual experiences become part of our memory. For example, if you were to hear a certain tune from your past it may conjure up memories of an experience long forgotten. As in the example of the digital story at the beginning of Chapter 3, memories of his grandmother are evoked by sensory memories such as hearing (his grandmother's songs), smell (juicy fruit and Pond's cold cream), sight (Wheel of Fortune and baggies), and touch (pinched thighs). Memories are the underlying force behind storytelling. Even though our memories may be impressionistic and not always accurate, it is how we think back on an event and try to make some kind of sense of it that informs our reality. Narratives, Hauser tells us, "color our perceptions, understanding, and reasoning about the settings in which we act and are acted upon. Their contexts provide us with sense-making perspectives that we invoke to make connections among events and draw inferences that follow from them about what is reasonable in our lives" (185-6). Storytelling is a safe way to make sense of our lives and how we fit in with society.

The excerpt from *Beowulf* and a digital story, were formed by the technologies of their times but still have similar conventions of storytelling. *Beowulf* was originally handed down through the ages orally but was later captured for our time by the technology of writing. I wanted to show the original written version in Old English because it shows a visual clue of an oral device, the caesura or pause which was

important to the pattern of the poem which in turn became a mnemonic device for an oral society that relied on memorization to pass on stories.

### **Paintings / Visuals**

In the frontispiece of Vico's *New Science*, there is an engraving that symbolizes what he has written in his book. He depicts the eye of God within a triangle that is within a circle and coming from the eye is a beam that is directed to the breast of a woman standing on a globe who represents Metaphysics. The beam bounces off her breast to a figure representing the poet Homer. On the bottom of the picture are various objects that are symbolic of human institutions that Vico calls hieroglyphs (par. 2). The first part of his book has the title "Explanation of the Picture Placed as Frontispiece to Serve as Introduction to the Work" and Vico in forty-two paragraphs goes into minute detail about the implications of the engraving (paras. 1-42).

Robert Goestch recognizes elements of theatricality in Vico's work, as evidenced by the engraving in the frontispiece. "In Vico's theater there are both words and images, just as in Camillo's, the work being dominated by the *dipintura* that serves as frontispiece to his text. The *Scienza nuova* is a type of emblem book, then, with the image at the front needing to be consulted, as Vico states, both before and after reading the work" (123). He goes on to point out that "the emblem book complicates the relation between reader and text, making the reader a self-conscious spectator of the drama that a verbal-visual interaction creates. . . . [T]he emblem book became in this way a *theatrum mundi* and a fable in brief. Vico states at the end of his commentary on the picture that "we may now recapitulate all the prime elements of this world of nations by reference to the

hieroglyphs that stand for them= (par. 40)@ (Goestch 123). There are, of course, aspects of theatricality in a digital story. What is interesting is most of the founders of CDS had background in the theater and theater arts. If, as Goestch suggests, there is a complication between reader and text because of the image, what can be said about a digital story? Of course, we are spectators, but as I mentioned earlier, because of the multimedia that affects sight, sound, and touch, a digital story becomes more of an experience than a spectacle. Furthermore, most computer users have become accustomed to this form of media.

Joe Lambert gives an example of the theatrical background of one of the found members of CDS, Dana Atchley. “In *Next Exit*, Dana Atchley did two things to guarantee that the focus of the performance remained on him and his story. First, he created a separate visual setting for his role as performer. Dana came in and lit his video campfire, a little TV sitting on a pile of wood playing a tape loop of a fire. He sat on his only other set piece, a log. . . . Dana was not immersed in the backdrop of his projection; he was in a separate place” (Lambert 90). We use the technology of our times to recreate the village campfire.

That Vico would use an engraving as an additional explanation of his text, is indicative of the culture and emerging technology of his time. According to Catherine Hobbs, in the Renaissance, illustrated books were linked to words. These Aemblem books were used for entertainment, education, spiritual instruction, and memory aids. Words and pictures worked together as equals in any of these books@ (ALearning@ 60). In this same article, Hobbs further reveals that Bacon Aaccepted the principle that images were more memorable than words@ (60).

As we learned, Vico theorized that poetic language included visuals (hieroglyphs and emblems). However, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century new scientific theories were affecting how people understood seeing. The 18<sup>th</sup> century was a time when there was a great deal of interest in optics especially after the publication of Newton's *Opticks* in 1704 (Hobbs, *ALearning@ 62*). But books and print media were also on the rise and teachers worked to understand and teach how to translate visual scenes and images into text (Hobbs *ALearning@ 65*).

Descriptive and thus literary language came to the fore and continues in modern day literature to some extent. Hobbs tells us that in French belles lettres, the most expressive text is one that tries to re-create this all at once—this powerful tableau effect of prelinguistic, visual thought (ALearning@ 65). McLuhan seems to concur with this idea that modern multimedia has brought back this idea of picture-painting words when he stated, “It is the poets and painters who react instantly to a new medium like radio or TV. Radio and gramophone and tape recorder gave us back the poet’s voice as an important dimension of the poetic experience. Words became a kind of painting with light, again”(177). The visuals in a digital story could be said to be part of the prelinguistic element that can be a bridge between cultures with different languages. However, even with pictures we need to learn how to interpret them so that they make sense from our culture background. We bring with us our own visual acuity that comes from our cultural background. For example, black is the color that symbolizes death in most Western cultures while white is the color symbolizing death in Chinese culture. Until we crack a cultural code we may be puzzled by some visuals.

Hobbs also quotes French philosopher Condillac (1714-1799) who explained the differences between the visual and verbal in this way: The visual world is holistic and is seen instantaneously as a picture. Verbal language is linear, occurring sequentially in units over time. Language decomposes holistic reality, allowing writers to convey what is really seen out there in the world into the mind, where we can once again recombine it to represent the holistic world. (Hobbs *Learning@* 65). In the world of the Internet, visuals are paramount. In a digital story they are in some respects the basic background of the story. For example, in Ieuan's story, he only used two photographs to illustrate the oral story so that the visuals were an added dimension but not the focus, not unlike as Lambert explained, the props that storytellers use in traditional storytelling (Lambert 90).

In the first chapter introducing digital storytelling, the information page on the masters program at the University of Indiana gave examples of different kinds of visuals (cave paintings to stimsims (I have not been able to find what these are) that can be used on a computer screen. More can be done visually on a computer with programs such as Flash. Script can move and morph across a screen. And we experience the different kinds of visuals differently because they send different messages.

I quoted Gerard Hauser in the chapter on Vico, in which he wrote about rhetorical framing. Framing in a digital story suggests not just putting the story or script into context but the actual visuals or photographs that move one after the other. First of all the visuals obviously have a physical frame because only a portion of the whole is captured. A photo would differ even if the photographer were to move a few inches to either side. Furthermore, the subject matter could change from one photo to the next. Photos and pictures are visuals frozen in time. With the technology of movie making software

(iMovie for the Macintosh and Movie Maker that is on the Microsoft platform being the most accessible and easiest to use), the visuals can be introduced or transitioned in certain ways that evoke different impressions as we move from one visual to the next. A picture that dissolves into another one gives a different impression than a transition where the next picture curls or peels away from the corner as though we are turning a page of a book.

For example, in Ieuan Sheen's story, the picture of the school children were broken up into smaller visuals, bringing into focus the face of each person in the group. There were very subtle transitions between each close-up. This story then has the feel of looking at a photo album and slowly getting acquainted with the people in the photograph. Another digital story may use more flamboyant transitions such as dissolving in and out between pictures or using a "page turn" mode that gives the impression of more movement. CDS does try to simplify both the visuals and audio in a digital story visual and audio files need to be limited to a certain byte size. Lambert stated "Large projection of text, high-resolution images, and video simply outperform the performer in terms of the visceral attraction to our retina." (Lambert 90). The visuals that use large amounts of memory would take too long to appear on the screen and the sequence and "mood" of the story would thus be lost. It would be similar to a storyteller who stutters whose audience would have to wait for the next word. In our culture, furthermore, we expect speed, instant gratification. We are used to the instantaneous aspects of the Internet.

### **Oratory: Voice Over**

An important part of a digital story is the voice over. Walter Ong tells us that



“electronic technology has brought us into the age of ‘secondary orality.’ The new orality has striking resemblances to the old in its participatory mystique, its fostering of a communal sense” (133-4). Vico suggested that youth should study poetry, painting and oratory because orality was still a large part of the civic nature of his culture. According to Schaeffer, the Neapolitan world in which Vico lived was still predominantly oral (120). As a rhetorician Vico was also immersed in classical oral tradition being called upon to give political, forensic or epideictic orations. Furthermore, as a lecturer at a university he also taught his students who would be part of the civic life of that culture and needed training in rhetoric. However, as mentioned earlier, the 18<sup>th</sup> century was a time when literacy was becoming more widespread and even orators wrote out their speeches. In digital storytelling the dialog is written first before being recorded to match the visuals. In many respects, the spontaneity of the spoken word is lost.

The spoken word is by its nature very personal because there is a real audience and the words cannot be recalled. However, that is no longer the case with the ability to record the spoken word. Ong suggests that secondary and primary orality are similar but also different. “Like primary orality, secondary orality has generated a strong group sense, for listening to spoken words forms hearers into a group, a true audience, just as reading written or printed texts turns individuals in on themselves” (134). Ironically, a digital story has both aspects. There is a sense of isolation because we are more than likely to be listening to the words spoken when we are by ourselves in front of a computer screen. But we are also drawn in by the sound a someone’s voice because the voice is so idiosyncratic. Lambert includes an aspect of oratory in which the voice over can appeal to people who find themselves hearing the sounds of words like music, and

really are not concerned with meaning of the words per se as much as the aural jazz of the presentation that creates a dominant tonal impression® (Lambert 40).

As I explained in the first chapter, what impressed me with Ieuan Sheen's story was not just the script which I was able to read, but the delivery that revealed the tone and inflections as well as the accent. What also makes us aware of the narrative construct of the story is the fact that we see old photographs of Ieuan and his classmates as children, but we hear Ieuan's 70-year-old voice.

Although some digital stories have brief seconds of video, most are slides of still photographs with a voice over and sometimes music in the background. With a digital story, we hear a disembodied voice that tells the story so we do not get the body gestures or the expressions on the face. We put these together ourselves as we react to the story and view the pictures. In some ways this could be defined as a “cool” medium because we have to add our imagination and we use more than one sense. We are in a different space as McLuhan explained, “The new media--the new languages—which have increasingly supplemented writing and print, have begun to reassemble the multiple sensuousness of integral speech. Touch, taste, kinesthesia, sight and sound are all recreating that acoustic space which had been abolished by phonetic writing. (“Explorations,” McLuhan and Zingrone 300). Though McLuhan talks about “acoustic space” the term we use would probably now is “virtual reality.”

McLuhan turned to non-Western cultures to explain the melding of visuals and literacy as well as the connections between cultures. In his book, *Understanding Media*, he talked about the consequence of literacy on Eastern cultures in which because of the “electric implosion” the East

now brings oral and tribal ear-culture to the literate West. Not only does the visual, specialist, and fragmented Westerners have now to live in closest daily association with all the ancient oral cultures of the earth, but his own electric technology now begins to translate the visual or eye man back into the tribal and oral pattern with its seamless web of kinship and interdependence. (50)

One of the things that oral cultures relied on heavily was memory because in an oral society you cannot return to the spoken word unless you have memorized what was said and thus pass it on. “In an oral culture, knowledge, once acquired, had to be constantly repeated or it would be lost: fixed formulaic thought patterns were essential for wisdom and effective administration” (Ong 23). In a chirographic or print society, words and ideas can be reread over and over again so our memories need not be as acute as those in an oral society. According to Ong, in a primary oral society, “the way in which the word is experienced is always momentous in psychic life. The centering action of sound (the field of sound is not spread out before me but is all around me) affects man’s sense of the cosmos” (72). This idea seems to echo the Vichian theory of the primordial giants who heard first the sound of thunder before they raised their eyes to see a flash of lightening and attributed the sight and sound to a god (Pompa 141). It was sound that first got their attention before they looked heavenward. Digital storytelling brings back the sound of the human voice in storytelling. Some digital stories includes background music that further affects the message. In bardic cultures many of the stories were sung to the accompaniment of a lyre or harp. Digital storytelling then, brings back another acoustical aspect of traditional storytelling.

### **Global Interconnectivity**

In Chapter 3, I introduced McLuhan's notion about the way technology was bringing the world closer together, even before the Internet. He was the person who coined the phrase global village, noticing that the "globe has become on one hand a community of learning, and at the same time, with regard to the tightness of its interrelationships, the globe has become a tiny village" ("Natural," McLuhan and Zingrone 180). The reach of communication has multiplied tenfold with the Internet.

Though we rely heavily on technology that seems to distance and isolate people from personal, face-to-face communication we still seem to have the need to communicate through more unsophisticated genres such as storytelling. It seems to be part of our synaptic as well as psychic make up. Marshall McLuhan certainly seems to have incorporated this idea of our relationships with the various technologies that man has created. He theorized that technologies are an extension of the human body, thus expanding Vico's view that the corporeal sensations bring about experience which then brings about connections. It is the appeal to emotion or experience that cements connections which sensations come first from bodily functions. McLuhan's theory that the pencil or pen is the extension of the hand has even more far reaching [pun intended] application when our fingers connect with a computer keyboard and the mouse. We are literally connected. We can now connect more readily, more efficiently and more widely than ever before especially when we are connected to the virtual world of the Internet.

In his *New Science*, Vico has theorized that "This common mental language is proper to our Science, by whose light linguistic scholars will be enabled to construct a mental vocabulary common to all the various articulate languages living and dead." (qtd.

in Hobbs *Modernity* 77). And the way we can connect to each other is through our commonalities, the “tangle of associational thinking that is at the root of community,” (qtd. in Hobbs *Modernity* 77). In spite of today’s postmodern thinking, there is a room for the probabilities of the Vichian theory of *sensus communis* as witnessed by the proliferation of blogs and chatrooms on the Internet as well as the more formal way of sharing experiences, digital storytelling. How these forums bring about associational thinking in our more and more global technological world remains to be discovered. And perhaps there is a new technology being developed now that may make it possible.

Instead of the metaphor of the world wide web which invokes the idea of a spider controlling and capturing us like flies, perhaps we need a new metaphor that celebrates our basic human senses that is community building. Telling stories, using narrative is such an integral part of societies whether sophisticated or primitive. And if we begin to make connections through stories realizing that at the other end of technology are real people, perhaps communities or global villages will finally come together because of a world wide *sensus communis*.

However, McLuhan asks interesting questions about what our relationships and changes in thinking may be because we are so interconnected. In 1970s, though he was writing about the effects of telephone, teleprinter and wireless, this statement is even more pertinent to the Internet. Today the entire globe has a unity in point of mutual inter-awareness which exceeds in rapidity the former flow of information in a small city . . . What happens to existing societies when they are brought into such intimate contact by press, picture stories, news-reels and jet propulsion? What happens when the neolithic Eskimo is compelled to share the time and space arrangements of technological man?

What happens in our minds as we become familiar with the diversity of human cultures which have come into existence under innumerable circumstances, historical and geographical?" (303-4). We are already experiencing anxiety about globalization and the possible homogenization of cultures. It is part of the reason why Western culture is so feared. I can see the frustration. Computer technology would change the Eskimo's culture more than we who are immersed in computer culture are changed by our knowledge about Eskimo culture. One thing that digital storytelling organizations hope to achieve is the keeping of culture rather than changing it to conform to the predominant culture.



## Chapter Five: Conclusion

After my presentation on the link between Vico and digital storytelling at ISHR, a participant at the conference came up to me after the session. She told me that her university and community had been collecting stories and material from Islamic communities in her area with the intent of building a bridge of understanding between the Islamic communities and other communities. She remarked that they had not thought of using stories in a digital format, but it was something to consider as a way of disseminating this information, thus making it more public and therefore reaching more people. Therefore, the theories from the presentation may actually have had a practical and active application in a real community.

Vico's poetic language is an inherent mode of communication that a broad range of people in age or sophistication can relate to. We seem to pay more attention to stories, because we recognize that they came from people's experience. We seem to be able to identify with others through their stories whether they are told in a traditional manner or through the Internet.

Storytelling is more than just something to entertain, it is also doing rhetorical work. In trying to understand human communication, many of the rhetoricians today are trying to reconcile philosophy and science. Caught in between these two highly-developed modes of communication is the everyday communication between ordinary people who are merely trying to make meaning of their lives and this meaning usually comes through their experiences with underpinnings of a belief system. Philosophy



concentrates on “reason and argument to seek for truth and knowledge of reality, esp. of the causes and nature of things and of the principles governing existence, the material universe, perception of physical phenomenon, and human behaviour” (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary* 894). Shades of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle haunt the search for wisdom. The root of the word philosophy comes from the Greek word *sophos* wise and *philo* love of something. Philosophy thus bases itself on wisdom and truth as defined by the intellect. Science also uses reason to tries to make meaning by taking human experiences and science is based on the Latin word *scire* to know. It is the root word in the modern Italian *conoscienza*. *Conoscenti*, are people in the know. But Vico has tried to synthesize philosophy and science and experience. Knowledge comes to us in many forms vicariously through reading and listening to others, but we also receive knowledge that comes from our own experiences. If we touch a flame, we will burn our fingers. It is this experiential mode that often informs us and we want to share that experience. Any kind of sharing of experiences as well as noetic knowledge builds community.

Vicarious knowledge and experience comes from our relating to others’ stories and making connections in our own lives, relating to other people through our common humanity. Trying to build bridges and connections to everyone is something that digital storytelling tries to address, but if a story is completely alien to another person’s worldview, how do we relate to it? There needs to be some kind of cultural connection. Certain stories within certain cultures are the glue that holds that culture together. Outsiders may not understand these stories, especially if they are myths or fables. But as Joe Lambert and his colleagues recognized, the hyper-mediated American culture has lost that sense of myth. Others who look at American culture, concur with this

observation. But new myths can be created perhaps an amalgamation of another culture's myths. And the dissemination of myths from disparate cultures can be achieved more easily through the rapid and extensive reach of the Internet. Thus, Vico's view of myths and fables may become an intrinsic part of the beginning of a global digital storytelling community.

Building community is a good endeavor. Our modes of communication have given more people the opportunity to be connected more than ever before. McLuhan saw that "electronic technology does not depend on words, and since the computer is the extension of the central nervous system, here is the possibility of extending consciousness without verbalization, getting past the fragmentation and numbing effect of language, a way to universal understanding and unity" (Gordon 82-3). However, the hybridity of languages in digital storytelling makes a richer mode of communication to reach out to others. What seems to be happening is the need for all the ways of communication: the gestures, spoken word, photographs, all of which bring to life a story in a digital world.

### **Accessibility of Digital Storytelling**

Digital storytelling does have some restrictions. For example, it is limited to people who have access to computers and the Internet. John Coate in his article, "Cyberspace Innkeeping: Building Online Community," addressed the question of bringing computer users and the general public together to "meet and talk on a common system" (186). However, there are places for the general public to have access, at least in the United States. Many local libraries have computers with Internet access, and many elementary schoolchildren are introduced to computers and even digital storytelling.

However, these are still restricted to areas where the “public” are middle-class and educated. Projects such as *Capture Wales*, NPR’s *StoryCorps* do go out to non-computer-literate people and collect and archive stories of a broad spectrum of people.

However, technology is changing very rapidly, especially as first world countries outsource their services to emerging cultures such as India that now is the “back office for the world” (Friedman 51-52) where telephone operators work for US and European banks and other businesses. With cell phones becoming more like minicomputers and the proliferation of cell phones even in remote places, a digital story could easily reach people who have no access to computers. Though you could say that people with cell phones are in the same category as non-computer users, may not necessarily be the case. For example, Thomas Friedman gave an example of poor regions around Delhi. He tells us that “an Indian start-up cellular phone company, called the Usha Group, has Indian-style Avon ladies who go house-to-house in the poorest villages, carrying cellular phones to people who don’t have phones in their homes. For a small fee, villagers can use the phones for a few minutes to make all their calls. Now Usha is installing public call centers in many of these villages—with cheap Internet access” (141). That statement was written over 15 years ago, and it is quite probable that this service has branched out to other places besides the outskirts of Delhi. Changing technology will give more access to digital storytelling and will probably make changes to the way digital stories are produced. A recent technology that is affecting especially young people is podcasting in which an iPod that has similarities to the older technologies of a portable tape recorder or CD player, can be used to download music and videos. It will just be a matter of time when a digital story will be able to be downloaded to an iPod.

At present there is another limitation of digital storytelling. Most of the stories are told in English, though *Capture Wales* also has stories in Welsh and on the CDS web site there is a link to a Hispanic digital storytelling project. It is only natural that most digital stories are in English since they started in the United States. More and more people are learning English throughout the world, but it would be interesting to see how future technologies will be able to embrace people from other cultures and give English speakers the experience of being embraced by other cultures. There are programs that will translate written text into other languages but I'm not sure if there is anything yet that translates and dubs audio. In fact, it would be difficult to duplicate the aural part of the story. The human voice telling that story adds another dimension to the effect of the story. The individuality of the narrator's voice with its timbre and cultural inflections would be lost, something that we have experienced in dubbed versions of foreign language movies. A solution would be to have access to a written script similar to what the *Capture Wales* project offers. This could be translated into other languages. Visuals are a more universal language but they cannot tell the whole story of experiences that is why digital storytelling uses verbal and visuals to tell a story. It would appear then, that a digital story may be limited to a particular language culture, making a McLuhanesque "tribal" effect within the global community.

### **Community Building on the Internet**

The question that this thesis has essentially asked is: Can we really build community through the Internet using storytelling? In some respects I would say yes, in other respects, no. It is not just the limitations of computer technology. For example, stories have been presented orally as well as in print, and they have not necessarily built

community. What traditional stories do and what the digital stories do, is make us more aware of other people and other cultures, thus changing our perceptions. Perhaps like Vico's *ingenium*, autobiographical stories will move us to find inspiration to write or present our own stories so that they are added to the mosaic or pattern of a culture. We will pass on our poetic wisdom. Furthermore, the stories of ordinary people inform a society and culture because, as Vico reminds us, "Poets were the first historians of their nations" (par. 820).

There is, of course, a concern that the Internet does make people lose touch or become involved in collectives what Robert Bellah calls "lifestyle enclaves" (Doheny-Farina 50). These enclaves are part of the retribalization that McLuhan talks about. Stephen Doheny-Farina suggests that the "net can either enhance communities by enabling a new kind of local public space or it can undermine communities by pulling people away from local enclaves and toward global, virtual ones. The second trend is in ascendancy" (54-5). For Doheny-Farina and Bellah, a "true community is a collective (evolving and dynamic) in which the public and private lives of its members are moving toward interdependency regardless of the significant differences among those members" (Doheny-Farina 50). CDS and other digital storytelling entities try to be inclusive but, of course, even within these organizations there will be of course exclusive "tribes" or "enclaves." For example, a corporation or school will only share the digital stories within its own organization, not making them public on the World Wide Web. The more public arenas such as *Capture Wales*, NPR's *Story Corps*, and [*Murmur*] projects do strive to give a universal voice to diverse populations.

## Conclusion

Today we live in a highly complex world but we still rely on storytelling however sophisticated we may be. The Vichian theories of the different ages of human cultures—poetic, heroic, and human—blend together, making hybrid modes of communication. It has ever been so. There are stories and people making connection through stories on blogs and emails that are often limited to “enclaves” (McLuhan’s “tribes”) that are limited by interest. However, CDS and other entities that encourage storytelling to create community do give us the opportunity to discover our humanity in others as well as creating a bond through our ability to identify with the storyteller.

What I am concerned about is the potential misuse of storytelling for purposes of commercial and political ends. There also needs to be an ethical sense so that there is not a return to Vico’s “barbarism of reflection.” Alasdair MacIntyre observed “What matters at this state is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained” (qtd. in Fisher 61).

Stories like Ieuan Sheen’s of his life as a schoolboy in a 1930s Welsh village may not contain deep insights into life, but it does help us remember our own school days, the similarities and the differences. It also encourages us to look at the simple pleasures in our lives. Other stories, such as the stories of abuse from the *Silence Speaks* project, help others to have the courage to speak out and rethink their perceptions of themselves and their lives. These stories also affect people who have not had such difficult childhoods, helping us learn sympathy for others. In the Internet world, no man or woman is an island; we have the opportunity to connect with others. The stories come alive with all the multimedia that engage several senses. Vico’s poetic language the stories—help

create community as they touch the “soul-strings” of the others, leaving more than the fleeting impression that comes from merely “surfing the net.” However, when we come away from the virtual world of the Internet, what we have experienced there should enlighten us with our real surroundings and encourage us to connect to and be involved in real communities.

## Appendix A

### List of Digital Storytelling Web Sites

Note: These web sites are currently available as at March 2006. As with many web sites on the Internet there may be changes in the future.

Web Site	URL	Description
Center for Digital Storytelling	<a href="http://storycenter.org">http://storycenter.org</a>	An organization that conducts workshops for schools, businesses, etc. It gives links to other digital storytelling web sites and projects.
Story Corps	<a href="http://storycorps.net">http://storycorps.net</a>	A project sponsored by National Public Radio (NPR).
Digitaless	<a href="http://www.digitaless.us">http://www.digitaless.us</a>	A site for beginners that offers resources and workshops.
Tech Head Stories	<a href="http://tech-head.com/dstory.htm">http://tech-head.com/dstory.htm</a>	A place that lists many other digital storytelling web sites.
Bubbe's Backporch	<a href="http://www.bubbe.com">http://www.bubbe.com</a>	A place for women to add their stories through a Digital Story Bee; most stories are by Jewish Russian émigrés.
<i>Murmur Project, Toronto, Canada</i>	<a href="http://murmurtoronto.ca">http://murmurtoronto.ca</a>	A project in which people tell stories via cell phones about particular areas of Toronto and Montreal.
BBC: <i>Capture Wales, Inside Lives, and Telling Lives</i>	<a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/capturewales">http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/capturewales</a> <a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/stoke/inside/lives">http://www.bbc.co.uk/stoke/inside/lives</a> <a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/humber/telling_lives">http://www.bbc.co.uk/humber/telling_lives</a>	Sponsored first by BBC Wales where stories are archived. With the success of the Capture Wales project, two other regional BBC areas, Stoke and Humber collect stories from their areas.
BBC World News	<a href="http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4630857.stm">http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4630857.stm</a>	To supplement new features, the BBC has people tell their own stories. This particular link is for stories told by Romanian orphans who grew up in Romanian orphanages.



Web Site	URL	Description
BBC World News: Having Your Say	<a href="http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/talking_point/4659237.stm">http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/talking_point/4659237.stm</a>	A feature of the BBC web site that asks for people's accounts of various situations. This particular one is for the July 7, 2005 terrorist attacks in London.
Fraynetwork Digital Storytelling, Australia	<a href="http://www.fraynetwork.com">http://www.fraynetwork.com</a>	An organization that is focused on indigenous Australians' stories to educate non-indigenous people. One story gives a lesson in the Aborigine language.
Story Beads	<a href="http://interactive.usc.edu/archives/000949.html">http://interactive.usc.edu/archives/000949.html</a>	A link to information on a master thesis. The author proposes "transactional storytelling" "Storybeads are wearable computers designed as a tool for constructing image-based stories by allowing users to sequence and trade story pieces of image and text.

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