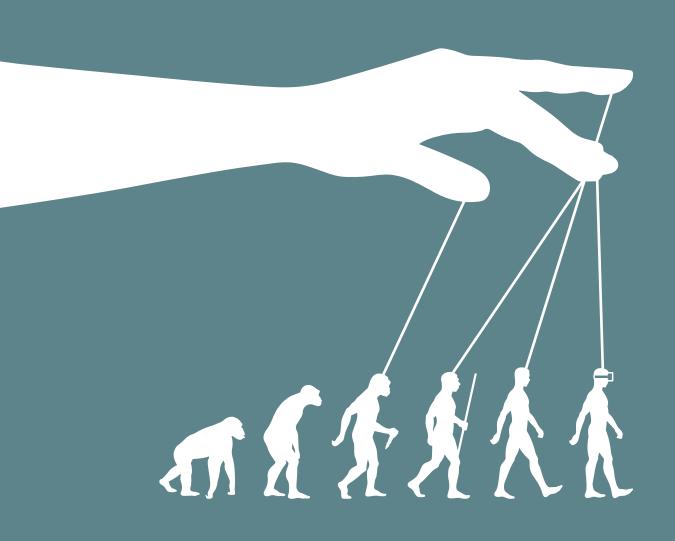# Oh!
The Stories
We Will Tell.

Jim Morrison

Has technology changed the reason why we tell stories?

The Narrative

I
Once Upon A Time...

II
...In A Land Far, Far Away

III
Information Is Just The Story

IV
Is This The Real Life? Is This Just Fantasy?

V
The Stories Our Children Will Tell

Bibliography

Act I

Once Upon A Time...

Technology is the campfire around which we tell our stories.

– Laurie Anderson

Introduction

The history of our species is a story as old as time, being told through the artefacts of past civilisations. From the time of hunter-gatherers, storytelling has been part of every known culture. Conveying meaning in message, **stories have helped us communicate and share ideas**, to inform and to persuade.

The medium of storytelling has helped us pass down morals and values to the next generation and provided the answers to existence, identity and purpose. Our lives defined by the deities of our environments, each with their own character and mythos.

Our species, throughout the lineage of artificial advancements, has been **shaped by the technology that we use**. This process and methodology for survival has given us tools, clothing and shelter, allowing humanity to create an artificial environment within the

natural world. **These environments allowed for the passing of information from one generation to the next**, stories weaved together and told to children to help make sense of the world around them.

The stories we told our fellow man for countless millennia have shaped our culture and society, defining our very way of life. This passing of information through storytelling laid the initial rules for society and community. Through this, our technological **innovations and inventions advanced the cultural evolution of our species**.

As our usage and dependency on these artificial tools increases, as does the expanse of information we consume and share. But now with the advent of virtual worlds becoming a reality, the stories which inhibit **these worlds may determine the society we make for the next generation**.

As we begin the 21st century, we will see the first ever generation of digital natives, a society born into a connected world. Humanity has never before seen such **an open and accessible environment of information**; the wealth of human knowledge, culture and civilisation at the fingertips of our children.

But are the stories being told around these digital campfires the ones we should be listening to?

Act II

───⟡───

...In A Land Far, Far Away

The ultimate value of life depends upon awareness and the power of contemplation rather than upon mere survival.

- Aristotle

In The Beginning

The role of storytelling in our anthropological narrative begins during the Palaeolithic era, as homosapien emerges as the evolutionary primary of the Stone Age. In a world of instinct and survival, the invention of fire allowed our species for the first time to conquer the natural elements. Fire brought with it an end to cold, dark nights and a means to fend off predators.

This technological achievement allowed our ancient ancestors to cook meat for the first time, providing a quicker, more efficient way of consuming energy; leading to **a growth in intellectual capacity**.

As we developed as a species we used this increased intellect and technological ability to form tools and materials from the world around us. Ancient artefacts such as hammers, spears and the bow

and arrow haven't much changed since the days of their inception, but the impact that these early advancements had on our species are still felt today. As Timothy Taylor, archaeologist and professor of pre-history, states in his work 'The Artificial Ape' - 'The intelligence that makes us inventive was enabled by inventions...'.

As a species, the stories we have told since the invention of language have taught us **how to act in an ever-evolving emotionally intelligent society**. As a communication tool, language allowed us to convey information to others, leading to increased cooperation and larger, more complex societies.

As American biologist Peter J. Richerson hypotheses in his 2013 publication 'Cultural Evolution', the mechanisms of cultural systems such as symbolic and ritualistic acts, originally created the rules and institutions of social behaviour.

The human species has **passed down stories across countless generations**, describing the nature and nurture of mankind. The creation of gods and myths were used to explain our lack of understanding of the world around us; the nature of the elements explained away as being controlled by invisible beings with natural and supernatural powers.

As these stories got passed to the next generation, new motifs and characteristics were associated with these gods; each developing their own unique personal relationship with the natural and supernatural environments.

The oldest known evidence of our storytelling nature can be found along the cave walls of Lascaux in Northern Spain. Almost 30,000 years ago, Stone Age man painted these cave walls, depicting the environment around them; from simple grazing animals to groups of hunters preparing for the kill.

The symbols and pictograms of these **ancient communications can only be left up to interpretation**, perhaps a depiction of everyday life, the struggle of survival, or as a religious offering for an ancient Stone Age deity.

The Pen Is Mightier Than The Sword

As an inherent **symbiotic relationship in our evolution**, technology allowed for the development of agriculture, irrigation and community. As communities grew, the rules and moral codes of these societies became enshrined through the construction of religious monuments and temples.

Towards the end of the Neolithic 'New Stone Age', about 4500 years ago, a new technology emerged, the early proto-writing systems. The technological advancement that these systems, such as cuneiform, brought to emerging civilisations, allowed for the creation of effective trade, agricultural management, and the introduction of defined cultural laws.

In turn, this saw the rise of the first large complex society of Sumer, located in modern day Iraq - largely considered to be the cradle of civilisation.

As with many great civilisations, the introduction of a formal education system generated a common language, along with its own set of social norms. It was during this time, that Richerson suggests, the 'world religions' appeared and universalised the ideological system "providing the basis for integrating multiethnic populations".

A singular common story provided stability to the masses, leading to increased cooperation in a multicultural society.

During the rise of the Ancient Greek empire, philosophy became part of the social and cultural evolution. It was here that questions of existence and purpose rose as the subject of civil discussion, and we began to analyse the nature of the stories that preceded us.

Canadian Professor and Philosopher Marshall McLuhan described Homer's "Iliad" as a 'cultural encyclopaedia of pre-literate Greece, the didactic vehicle that provided men with guidance for the management of their spiritual, ethical and social lives.' Furthermore, this poetic form existed for the 'faithful transmission' from generation to generation.

This transmission of information and **the continued process of cultural evolution grew stagnant** as these ancient empires fell.

If this is true, as Peter J. Richerson suggests, the fall of the Western Roman Empire drove the world into a 'Dark Age', so called due to the drop in a literate population and literature production.

During this time **the church became the single most powerful storyteller**, using the pre-existing ideological systems of religious governance to gain power over the masses.

This era of illiteracy forever changed during the Renaissance with the invention of the printed medium. Up until this time, the production of literary works was timely and costly, with most educated scholars being members of the church.

Johannes Gutenberg's printing press, invented during the 15th century, allowed for the first time **the mass production of the written word**. This technological achievement had a dramatic effect on western European civilisation with its ability to spread information quickly and accurately, **helping create and support a wider, more literate public**.

Act III

❧

Information Is Just The Story

*You can sway a thousand men
by appealing to their prejudices
quicker than you can convince one
man by logic.*

- Robert A. Heinlein

One Picture Worth Ten Thousand Words

Four hundred years after Gutenberg's printing press gave us its first mass publication, the oldest known surviving photograph was captured by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce during the late 1820s. Over the next fifty years, this technological achievement would allow the world to see **a true snapshot of the past**, a glimpse into a world seen through different eyes.

With the power of written word a fallible medium, the photograph brought truth to life. No longer an interpretation of a storyteller's bias, photography allowed the world to see its true self for the first time.

As Renee Byer stated in her 2009 TEDx talk, 'the power of the enduring still image, to inform and bring understanding to issues.', **the photograph became the new medium for storytelling**.

At the end of the 19th century, Italian inventor Guglielmo Marconi introduced the world to radio communication. This new technology became **a fundamental part of our communication apparatus**, ever improving with increasing ability to communicate over great distances, and to an increasingly larger audience.

As the industrial revolution spurred on with the technological advancements of a new age, we began to see **the landscape shift to mechanical and electronic tools**; with the conflicts of the first world war leading to pioneering advancements in transport, manufacturing and communication.

The invention of cinema, at the turn of the 20th century, dramatically changed how we told stories. It created **a definitive, permanent narrative in which to convey meaning and message**.

The power of the moving image provided an output to communicate a single agenda to the masses, and it not be lost in translation. The usage of this technology allowed for the mass communication of nationalistic propaganda, **influencing a nation through storytelling**.

As our society moved further into the Electronic Age, the 1930s brought with it the first television broadcast and the creation of

the first digital electronics, artificial devices capable of information computation. As with every major cultural development, the technological **advances of our society grow when our survival is threatened**.

The culture leading up to the second world war led to the mass distribution of propaganda, the timeless story of good versus evil, the light verses the dark.

In 1938, Orson Welles showed the power of technology and storytelling, presenting a radio dramatisation of H.G Wells' science-fiction classic 'War Of The Worlds'. Causing a panic across America when first broadcast, this mass communication directly into the homes of the population, followed the story of a Martian invasion, and provides evidence of **our societies susceptible nature to the stories that we tell**.

As the mass-media machine took over, new information environments and institutions arose, each with their own rules and moral codes of conduct.

These **institutions regulated the stories we were told**, creating a consistent narrative to entertain and subdue the masses.

This institutionalised form of storytelling stills continues to this day as noted within Marshall McLuhan's 1968 examination of modern mass media, 'All media work us over completely. They are so pervasive in their personal, political - psychological, moral, ethical and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched'.

Into The Void

Although the dawn of computing began during the 1930s, it wasn't until the 'fourth generation' of computers, and the invention of the microprocessor, the Intel 4004 in 1971, that this new electronic environment was available to an eager, **information-ready mass audience**.

Over the next twenty years, our engagement only increased with these electronic environments. With the World Wide Web connecting us to a global electronic network, the evolution of information communication has directed the course of our civilisation.

The internet has allowed for the **collaboration and curation of the largest information repositories ever to exist**; and has provided the tools for global cooperation on a scale like never before.

As the power of computing grew with each new technological release, as did our interaction and engagement with these new digital devices.

The timeline from simple virtual constructs to programmable interactive games has been relatively short in our technological and cultural evolution; and as **our addiction to these interactive technologies grew**, so did the power of the stories contained within them.

The video gaming industry provided a medium for storytelling the world had not seen before. **A story driven by direct engagement**, the player immersed in its narrative. From Space Invaders to Super Mario Brothers, the early games of the 1980s and 1990s created a subculture of interactive storytellers, their narrative played out while **peering into the void of a virtual world**.

As the industry grew and adapted to the needs and wants of its consumer market, the technological advances in graphical rendering and computational performance produced games that could immerse the player even more than ever before. Dynamic storylines allowed players to choose their own adventure, becoming the hero of their own quest.

The stories we tell through these games allow us to engage in acts of violence, detached from our engaged reality, as we sit behind a protective screen.

British archaeologist Timothy Taylor makes the hypotheses that 'Not only have we invented all technology-but that technology has physically and mentally made us.' If this is true, then the stories being told to us through this interactive medium have **the power of change our social behaviours in the real world**.

Act IV

***

Is This The Real Life?
Is This Just Fantasy?

We have no sooner learned to speak, than we begin begin demanding to be told stories.

\- Christopher Booker

Idle Hands

With the advent of interactive technologies and social media platforms, every 'user' has become **a storyteller to the masses**. With little or no checks and balances for the content that is being produced, we find ourselves surfing the information superhighway, consuming the newsfeeds and blog posts of these information environments. Each environment setting their own individual rules of acceptable behaviour.

The **engineered truths** and the impact of social media on a population can be seen in the democratic vote for Brexit in the United Kingdom and the American Presidential election of Donald Trump in 2016. No truer is there an anecdote for **the power of misinformation**.

As McLuhan predicted, stating 'In the name of progress, our

official culture is striving to force the new media to do the work of the oldest', platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Youtube have been **given a voice on equal grounding with official news media**.

We tap into our social newsfeeds for entertainment, to keep up to date with current events, all the while unbeknownst, we are being immersed in stories of misinformation and propaganda, **designed to subvert the course of information truth**.

In order for us to combat this attack on truth, the institutions which have supported our cultural and technological development must be **proactive in driving the mechanisms for change**.

As McLuhan states in reference to the rise in popular culture 'it is a matter of the greatest urgency that our educational institutions realize that we now have civil war among these environments created by media other than the printed word.'

James Bridle outlines in his 2018 book 'New Dark Age' regarding the conspiracy of the chemtrails theory, 'Within a few years, assisted by online forms and talk radio - Questions were asked in parliaments; national scientific organisations were flooded with enquiries;'.

This **power of the user-driven information environment** creates the social echo chambers in which we now reside. The stories of a deep state and new world order, and the arguments for climate change denial and flat earth theory are played out on **the same theatrical information stage** as our established news institutions.

The proverb 'The devil finds work for idle hands' is as true today as it ever was. With the world now experiencing the narratives of these information environments on a daily basis, we must look at the digital platforms in which we engage and inform us about the world.

The same environments that allow us to socialise with friends are now becoming the ones that **saturate us with mass-media content**.

If what Jorge Arango suggests is true, and that these 'information environments create contexts that influence our behaviour and actions', then we must be ensure that these environments are proactive in protecting and supporting us; not blur the lines between **our perception of truth and our engagement in reality**.

Future Worlds

As we look to the future of our information and communication environments, we see the emergence of reality-breaking technologies. With Augmented and Virtual Reality, **our storytelling has become more immersive than ever before**.

From immersive film and virtual reality gaming to mixed reality storytelling, these technologies have **the potential to redefine our society** and how we interact as a species. As we leave the safety and security of our bricks and mortar environments, we must ensure that the information that we communicate, the stories that we tell, drive **a positive narrative for our species**.

A keen observer of cyber-culture and previously an executive editor at Wired magazine, Kevin Kelly makes an observation in his 2016 publication 'The Inevitable,' that 'The future we are

aimed at is the product of a process - a becoming - that we can see right now. We can embrace the current emerging shifts that will become the future.'

If this is true, we have the opportunity to discover and employ the mechanisms required to support this **ever-changing immersive landscape of information**. We have to ensure we make the right ethical decisions now rather than ignoring the impact our decisions have on future civilisations.

In further observation of future technologies, Kelly states that 'Two benefits propel VR's current rapid progress: presence and interaction.' Presence in this sense relates to the realism of the observable reality generated by VR. As the speed and development of technology increases, the realism of 3D graphics and pixel perfect detail of render and resolution, **our brains will no longer be able to tell the difference between the virtual and the real**.

As for interaction, our current technology, still dependent on interactive sticks and weighted goggles, grounds us in the real world. But lest we not forget that we wear technology everyday, from the clothes on our backs, to spectacles, headphones and timepieces.

Once the technology to support immersion in Virtual and Augmented Reality has reached the level of comfortability that we have with our current wearable technology, then what is there left to keep us grounded?

If we are no longer bound by the rules of reality, then **the rules and institutions of that reality are no longer applicable**. This is why we can enter 'Deathmatch' competitions, our gaming consoles link us to a reality behind the screen, were the goal is to kill as many enemies as possible.

This disconnected reality supports the users engagement, but not deep enough to affect their moral conscience.

A VR simulation in the near future will no longer have that disconnect. As Jorge Arango points to in 'Living in Information' - 'you experience the effects of acting within a context when the forms that enable it alter your understanding and behaviour.'

With this reference in mind, Virtual Reality is the form that will immerse its user fully in the context of the experience.

By transporting the user to a world were the act of killing is rewarded, **this immersive contextual experience** could lead to

symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder, or the emergence of sociopathic and psychopathic tendencies in users.

If our brains are really unable to tell the difference between the natural and virtual world, then the stories we tell across these planes of existence must co-exist peacefully together.

Act V

The Stories Our Children Will Tell

Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.

\- Arthur C. Clarke

Conclusion

The question of our cultural evolution is one that has intrigued scientists and historians for centuries, and will be a subject of much interest for generations to come.

The power of the human intellect, combined with our physical ability to manipulate the natural world around us, has provided us with the technology to become **creators of our own world**.

With **our environments continually shifting from bricks and mortar, towards those made of 1s and 0s**, we must ensure that the narrative defined within them is one that supports the positive development of our species.

Our process for discovery and the technological achievements we have made, have led us to the possibility of creating a completely virtual reality, **an artificial world inside an artificial environment**.

As we move closer to **becoming gods of our own virtual realities**, with great power comes great responsibility. Our social behaviours have been regimented and institutionalised through the stories our environment tells us.

But these **new information environments do not have the constraints of a singular moral governance**. What is deemed socially and morally acceptable is left up to anonymous avatars, the virtual moderators and administrators of our future worlds.

As we have witnessed through **the symbiotic development of cultural evolution and technological advancement**, we begin to see that the question of why we tell stories is embedded in the very fabric of what makes us human.

Our intellectual capacity has driven the development of language, tool building and social cooperation, which in turn has created the need to communicate and share our ideas with others through speech, art and demonstration.

From instilling the norms of social morality and value to our children, to the ideological control of the masses, **storytelling has not really changed since our first historical records**.

What is different in the modern era of the Information Age, is that our society has access to information on a scale like never before.

The great libraries of ancient empires were restricted to the wealthy, powerful and educated, leaving mostly an illiterate population; but now **our information environments are open for everyone to create, curate and consume content**.

Philosopher and Mathematician Alfred North Whitehead stated "The major advances in civilisation are processes that all but wreck the societies in which they occur.", and no more is truer now, as we continue to move forward into our future of virtual societies, **blurring the realms between fantasy and reality**.

With user-generated content filling the digital airwaves, our society has become intertwined with 24 hour media programming, all of us becoming the storytellers of our own generation. Moreover, as our communal environments have shifted from physical buildings to digital platforms, we have created a place where our personal lives are shared through **the same lens as media fiction**.

As we look back over the our cultural and technological evolution, we see that the **stories we tell haven't really changed**.

If from our earliest days, as Booker states 'those archetypal rules which have governed storytelling since the dawn of history have in no way changed', then no matter what message is being conveyed, storytelling is just a narrative for communication, to help organise and share information.

We find today that technology hasn't changed why we tell stories, but instead it has just provided the necessary tools, platform, audience and opportunity for every story to be treated equally.

Bibliography

The Stories That We Read

McLuhan, M., (2008). The Medium Is The Massage. London: Penguin.

Booker, C., (2004) The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories. New York: Continuum.

Arango, J., (2018) Living In Information: Responsible Design For Digital Places. Brooklyn NY: Two Waves Books.

Campbell, J., (2004) A Hero With A Thousand Faces. Vol 17 1st ed. Princeton University Press.

Yorke, J. (2014) Into The Woods. A Five Act Journey Into Story. The Overlook Press.

Rose, F., (2012) The Art Of Immersion. Norton, W. W. & Company, Inc

Taylor, T. (2010) The Artificial Ape: How Technology Changed the Course of Human Evolution. St. Martins Press.

Sternberg, R. (2012) Intelligence and Technology: The Impact of Tools on the Nature and Development of Human Abilities. Routledge.

Jasanoff, S. (2016) The Ethics of Invention: Technology and the Human Future. W. W. Norton & Company.

Kelly, K. (2016) The Inevitable: Understanding the 12 Technological Forces That Will Shape Our Future. Viking.

Bridle, J. (2018) New Dark Age: Technology and the End of the Future. Verso Books.

Richerson, Peter J. and Christiansen, Morten H. (2013) Cultural Evolution: Society, Technology, Language, and Religion. The MIT Press.

The Storytelling Power of Photography - TEDx Talk by Renée Byer | LensCulture. Available at: https://www.lensculture.com/articles/renee-c-byer-the-storytelling-power-of-photography. Accessed 08 December 2018.

Early film history and propaganda - Propaganda - movie, director, cinema, scene. Available at: http://www.filmreference.com/encyclopedia/Independent-Film-Road-Movies/Propaganda-EARLY-FILM-HISTORY-AND-PROPAGANDA.html. Accessed 06 Decemer 2018.