TRANSITIONING TRADITIONAL PRINT TO THE MEDIUM OF MOBILE DIGITAL

A CREATIVE PROJECT

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Digital Expression at the Start of the Twenty-First Century

Technology has always challenged and aided humanity to imagine stories. Stories help people to understand concepts without necessarily having experienced them. How society imagines effects how current events are recorded, shared, and interpreted. Books have helped humanity to understand how one event follows another and can add up to a greater moral. There will always be a great need for linear thought, but there is just as much need to utilize nonlinear thought. It is just as important to understand and utilize the concepts of order and chaos as both are involved with creating and interpreting stories.

New methods of sharing written words have shown an impact on how the public expects to be presented with written words. This is reflected in the growing popularity of digital devices. With new forms of communication come new forms of communicating. As new imaginative mediums come into existence, so will change interpretations of how stories can and should be told.

Audio and video were quick to adapt to digital formats just as soon as the technology gained publicly accepted quality. With print being humanity's oldest form of modern recorded medium, it may be considered the most interesting study of what may happen to the medium. Text has been adapted into every visual digital medium available. Yet, it is still one of the only mediums whose analog ancestor still dominates over it in the marketplace.

One of the most widespread and flexible media emerging today is mobile apps. With the only real constraint being its hardware, the directions that storytellers can choose to express themselves is limited greatly to their imagination of the device. Books have always allowed unlimited potential to capture ideas, but digital mobile devices have exposed limitations as to how books project those ideas.

My goal for this creative project is to push the boundaries of traditional text based storytelling into the nonlinear digital medium of a mobile app. I have self-published book titled *Something. The Point of Everything*. After feeling that the traditional medium didn't fully convey what I hoped it to. That started me down a path of exploring more modern methods of expressing my thoughts. This project demonstrates how digital mediums offer not only new ways of expanding old media, but they will change the expectation of how media will be delivered in this increasingly digital world.

Literature Review

Linear vs. Nonlinear

Linear and nonlinear thoughts are separated by patterns of perspective. A linear thought comes from one point of view and holds to a line of thought until the end, based always on the starting point. A nonlinear thought can change one's perspective and direction by constantly resetting the conceived origin point. Nonlinear thinkers often switch subject to topics of distant relation (Nichols, 2011). They can often be considered to be scatterbrained in the eyes of a linear thinker, and a linear thinker looks closed minded to a nonlinear thinker. Both linear and nonlinear patterns should be valued as

equals. The ability to adapt instantly can be just as powerful as the ability to remain focused.

Though devices require a certain level of education to operate, apps are being designed with human intuition in mind. In an article of the Times Educational Supplement (2010), Ian Harper, who has titled himself a "trans-media storyteller", created an app combining written text, photography, video, puzzles, painting, and games. The article mentions that pupils were skeptical of the mixed media at first, but once the patterns of the experience sank in, they showed comfort and enthusiasm in exploring the nonlinear story (2013, p. 30). The expectations audiences have of devices is expanding, so will expand the directions that storytellers can lead their audience.

When dealing with digital text, there are two main streams of digital distribution: e-books and book apps. E-books are simply pages of a book displayed on a screen in its traditional linear form. They function and are formatted as close to a physical book as the technology allows. A book app is an interactive reading experience. The story doesn't necessarily move in a linear pattern. Story flow is based partially on the user's preference and character (Kritsonis, 2011, pp. B6).

Meograph is a prime example of an app pushing the limits of presenting a story. Meograph offers a unique divergence of media through text, pictures, video, external links to in-depth material. It also incorporates Google Earth and Google Maps to create a story timeline. (Hastings, 2012) Simply by filling in the information of what, where, and when events in the story took place, a timeline is generated that can be enhanced by text, photos, video (Hastings, 2012). With this, people can capture and share the story

of their experience in ways that are proving not only to be much more powerful, but also much more captivating for consumers.

Some storytellers are now starting to abandon conventions that have long been associated with text. "Whereas many digital children's books still mimic the look and feel of a regular physical books, Disney Publishing has leaped past that model in exploring the interactive multimedia capabilities of digital" (Bacon, 2014). Part of their method is getting away from "page turning". Rather than adapt the conceptions of print, they have adapted such methods as "pan and view", a feature that allows readers to pick up their device and move it to the left and right to display a panoramic view of a space. Through nonlinear storytelling, Disney has left the outcome of their stories for kids to explore rather than passively guiding them (Bacon, 2014).

Since the early 1990s, Experimental adaptation has been explored in science fiction circles in the form of hypertext sci-fi stories. Based on the emerging Internet technology, links were applied to the text to open multiple directions of story flow. Some stories went so far as to link video and pictures to create a true nonlinear multimedia experience (Landon, 1993). The convenience of today's pocket sized technology frees users to consume the story anywhere. The problem sharing stories in the early days of personal computers were the size and cost of the devices utilized. Users were constrained to a bulky desktop machine that was tethered to the wall by multiple power cords. Digital storytelling now has the ability to become more widespread as mobile devices become smaller, cheaper, and more accessible to every level of society.

One of the benefits shown in hypertext has been the control of story flow. Readers can be denied the option to skip to the end, or browse through content at will. It

can also open up the direction of a story in infinite new ways. Some downsides, however, can be continuity. If each individual has a unique experience, the story may be lost in the segmentation of interchangeable parts (Douglas, 2001).

The unique structure of *Something* lends itself specifically to a nonlinear format. *Something* is a group of independent yet collective thoughts that do not necessarily need the surrounding thoughts to stand up its part of the story. Hypertext fiction still conforms to the idea that one idea leads to another, and a thought might not make sense without the thought preceding it.

The printed book has itself become a perfected technology. To change the conceptions of a book would result in a new medium. The constraint of the printed format has challenged storytellers to experiment with infinite possibilities. Since its creation, placing a printed story into the environment of a tablet, the limitations of the printed text becomes quickly apparent (Kirkus, 2012). Within a book, there is no option to insert a video or sound. There is also no way connect with others online to share the experience.

Authors from before the twenty-first century couldn't consider the versatility of writing for an app. A story written in the format of a book can only be expressed in the format of a book, just as film can only be expressed in film. Though tablets can accommodate the print format, there is little that can be done as far as updating the reading experience without changing the artist's original concept.

There is still want for printed books. There are still people that would rather search for a physical book than stare into a screen for hours on end. Though the new

digital media seem to be growing as traditional print seems to be declining, as digital technology takes root into the expectations of today's culture, both page and screen will certainly be used in tandem to express and document human experience (Springen, 2013).

Mobile Digital Usage

As more attention is placed toward digital distribution, development of what digital devices are capable of conveying becomes increasingly important. According to a Pew Internet study, book readership dropped three percent from 2011 to 2012 for readers 16 and older (Rainie, 2012). E-book popularity rose five percent by the end of 2012 (Zickuhr, 2014). As more attention is placed toward mobile digital devices, more value will be placed in content that it exclusively provides.

People are expressing themselves through writing and other mixed media at a rapidly growing rate. Through this evolving process of writing, there will undoubtedly arise new ways to package and project stories. According to a Flurry Analytics survey (2014), overall app use grew 115 percent in 2013. Categories such as entertainment, shopping, games, sports, and news all grew less than 100 percent each. That same year social media growth was 203 percent (*para 2*).

Within overall app usage, a majority of the time spent on digital devices is dedicated to expressing or receiving a narrative of some sort. Within mobile device web usage, 86 percent of online use has been through apps rather than traditional web browsing. That is a six percent increase from 2013. Thirty-two percent of app usage

time was spent playing games, and another 28 percent of time was spent on socializing (Perez, 2014).

With most of the public's attention looking toward entertainment and interactivity, to become competitive, digital storybooks may have to find an interactive and captivating format to compete in a digital market. Within actual app usage, 34 percent of apps sold have to do with games and entertainment. Only five percent of apps have been related to books (Statistic Brain, 2014).

As the public searches for new sights and sounds using newer methods, naturally, creativity will bring the various mediums together in new ways. According to Dana Kerr, "Just a year ago, mobile platforms commanded 50 percent of users' total digital media time, and now that number is up to 60 percent -- the majority of that within apps" (Kerr, 2014). Ninety-six percent of each online radio and photography is consumed on mobile devices (2014). As more people seek new content on mobile devices, developers will surly seek new ways to present such content.

Mobile Digital Implementation

Many traditional print mediums have elected to use digital devices in tandem with their print. Vogue Magazine has reported a growth of digital subscriptions to be over 400 percent. Still, that only makes up about 3.8 percent of total circulation (Sedghi, 2013). With half of Americans in 2012 reported to receiving their news online rather than print or radio, there appears to be a want for interaction or control in receiving information. Even television news has seen a sharp drop in viewers under the age of 30

(Beaujon, 2012). As more people become accustomed to active media that require consumer response, passive media that require no acknowledgment to continue may wane from grabbing the public's eye.

As the convenience of digital technology grows, so will grow the expectation of a single reporter in the field. Simply by setting multiple small recording devices around a moment, almost anyone can accomplish the same feat that would have required a truck of equipment and a team of skilled professionals. Journalism schools, such as The Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism at the University of Southern California have also begun to adapt to the evolving digital environment. The role of a traditional reporter is growing into a position completely different than the same role in the twentieth century. In addition to writing a text article, journalists are now expected to be able to capture and edit professional video and sound (Dahl, 2014). This ability for technology to turn a team of multimedia jobs into a single job lends itself to all mediums. Computers are designed to make a person's life easier. As computers continue to lessen the burden of creation, creative minds may find themselves freer to focus on concepts beyond functionality.

Institutions around America are experimenting with ways to implement digital reading technology into their programming. The School Library Journal has highlighted libraries around the United States that have incorporated tablets into their story time. Emily Miranda, a library supervisor of children's services in Massachusetts enjoyed how children were able to interact with the story and have more fun in the process. She expressed that the stories had a larger impact on the children, though there is still skepticism toward the educational use of tablets. Kathy Kleckner, a Minnesota

children's librarian is afraid that the independence involved in the tablet medium could cause social behavioral problems by dehumanizing a social experience (Samtani, 2013).

Many schools have decided to purchase iPads for their students to borrow. "We can't say we're committing to the iPad in perpetuity," says Chris Johnson, director of technology at New Trier, (Springen, 2013), "We're committing to the change in how we teach and learn" (p. 30). The reason that the iPad is the current tablet of choice for many educators is the versatility of the device. There are numerous apps that specialize in teaching literacy in new creative ways. On top of that, the tablet is a very powerful tool of researching informational and artistic content (2013).

There is hope that apps may increase retention through interactivity. Though a correlation has not yet been revealed between book apps and test scores, there have been signs of digital apps aiding in information retention due to the interactivity of an experience. The more involved a student gets with their lesson, the easier it becomes to recall the experience (Springen, 2013, p.30).

Public Accessibility

The biggest challenge of getting technology to everyone is the cost. On average a tablet costs $500. There are also fees for many educational apps. There must also be a wireless internet infrastructure that can handle thousands of tablets accessing it at once. Even when all of that is purchased, there are repair costs to consider. There is

also constant threat of devices becoming obsolete within two or three years of their production (Springen, 2013).

One of the benefits of digital text over print is the accessibility. E-books are available to readers 24 hours per day, seven days per week, and 365 days per year. Personal digital availability could also encourage children that feel checking out physical materials would appear "uncool". Furthermore with digital books, the thickness of the book is no longer a factor of intimidation. Remedial readers don't have to feel self-conscious about their book looking different from the advanced reader's book (Springen, 2013).

With technology becoming more widespread and abundant, stepping into the world of app creation is steadily becoming more accessible to the public. The only materials needed to create an app are a mobile device, a computer, and a fee to participate in an online app store (Biti, 2013, p. FP6). That is to assume that the creator has knowledge of how to program new software.

As much of society is completely illiterate and lost when it comes to code, coders have the ability to set high prices for their time in this early and vastly uncharted era of digital expression. Hiring someone to code an app itself can be quite an expensive endeavor. Experienced coders charging upwards of $100 per hour for projects that take weeks of effort to complete. New apps require new code. The execution of the programming is just as important as the story being conveyed (Kirkus, 2012).

New Horizons

When new approaches to storytelling are used, the type of story that writers can capture is also renewed. With new technologies, writers can imagine stories that don't have to be limited to a single line of events. With most traditional books having already made their digital crossover in the form of e-books, creativity is spawning from stories constructed specifically for tablet devices (Kirkus, 2012).

There has been a rise in original content specifically produced for tablet technology that shows the public is quickly embracing the idea of new patterns of exploring ideas. According to Kirkus Features (2012), the top ten apps list of the 2010 was dominated by adaptations of printed books. In 2011, the list was divided evenly between e-books and book apps. In 2012, their list displayed that "books that are native to the tablet dominate overwhelmingly" (Kirkus, 2012).

With more freedom from locked chronological movement, there can be room to not only allow interactivity, but some apps actually require it. Audiences are no longer allowed to experience stories passively. The nonlinear format also ensures that the audience will have the opportunity of a unique experience with each encounter (Lhoog, 2013). "Unlike traditional films, storytelling apps are freed from the constraint of having to unfold in prescribed amounts of time" (Lhoog, 2013).

The future of storytelling technology will grow in the direction that society feels comfortable exploring. In this time of technology advancing giant leaps, a devices success still depends on a laymen person's ability learn, often in small steps. The cycle

of writers offering new stories and listeners demanding even more will fuel the evolution of human expectation.

With new forms of sharing ideas come new ideas that can be shared. As technology helps us to imagine our universe, we will gain new knowledge that will inspire new usage of old ideas and new ideas of old usage. This project demonstrates how technology can help us to share our imagination with each other. Without the digital animation to help explain concepts, or the iPod to capture the ideas, or a computer to organize and design, or a device that encourages multiple directions to be taken at any moment, every step of expressing this idea of something would be impossible.

Method

The app is adapted from my self-published book, *Something. The Point of Everything*. The book is organized to capture a story that applied to a reader's experience no matter where the reader picks up and leaves off. Every paragraph stands alone as a relatable thought. I collected ideas that I felt to be not only powerful but also useful. I organized the thoughts into patterns that I felt lent themselves to the openly interpretable nature of the story.

As the book is geared toward multiple interpretations, each sentence is to ring true with the emphasis placed on each word. A sentence with four words is considered to have at least four interpretations. "The **ball** is red," reads differently than "the ball **is** red". Yet, writing "the ball is red" leaves interpretation for the emphasis to be placed on any word or combination of words.

One of the primary purposes of capturing any thought is to raise awareness of that thought. *Something. The Point of Everything* is designed to open linear minds to how nonlinear storytelling can flow no matter their approach. Engrained into every educated American is the urge to read in a straight line from left to right, and from front to back. Few books written in English, which are available from retailers, stray away from the format established at the time of the creation of the printing press.

In the form of a mobile app, the reader has a constant reminder that they may explore the text in many directions (including a straight line) at any given moment. *Something* can be read intelligibly from any point to any point. In the form of a printed book, the reader's imagination is limited to the reader's past experience with books. Books do not seem to stir wonder of functionality at first glance.

As my first attempt to express my growing network of ideas, I approached the project as a traditional book. I outlined my direction and constantly held to that initial flow. I would typically start at the beginning and revise straight through to the end. Some days I would start at different points, but I always read from that point to the end. The outcome of that initial effort was titled *Life in Perspective: Reality Revealed.* This is the first edition of *Something*.

The printing cost of *Life in Perspective* proved to be too great for consumers. With color pictures scattered throughout the book, the manufacturing tripled the cost of a basic black and white textbook. As there is no demand for a product with unknown benefits, twenty dollars was too much for readers to bear.

After a short time of selling and listening to response, I found that I had to fix the cost by eliminating pictures, and I gained a new awareness as to how people could misinterpret. I have become interested in using that misinterpretation, or rather, preconceived expectations of how a sentence flows to guide readers to ideas that can at first seem wrong, but grow into an idea of understanding otherwise impossible to obtain.

The first step of writing *Something* was to collect thoughts that stood alone as powerful and useful. I constantly listen for what I feel to be a universal truth within everyday experiences. I collect thoughts as they arrived to me on an iPod Touch that I keep in my pocket. Without that, ninety percent of my thoughts would have been lost in my search for writing materials. When I realized that I had several hundred paragraphs of thought saved, I began categorizing them. I named each category according to the theme that each group collectively reflected.

Creating the flow of these thought was a manner of applying many levels of organization. I would have days where I focused on organizing paragraphs, and somewhere I would focus on putting topics in order. I contemplated the order of each sentence within each paragraph, and then each word in each sentence. The more order I would seek within the work, the more order I would find to explore.

Design of the book *Something* was kept as simple as possible. With no color inside of a book, cost is cut by more than 66 percent. Though, the book does lack the visual charm of the original. People were less inclined to read passages without pictures to first grab their attention. With pictures, the book was a multimedia experience. Without pictures, the response was similar to that of a dreaded chore.

Life in Perspective was written and designed on a Macintosh computer. I find that the physical appearance versus. Functionality of each *Life in perspective* and *Something* are reflective of the computer on which they were designed. The image of *Something* is plain yet versatile to any experienced audience, while *Life in Perspective* was received as much more sleek and appealing to readers. The doubled price of *Life in Perspective*, made it difficult to sell, and the lack luster of the appearance of *Something* also caused difficulty in sales. Though *Something* experienced stronger sales, there also required much more explanation to peak a stranger's interest.

An important issue to deal with just as much as the content itself is the speed of the content. If users have to wait on their content, they will likely grow impatient and find other sources of information. Because of this, concise writing is becoming more crucial today than ever. Modern readers such as myself expect the point to come across almost instantly. That means breaking a large story into smaller pieces may hold a reader's attention more firmly than hours of reading from a physical book would offer. The average adult is being trained to expect to be rewarded early and often from media. In the case of the *Something* app, users are rewarded at each paragraph with the option to push a button and see another paragraph from the direction of their choice.

I came to the idea of transferring my idea into an app as I was scripting a documentary that attempted to convey *Something*'s message through moving pictures and sound. I was unsatisfied with all of my outlines. With a film, I felt I had to build to a major point by deemphasizing other important point. I also felt that individual interpretation would be lost in the tone of the voice emphasizing words from my personal perspective.

I want to create a reading experience that inspires creative exploration. I also want the presentation to focus on one paragraph at a time, as I feel that each paragraph stands alone as an intriguing thought. When faced with the next paragraph, I feel that readers sense that they must move on. When only one paragraph is displayed at a time, it is my hope that people will be more inclined to reread a paragraph to the point that they gain a deep understanding of it before moving on.

I first want the app to offer some of the main conventions of a physical book. Readers have to be able to read the book from beginning to the end. I want the chapters to be at least as accessible as a book. I chose to add a "random" button to simulate the ability to flip to any paragraph in the book. I also added a "favorites" menu to access paragraphs that particularly connect with individual readers.

The title fonts are Georgia font based from the appearance of the physical book. The body text was changed to a san-serif font to better accommodate prolonged reading on a backlit screen. I looked at the first paragraph with every font in my library until my sense of taste settled on Gill Sans MT. The color and font of the buttons were chosen to reflect the simplicity of the blue san-serif fonts used throughout the iOS system. I chose the Corbel font out of a list of over a dozen nearly identical fonts. That was the font that I felt to be the most simple and bold, as that is a major theme within the app. All of the specifications of the fonts were inspired completely by personal taste.

The background of the app is taken from the cover of the book. I chose the color white as the background because it contains every color and therefore fits my intended emotional impact for the story. To improve texture to the blank white background, I added a manually faded photograph that I had taken of a rock in the rain that I feel to be

obscure yet vividly defined enough to inspire wonder. This is also my intended feel of the content of the whole app.

The logo for the title page is based around a photograph of my pupil. Around that are question marks that fade to red and blue to represent positive and negative wonder. The exclamation marks were made black to express that I find questions to be more colorful than answers. The photograph on the credit page was chosen for its balance of the sun, earth, and terrestrial life.

As I already had all of the pieces collected and thoroughly organized, working with the coders was a short and simple process. There was a very clear picture of what was expected of the coding. I sent Photoshop mockups of screen shots, specific fonts, colors, and images such as the favorites button and title screens.

We would meet periodically to inspect process and suggest direction. They were very easy to work with as most of my suggestions simplified their work. I would test the latest prototype and they would fix the errors. Every aspect of presentation was brought into question as I had to express exactly what I wanted to a team unfamiliar with my personal sense of style.

Approaching a project such as this has taught me to balance the concept of content with cost, resources, and user friendliness. As the ideas that lead to *Something* evolved into the idea of the app, the app has evolved my ideas further. Discovering the working pattern of how technology allows stories to be told has expanded my imagination of how to tell my story.

Conclusion

The subject of *Something. The Point of Everything* is "something". It's as specific as it is general. One can look at the subject as any specific individual thing among everything else, or it can be viewed as the idea that everything in our awareness summing up to one infinite idea. This collection of ideas works from many perspectives reflecting the unanticipated experiences of the reader.

I find the subject of *Something* to be quite fitting to the functionality of this project. The process started as a means of capturing new perspectives of socially understood ideas. Based on feedback from the printed release of *Something*, many of the ideas have already proven to open new avenues of thought for readers of all ages. A barrier I always have to face when sharing these ideas is assuring people that the ancient printed medium can still hold new ideas.

I have published *Life in Perspective: Reality Revealed* and *Something. The Point of Everything* not only as a test of its content and my abilities to match the modern expectations of printed books, but I also did it to gain a perspective of how society surrounding me would react to the ideas in the most "professionally" accepted text medium of today.

The reaction to the content was in general much warmer than the reaction to the medium. Some people would tell me that if it were in another form, they would be more interested in purchasing it. They expressed that they did not have the patience to read even a short book. There were some that overlooked the purpose of the work because they could not get past some of the process of having published a physical book.

Within the next year, I will continue to work with coders to add features to the app. There will be a note section where readers may become writers themselves and capture their own thoughts. There will be a "share" feature to post paragraphs on social networks such as Facebook. The topic headings will be activated to call up a random paragraph from within a section, unlike the random button that calls up a paragraph from the entire book.

Customization will also be added to the text. Within a "settings" menu, users will have control over font size and background color. While the white background holds to the look of the book, a black background with a white font will ease eye strain for prolonged usage. My personal photography will also be utilized within the random button to add visual texture and color.

From my experience, in the form of an app, the open-ended story simply works better. Users are constantly confronted with a focused thought surrounded by functionality. There is constant action without an overwhelming amount of training required. My aim with the app is for users to better sense the interconnectivity of each idea by constantly presented them with multiple options of exploration. With more control over functionality comes more considered control over how a story is conveyed. This also means there can more to consider while designing a story.

Though at first I did not set out to create an app, after years of working on an idea that I felt I had to express, only in the medium of a digital app could my ideas be presented in a style that I feel is fitting to the content. Based on the response from my published books, I have had to find a way to make my thoughts more accessible to an increasingly online and interactive public.

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