

Intellectual Autobiography

Perhaps unlike some of my colleagues and predecessors in this MA program, my intellectual story hasn't been defined by distinct, earth-shattering moments of revelation. In fact, very few people were involved in my scholarly formation in regards to this program. But maybe that makes my story all the more unique. Since childhood, my interests have always been shaped and informed by music, visual design, film, television and print. In some ways it seems this course of study was inevitable. In any case, I know why I am pursuing this degree, and in this essay we'll look at the progression of circumstances and choices that let me to this point.

In high school my interests always stood firmly grounded in the technical side of media. As an audio technician I learned the skills of removing distraction to let whatever voice or message I was amplifying be understood as clearly as possible. This philosophy was one I developed on my own and succinctly stated to as many people as would listen to my yammering.

I learned the basics of the art of video editing in an internship under Tony Mercado. His experience as both a cameraman and editor for various documentary films, along with his prowess for technical processes, further developed my love of multimedia. At the same time, it definitely played up my computer geekiness.

That geekiness was where I outputted much of my creative energy. A friend and I jumped into the computer modding culture that was beginning to gain steam in the late 90s, cutting up our PC towers and installing lights, windows, and gaudy paint. We customized our operating systems, internal components, and cases, making sure no part was left untouched. In photoshop I created abstract art pieces, submitting them at times to art competitions. I never thought much of my graphic work, but happened to win second place at a contest sponsored by Scholastic and Otis College of Art and Design. I never made a big deal of this to anyone (at times I was even self-deprecating over it), but I was secretly proud of this accomplishment.

As I entered college--what many consider the cusp of "adult life"--my choice in studies seemed obvious. Four years later, in 2006, I graduated from Greenville College with a Bachelor of Science in Media Promotions and, to back it up, more experience than I ever imagined I'd have at only 21 years of age.

In four years I had become Executive Director of a mid-sized music festival and Station Manager of the school's radio station. But it was the summer between my Junior and Senior year that my love for new media took a solid form.

That summer I travelled back from the St Louis area to my childhood home of Southern California and took up an internship at the well known independent record label The Militia Group. As soon as I

stepped into their lime green offices and was sat down in front of their iMacs, I knew I had found my calling.

One of the bands on Militia, had a particularly smart guitarist named Dan. I am convinced now that Dan was a soothsayer, able to peer into the murky future and pull out the destiny of social media. Dan had a plan to utilize MySpace that was brilliant and hadn't been used by anyone, as far as we could tell.

The band, Sherwood, was going to be on a nationwide tour with the band Daphne Loves Derby. Dan told us to send a message to every Daphne Loves Derby MySpace friend. The difference was that the message we were sending sounded really personal. It went something like this:

"Hey! We saw you're friends with Daphne Loves Derby. We're going to be on tour with them this summer and would love it if you checked out our music and tell us what you think. We'd love it if you added us as a friend too. We hope to see you out at one of the shows! Love, Sherwood"

Today, this sort of message seems obvious, but at the time no one was asking someone to check them out before friending them. It was all, "add as many people as you can". We gave the impression of caring enough to contact each individual person with a "personal" message. And it paid off. We sold out every show on the West coast plus their entire first run of merch.

An accomplishment of that kind had me hooked. I was fascinated with the culture of social media. These relationships made, the limitless potential to make connections with other people, and the marketing possibilities excited me.

So, as I enter the next phase in my education, The New School is another obvious choice. Not only does the university have a remarkable reputation among artists of all walks, but it is active in media today. As a thinker *and* a doer, the inclusion of theory and practice fits my interests and goals perfectly.

The future is so infinitely enormous that I have always had a tough time nailing down one thing I want to do for the rest of my life. With so many opportunities, how can I make that choice? But rather than getting bogged down in the fantastical side of it all, I have created two goals that I would like to attain in the next five years.

At this point in my life I know two things: 1) I love sharing what I know with others. Whether that manifests itself in helping an artist or an organization better use the resources available to them online, or in the classroom, teaching college students how to write clean and valid markup and wield the sword of Cascading Style Sheets to make a beautiful and effective website, I always enjoy myself most when I am giving back.

And 2) I don't like working for "the man". I don't want to be a cog in the wheels a large corporation, helping them dupe customers or expand their portfolios. I guess my humanitarian side comes out in wanting to help the little guy achieve his goals.

To these ends, the goals I want to achieve in the next five years include:

1. Freelance design and consultancy
2. Teaching at a college level

Being in the working world for several years has shown me that I really can't enjoy myself unless I have the ability to create. My goals above will allow me to combine the theory and practice methods gained at The New School and perpetuate them, hopefully instilling the same values in my students while reinforcing them in my own creative endeavors. By teaching the principals behind new media communication I will learn them better myself and in turn be able to apply them to freelance projects -- whether those be actual designs or consultations for organizations wanting to get in the new media game.

But before all of that happens, I'd like to make some contributions to the field. I'd like to be published, I'd like to be respected. However, I feel my literary contributions will have to be on a broader topic than social media and digital culture. I will always tend toward communication and interpersonal relationships, as that is just how I think.

In any case, the path I'm looking at will include a lot of theory with production classes in focused design fields, mostly related to the web. That's where I work now and will continue to work. At the end I'd like to have some sort of culminating work as an online installation piece. But for me, it's too early to know exactly what that will be. Who knows where the technology will be in even a year's time, anyway?

I am excited to see where the new theories, ideas, and skills I learn during this degree program will take me. Even in my current job, I am seeing immediate benefits. I've been applying many of the theories and discussions into my everyday web marketing strategies. As I shape my masters I know that my skills will only increase and my knowledge will only widen. In other words, this degree will also shape me.