HISTOIRES DE VIE MONTRÉAL
MONTREAL LIFE STORIES

"DIGITAL STORYTELLING": FROM INTERVIEWS TO DISSEMINATION ON THE INTERNET

What do we mean by "Digital Storytelling"?

According to Wikipedia (consulted on 27th of July, 2009), "'Digital Storytelling' is an emerging term, one that arises from a grassroots movement that uses new digital tools to help ordinary people tell their own 'true stories' in a compelling and emotionally engaging form." Said shortly, it means "to disseminate life stories with digital media".

Why is it important to disseminate life stories?

The concept of "shared authority" is central to the "Montreal Life Stories" project. It implies the actual sharing of authority between researchers, interviewers and interviewees. The content of the interviews, as well as the interpretation of this content, depends largely on the relationship interviewers and interviewees establish. We strongly encourage the participation of the interviewees at each step of the decision-making process in regards to the interview they have contributed to the project. Moreover, as stated in the 2007 research proposal[1],

> Communities are collaborators, and true partners in dialogue, as well as subjects of the research. The Life Stories of CURA will devise strategies designed to share authority beyond the interview stage, enabling interviewees and community partners to help the project interpret interviews, and to participate in research production.

The interview excerpts that will be shown online, in making information accessible to the general public, are part of our educational and communal strategies.

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[1] Online, http://www.lifestoriesmontreal.ca/files/CURA_final_application_english.pdf

Which life stories are we going to disseminate?

The "Montreal Life Stories" project aiming at collecting life stories, will first disseminate excerpts coming from interviews conducted by our members and collaborators, within the umbrella of the project. However, since "Montreal Life Stories" is fortunate enough to count on numerous community partners, clips from other provenances could also be added to the website, as long as the project's ethical rules are respected. For instance, no excerpt will be made public unless the interviewee has consented to its dissemination. Thus, the "Montreal Life Stories" staff makes sure every person interviewed by members of the project has signed a detailed contract, before any further steps are taken. The post-production coordinator will be the one supervising this whole process, and will assign interviews of **consenting** interviewees to anyone who would like to be involved in the Digital Storytelling section of the project.

Where will the selected excerpts be disseminated?

The "Institut du Nouveau Monde" (INM), now hosting the portal "Citizenshift", (http://citizen.nfb.ca/displaced-violence-life-stories), is affiliated to our project. In the file "Displaced by War, Genocide and Violence: Life Stories", one can find the excerpts disseminated online by members of the project. This file also contains excerpts of conferences, various types of work documents, as well as other kinds of multimedia documents produced by "Montreal Life Stories". It is worth noting that only documents in English are to be found when following this link. The same type of documents can be found in French on the French-language counterpart of the portal, "Parole Citoyenne" (http://citoyen.onf.ca/histoires-de-vie). Thus, although these two portals share the same goals and philosophy, the content of "Citizenshift" and "Parole Citoyenne" varies quite considerably.

When and how to disseminate the clips online, and who will be in charge of this process?

Many people are collaborating to the dissemination of the chosen excerpts. For more clarity, since we are going to get into the most "technical" part of this leaflet, we will first discuss the selection of the excerpts, then the writing of a presentation text, and finally, the meeting with a member of the post-production team.

Selecting the excerpts

If the interviewee wishes to be involved in the Digital Storytelling process, and if they are able to do so, we strongly encourage that they will participate in the choice of excerpts they wish to see appear online; this can be done

independently, providing that for the next steps (i.e. writing a presentation text and putting the clips online), a member of the post-production team will be available to assist the interviewee.

The interviewee can also choose to work in collaboration with a member of the project for the selection of interview excerpts. If the interviewer is ready to engage in this process, they would be the best fitting person to fulfill this role, as they have already built a trusting relationship with the interviewee, and they already have listened attentively to their narrative. If the interviewer is not ready to be involved in the Digital Storytelling process, the interviewee still can get assistance from and work in collaboration with another member of the team, be it either a post-production intern, or anybody else who is interested in this project.

The selection of interview excerpts requires a careful watching of the testimony on DVD. The next step requires the assistance of someone who is able to use video and audio editing software. Some members of the post-production team of "Montreal Life Stories" are fully qualified for this. Before making an appointment with one of them, make sure you:

- have watched the testimony thoroughly, and spotted the excerpts you find the most interesting, and you think could make good clips. It's possible that you will need some editing in order to paste together excerpts that would ultimately constitute one clip on the INM website. It is also possible that you divide an excerpt into two parts, in order to make two clips out of it. There can be more than one clip per interviewee. However, a clip which is too long can be boring and will not represent the testimony well. That is why editing is necessary. If you are not the interviewee, make sure they consent to the dissemination of each excerpt you wish to disseminate. It is possible you don't agree with them, in regards to the choice of excerpts and the editing process: this illustrates well the need to "share authority" and the ways in which it is possible to do so, by communicating and negotiating in order to find a consensus;

- have taken notes concerning the time location of the chosen excerpts on the DVD. This is why we strongly recommend that the person in charge of the Digital Storytelling process – be it the interviewee themselves or the person assisting them – is the same person as the one doing the chronology of the interview. The **chronology** is a process well explained in another section of the training guide. It consists of saying what the narrative is about at each step of the storytelling. A left column indicates the time code of the interview, for example: 00:01:23 (zero hour, one minute, 23 seconds), whereas a right column informs as to what the person is talking about at that specific moment (for example: "she speaks about her parents, her house, and her school"). Basecamp provides more complete examples of chronologies. In order to save a lot of time, it is important to be able to tell the post-production team where the chosen

excerpts are on the time code. The person who made the chronology has watched attentively the interview; they are therefore the best suited to involve in the Digital Storytelling process. If the person who makes the Digital Storytelling entry watches the DVD with all of the attention it requires without making the chronology, it would also be a shame that someone else doubles this amount of work by making the chronology. That is why we strongly encourage that the person in charge of the Digital Storytelling would be the one taking care of the chronology also, and vice-versa;

- have noted carefully the presence or absence of pictures, on the DVD, and/or any other element that could make the clip more dynamic and attractive. At the present time, we are constantly bombarded with excellent quality sounds and images that are surprising; therefore, excerpts of interviews that would be more "static" and less "interesting", on a visual and audio level, are likely to "discourage" those who are watching them. Without implying that we are going to become award-winner videographers, and without the intention to produce sensationalist clips, it is possible to improve the quality of the clips we produce, and make them look more "professional". One of the easiest ways to do it is to add images to the still clips. Many interviewees have published books telling of their experience. It could be interesting to add pictures of the book cover to the clip. Others have photographs of the people they are talking about; these can be used as a background image, while hearing the interviewees speak. Some have audio documents: for example, one has a poem, which we can hear recited on the DVD. If the DVD does not contain any document, it is strongly encouraged to contact the interviewee (if it's not you), and to ask them if they could possibly bring pictures or other documents of that kind at the Oral History Centre. Another option would be to go visit them at their home and take pictures of the documents, or to borrow the documents and come scan them at the Centre.

The writing of a presentation text

On the "Citizenshift" / "Parole Citoyenne" portals, one can easily notice the fact that the videos are accompanied by a title and a presentation text. For example, one of these excerpts is titled "Walter Absil Explains the Origin of his Last Name" (http://citizenshift.org/node/22451&dossier_nid=22423). As the clip is only an excerpt of a much longer interview, the presentation text must give enough details to make it understandable. It must introduce the person and contextualize them. It must make the synthesis of what was said before relating to the chosen excerpt. For example, in the case of Walter Absil, the explanatory text, without which it would be impossible to understand what Walter Absil is explaining, goes as follows:

Walter Absil was born in 1928 in Vienna. After the annexation of Austria into Germany in 1938, his family left the country for Brussels, Belgium, where they lived undisturbed until the Nazis' arrival in 1940. The Nazis began to round up Jews and deport them in 1942, mainly to Auschwitz. Since the first victims of these deportations were Jewish immigrants, Walter's family tried everything possible to receive Belgian citizenship. Walter was adopted by a Belgian woman, thus losing his birth name and taking on the name Absil. Finally, the family went into hiding because they realized that all their efforts were futile.

You can count on "Montreal Life Stories" members at any stage of the Digital Storytelling process. They could help you find a title and write a presentation text if you need help. Don't hesitate to ask for assistance when you meet a post-production team member.

Meeting with a post-production team member

Now that you've completed the chronology of the interview, selected the excerpts and taken notes on their location on the DVD with the appropriate time codes, written a presentation text and a title (except if you need help for that, which can be done later on), and gathered pictures and other interesting material to add to the clip, it is now time to make an appointment with a member of the post-production team. Once again, if the interviewee wants to be involved in that process, he/she is strongly encouraged to do so by joining the appointment. The member of the post-production team will edit the clip and make it available online. Together with him/her, you will review these passages, you will decide where to start /cut / end the clip, and you will decide on anything related to the final aspect of the clip that will be found online. You will also discuss with the postproduction member about the presentation text and the title. You will be asked if you want subtitles and text to appear on the clip. It is recommended to allow enough time to do this in the meeting, in order to cover unforeseen elements and discussions that might arise.

The editing in itself might take many hours, depending on its complexity. It can also be done in a few days, depending on the availability of the members of the post-production team. You most probably will therefore have to make a second appointment with the staff member, in order to come and view the final product. Some insist on seeing the clip at the Centre before it's aired online, in order to discuss it in person. Others ask for a DVD of the clip to be sent to their homes for approval before being put online. Finally, some choose to see it when it's online only; they ask to be notified when it's available online.

Before disseminating the clip online, it's possible to make the modifications requested. Once it's online, it will be more difficult to modify the clips: however, if you don't feel completely satisfied with the clip, for any reason, you're invited to

contact a member of the post-production team, in order to discuss it and see what we can do about it.

Conclusion

The project "Montreal Life Stories" is in constant evolution, and its Digital Storytelling group is still at its first faltering attempts. We gladly welcome comments, suggestions, and critiques, so that this guide is adjusting to the actual goals of the project, and that it is useful as a working tool. What's important to remember is that the postproduction team will do its best to offer you all of the assistance that you need at any stage of the process, and that we hope this will be an educative and enjoyable experience for you. Please don't hesitate to contact us!