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The Internet: A Creation Out of Control

The Beginning

Sitting in a ship's cabin, rocked by the frozen sea and chilling winds, Victor Frankenstein, furthermore referred to as Dr. Frankenstein, relives his journey after tampering with the spark of life. " ...from the midst of this darkness a sudden light broke in upon me--brilliant and wondrous, yet so simple" (Shelley 52). This light was to guide him in his creation of a human being. He believed this creation would bless the world of science and set a foundation for future exploration in such a field. In some ways, this creature was Dr. Frankenstein's blessing, in others, his curse. In a similar fashion, the Internet has taken on a life of its own and grown into a creature that disregards restraints, redefines property, and is changing how we define creativity.

How the Creature Came To Life

The Dr. Frankenstein of the early Internet, consisting of government and education programs, sought for the ability to communicate more quickly and efficiently. It seemed harmless, useful even. It started out as a modest project taken on by the Defense Department in the 1900's to establish more efficient communication during wartime (Baccala). Because universities were housing and experimenting with computers at the time, the Internet has become a resource used by academia. In its docile, contained form, it served as a logical system set up to channel information. However, everything changed when the business world gave the spark of electricity that woke the creature up.

By creating and selling the personal computer, the Internet escaped to the public. Internet users of the world have become Dr. Frankenstein. No longer is the Internet a program for merely efficient communication. They have created their own monster through the words, pictures, videos, ideas that shared, the programs used, the sites visited. Similar to when the creature sat in the hovel listening to the lessons from his oblivious benefactors, so is the Internet expanded when Internet users contribute to it.

Responsibility

"Alas! I had turned loose into the world a depraved wretch, whose delight was in carnage and misery;" (Shelley 79). Just as Dr. Frankenstein felt responsible for the creation he had pieced together, all creators feel obligated, in one way or another, to take responsibility for their information, pictures, videos, writings, etc., referred to in this essay as content. The creation of the Internet and its subsequent growth and expansion resulted in SOPA/PIPA, copyright, creative commons and similar controlling programs. Government, education, business and the Internet populace at large, the ones that brought the Internet into existence, are now seeking to restrain it, with varying degrees of success.

Control Issues

The infamous SOPA and PIPA bills were formed by the government in order to help stop online piracy and protect IP. While many agree with the intentions of the bills, even more are afraid that these creations would get out of hand, like the Internet itself (Magid). The backlash against these bills was incredible, with whole websites shut down for a day in order to make their protestation clear. There are entire online communities dedicated to keeping the web free from government interference, such as the Technology Liberation Front, who describe themselves as, "...the tech policy blog dedicated to keeping politicians' hands off the 'net and everything else related to technology" (Tech Liberation Front).

In a similar vein, schools have felt that they need to seek more control and keep the kids' hands off technology when it is not necessary. They are still striving to make use of this new learning medium, and teachers are constantly being encouraged to incorporate more technology into the learning process (Cuban 1). But they too have felt the backlash of the creature as students become seemingly more distracted with the same technology that is supposed to teach them. Mrs. Tolata'u, a 4th grade teacher at Wasatch Elementary School, explained that they have to be very careful with what programs they use on the Macs in their classroom so they can avoid distraction. Each program is specifically chosen to be beneficial to the student's learning, and from these examples, it appears that the massive Web creature can break attempted restraints as easily as tossing a little girl into a pond.

Creation Clash

The Internet is the ultimate public square, it is easy to "overhear" other's conversations and see those things that people display. Thus, a massive creative collaboration culture has evolved, with everyone sharing their own ideas, building off another's, taking someone's content and "remixing" it. This leads to two things: 1. Issues of property and 2. A rehaul of the definition of creativity.

In the digital world, one cannot simply sign a creation with a signature, or keep it locked in a safe to keep people from stealing it. As they say in those Internet safety videos, "Once it's on the Internet, it's there for good." make formal. There are few boundaries that keep, say, an artist's song from being shared with a group of 40 people illegally at a dance party, and even closer to impossible is the ability to regulate the misuse of content. Many see Creative Commons licensing as an answer to this problem, as there is a lot less regulation required and content is much easier to share. However, attribution can be little to none, and content can still be used in ways the owner may not wish.

The pop-culturalization of Frankenstein is an example of how creativity can get out of control. Frankensteinia, a blog dedicated to the tracking of pop culture's use of Frankenstein, has hundreds of examples of Frankenstein being transformed into musicals, comic books and fanfiction novels. No longer is Dr. Frankenstein's creature locked up in Mary Shelley's text; he is roaming the Web. Over decades of slow transformation, with various artists, filmmakers and writers injecting their own versions of the monster into the world, we see a very different creature than the one described in the novel. The Internet is where a Google search of the word

“Frankenstein” brings up thousands of images of the iconic green, bolted, flat-top monster. The changes to the creature were not just cosmetic, however. This creature has very little capacity for intellectual thought and is almost childlike in nature, while the original was quite articulate and intelligent. We can compare this transforming process to the game of “Telephone”, where each person passes on a sentence to the next, and when it gets to the end of the line, it usually does not turn out the way it was originally stated.

This is where property issues take place. If someone takes an idea from another, and improves upon it, however illegally, should this secondary creation be destroyed? The answer to this question has been a new virus for Internet users. The answer can’t lie in more control. As explained above, there is no way for a single party to control and protect content on the Internet. Piracy and misusing content of all kinds is rampant. Though it may sound paradoxical, perhaps as idea of creativity changes, so will the property issues.

Rehaul of Creativity

From the logical body parts of communication set up by government, education and business, has arisen a new kind of creativity. It is one powered by new, powerful tools that are accessible to anyone, and the content itself is amazingly accessible as well. Simple text on the page is standard, what is new is the transformation of text into fresh and original ways.

Websites like Eric Fischer’s photo-mapping, where you can see that parts of cities most photographed, and wefeelfine.org, a place where one can see the emotions of any age group or gender that posted on the internet in any country. These, along with many, many others, have completely transfigured how we read information. Simple graphs and charts are *too* simple, and these new forms of seeing information allow for even more conclusions to be drawn from the unique lenses. It has transformed literature, whose last major reform came with the invention of the printing press. No longer is Frankenstein print in a book, it is an interactive iPhone app, or a meme. People have the ability to take already existing content and make it their own, as well as starting from scratch. Internet users have the tendency to share whatever it is that they have, finished or not. While speaking to Alistair Wood, a man who publishes ukulele chords to popular songs, said that he would much rather have someone be using them than for his content to be sitting latent on his computer. Internet content is meant to be published and utilized by everyone.

The Dark Side

“Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein blurs divisions between master and slave, creator and created, human and monster.”, said Devon Anderson in his article, “A Summary of Modern Criticism”. These blurred lines are also seen in nearly all content posted on the Internet. Everyone has a strong desire to share themselves, their individual viewpoints with the World Wide Web. Not only does this desire seem inherent, but it is encouraged by the use of social networking sites. Individuals are expected to share aspects of their daily lives with their social circles in online settings. Thus, anything created cannot be separated from the individual’s self. On the other hand, because everyone is sharing, it leads to a kind of collective consciousness, where people feel like all content is free game. Individuals can easily save a picture from Google

and put it on their blog, or watch a movie on a pirated movie site. It doesn't feel wrong. Nor have attempts to show people that it is wrong have been successful.

What is needed is simply a change of perspective, or a new way of thinking about the creature that has been bestowed with life. The creature from Frankenstein, seeking to be understood and taken in, went to a blind man to beg for compassion and understanding. The man was willing to speak with him and comfort him, but only because he could not see the monster's face. The Internet is in the homes of more than half the globe. Though people may be blind to its true nature, but perhaps an understanding can be reached while being able to sense its presence and power.

Conclusion

It is impossible get rid of or find a way around the creativity, collaboration, and communication that the web makes possible. People will continue to utilize it, in one way or another. The creature we are looking at is not simple, not logical, though it is made up of logical parts. Therefore, it cannot be understood necessarily in a simple, logical way. What this means is that we need a new ways of looking at the creature, seeing past the strange exterior and looking at what we can gain with it in our midst. Control will not work, but perhaps friendship will. The Internet can be utilized for worldwide benefit, even as it redefines creativity and property. As it learns and changes, so can the rest of the world, instead of chasing after a phantasm of control.

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