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The Media Mural Project: Empowering Youth in New Mass Media

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Biography:

Jess Damsen, M.F.A., Digital Art & New Media. Jess is a new media artist working primarily with video technologies in both public new media and traditional art venues. The artist investigates ways that new forms of digital dialogue and experimental art intersect to create unique aesthetic and communication experiences. The Media Mural Project was made possible by the dedicated educators at Renaissance High School in Watsonville, California and by the ArtsBridge America, Porter Fellows and Digital Art / New Media MFA programs at the University of California at Santa Cruz.

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Abstract:

This article describes the pedagogy, practice and outcomes of a digital art program developed to enable high school and middle school students to become active participants in new forms of grassroots public media. Students and their teachers become producers and controllers of art-based videos and associated digital dialogue which is distributed on the Internet.

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I. Digital Art and Dialogic Process

Art is a state of encounter.

-Nicolas Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics¹

The Media Mural Project², which provides art-based instruction in digital video/music production and distribution, is a digital media education program developed to influence the potential for local, alternative high school and middle school students to become active participants in mass media venues. This project, which can be duplicated almost anywhere, enables young people to become producers and controllers of art-based media on a grassroots level and to participate in associated digital dialog over Internet, radio, television and cell phones. Recent developments in user-friendly and massively accessible audio-visual technologies are quickly changing the way people interact in these public communication spaces, especially youth. Blogging, instant messaging and uploading are already transforming the way people communicate toward a model of two-way, response-based messaging networks, as opposed to the traditional model of one-way communication in which a large public audience passively receives a top-down flow of information, usually from corporate and government organizations through standard media venues. The potential for young people to gain a voice by contributing their own digital art messages to this universal conversation is unprecedented in history and can empower them to make a difference in their own lives and the lives of others.

Technology providers such as Apple, youtube.com and Current.tv push software and social networking packages that attract people to use interactive internet, TV and mobile devices, making it easy for almost anyone to get involved

as a media producer in direct communication with others.³ Young students today are highly motivated to participate in these particular digital art forms that are both "hip" and relevant to their daily lives. Interactive involvement in this arena requires that they learn not only about new kinds of technical tools, but also new forms of digital messaging and response akin to social interaction, digital dialog language skills and emerging dissemination methods. This process is becoming so easy that even very young or challenged students can become immediately enabled to participate in emerging public spaces arising now on Internet, television, mobile devices and more. The goal of the Media Mural project is to exploit these emerging technologies and mass media venues in a way that empowers youth to become thoughtful participants in public media spaces that operate as multi-voiced nexus points for communication.



Students uploading their music videos to the Internet

Creation of the Media Mural Project was informed by an interactive form of art practice known as "relational aesthetics,"⁴ "new genre public art"⁵ or "dialogic" art.⁶

"Relational aesthetics" is based on collaborative processes in which an organizing artist, or teaching artist provides a context for targeted groups to communicate about an issue, problem or common experience. The teaching artist organizes an activity with the group, and the activity itself is the art work . It's not about producing physical artifacts. It's a social event.⁷

Art is the place that produces a specific sociability....As part of a "relationist" theory of art, inter-subjectivity does not only represent the social setting for the reception of art, which is its "environment," its "field" (Bourdieu), but also becomes the quintessence of artistic practice.

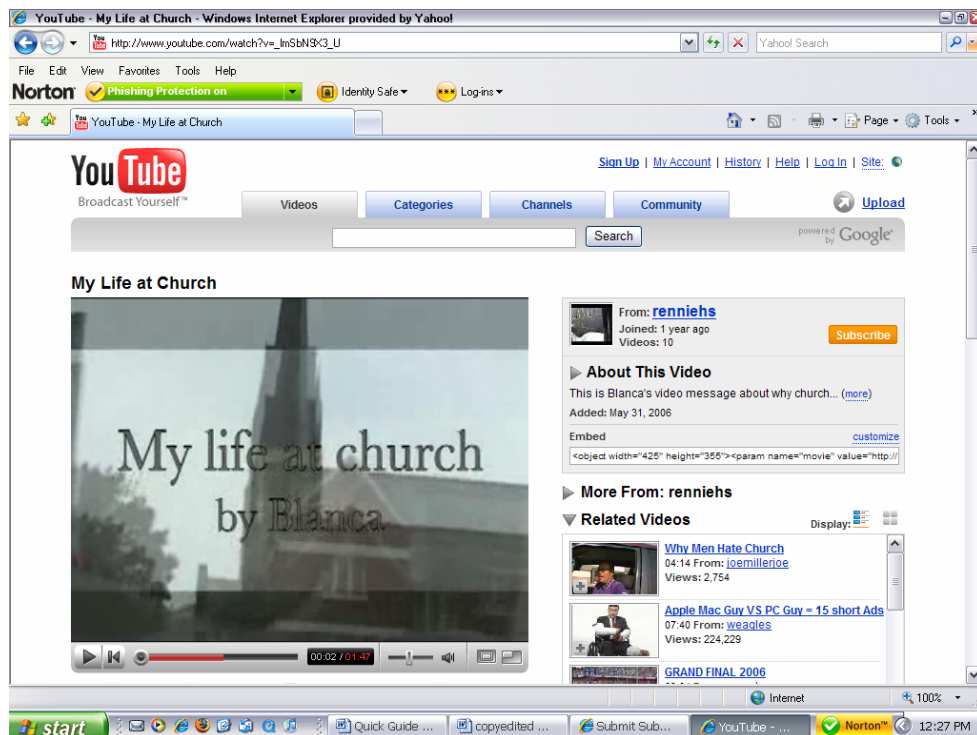
-Nicholas Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics⁸

The Media Mural Project specifically seeks to free its students from reliance on traditional forms of art that are based on passive exhibition of a carefully constructed object. It further strives to reveal how subtle forms of advertising and other propaganda-like messaging influence an audience. It encourages students to participate as an artistic voice among others, not to merely produce a video or piece of digital music to play in the car. The work of the Media Mural Project emphasizes the potential of multi-voice, democratic opportunities to a generation about to engage in that increasingly discursive network, which, for the first time in history, can support instant sharing of millions of works of artistic expression and responses across the globe. The phenomenon is taking the world by storm, giving the common person new power to influence global or local conversations.

The Media Mural teaching artist aims to produce several transformations in awareness and technical ability. Instruction includes insight into the psychological and social effects of messages found in public media, such as propaganda and

advertising, and thinking about becoming informed media consumers. The digital skills they learn offer them the choice to become participants in social dialog as they upload the digital video and music messages they create, by blogging and by responding to others in their digital venues such as email.

This kind of grassroots, interactive and response-enabled approach to digital art is not just the wave of the future; it is already operating on many popular web sites, numerous television venues, and more. This scenario presents unique opportunities to interest young people in the popular art forms of video and digital music, because they are already deeply involved on a social level through television, the Internet and cell phones. They are the first generation of people who have easy access to the free or affordable, easy-to-use software and hardware that enables them to easily join the digital community.



A Media Mural video on www.youtube.com

The technology is so accessible and easy to use that students everywhere are already making and uploading videos regardless of any instruction they receive at school. But a program like the Media Mural project gives them the opportunity to understand how creating digital art for mass distribution truly enhances their power for personal expression and social communication if they use it wisely. They are encouraged to think about the responsibilities of becoming a "content" producer or responder, similar to the responsibilities that artists commonly consider when thinking about the messages conveyed by their art. By understanding and exploiting those basic tenets and by having the technological tools to join in, they gain self-control and the option to become a positive voice with an unlimited audience. As with all successful art experiences, the chance to gain self esteem is heightened. As numerous students demonstrated during the project, producing cool music videos can be an especially satisfying result for high school students whose social lives sometimes seem to revolve around the latest pop culture music and entertainment superstars.

When the project began it was also considered an experiment in new media art documentation, collecting specific messages and overall behavioral patterns regarding the way its participants and their audiences interact within new media communication spaces. As a basis for art practice and research, the long term potential of the Media Mural Project was as a mechanism that investigates and comments on emerging forms of new media art, digitally networked community building methods, educational potentials in new media and digital art, and other factors that have yet to emerge in the mass media landscape. Soon after the Media Mural Project was started in 2006, media venues such as youtube.com,

myspace.com and others exploded into mainstream culture. Clearly, the documentation collected during that pilot Media Mural Project is paltry compared to the rich research environment of the Internet that later developed naturally. But as a digital arts learning program, the archive of material the project interacts with could still continue to provide specific insight into the social, psychological and spiritual benefits that students reap as budding digital arts artists, some of which are discussed later in this essay.

The recent appearance of easy-to-learn software in almost every computer sold is part of the reason this project is possible and relevant to youth culture. The massive proliferation of these products in the market, and the commercial strategies of the providers behind them, precipitate the necessity for projects like the Media Mural Project. The trinity of cheap consumer cameras, free editing software and Internet platforms that accept A/V content in order to attract consumers is historically unique. Such products are already in place at many schools. In fact, schools in particular are being offered excellent deals by Apple, Inc. and others to place banks of multi-media computers in the classroom that will automatically interact with their online products when installed.

The Media Mural Project interacts directly and intentionally with the products and spaces offered by commercial providers such as Apple, as they do indeed enable the public with unprecedented and "free"⁹ access to content creation and content sharing. Apple particularly pushes a suite of software, devices and media spaces that encourage consumers to produce and share their own A/V content. Their iMovie and GarageBand programs enable people to easily generate music and movies as digital files that can be shared online. They provide tutorials and easy

interfaces so that almost anyone with the most basic computer skills can learn them quickly. Apple encourages sharing of those digital files by also providing media spaces like iTunes and packages like iLife that make it easy for the general population to get access to media produced by it's users and partners. Access to that content further enables massive sharing of the material on other Apple platforms like the iPod player. As the product name "iLife" implies, Apple is selling a media-based "lifestyle" to consumers based on A/V media production and sharing.

Other technology providers utilized by the project are Current.tv and youtube.com. Current.tv is a major new satellite TV station that plays video made by viewers. It provides a web-based venue created specifically for uploading certain very specific types of videos for potential satellite television broadcast. Some students participated in the Current.tv system, but all videos produced in the pilot Media Mural Project were uploaded to youtube.com, which has very few restrictions (other than those dictated by standard copyright and age-related concerns). Youtube.com associates a robust, but easy to use, system of response, sharing and community formation based on free uploads of any videos that do not infringe on copyright and that don't contain offensive content. This site was heavily utilized by The Media Mural Project from the beginning, due to its relatively unrestricted capacity to disseminate A/V content and to facilitate dialog about it. This feature of youtube.com is probably the main reason why the site has become quickly and wildly popular very recently. The use of material on youtube.com has even become a practice by traditional mass media venues such as CNN, MTV and emerging media spaces like cell phone downloads.

The Media Mural project does not ignore the fact that all commercial technology providers utilized in the project do not offer their "free" music and video-making products out of sheer altruism. The project curriculum includes discussion about ways that these providers gain market share as the prime motivation for their approach. The companies hope to gain more customers who become inclined to buy more products and services after becoming familiar with the free ones. As they use the free services, customers begin to connect with other people who also use them, such as family and friends, thereby becoming more invested in using the company's compatible products. The companies sell more products, and they also garner greater advertising value as their customer base expands.

Any and all technologies and platform providers would be put to use by a Media Mural Project, depending on the equipment available at any given school and on what new tools appear in the future. More work with mobile devices like iPods, mobile laptops and cell phones will be a focus of the work as those platforms continue to develop in the future. For example, video-over-cell-phone technology was just emerging in 2006, but, by 2007, the iPhone was released with media interaction designed to be the showcase feature of the product. The point is that such platforms increasingly serve as multi-media interfaces for a larger cultural exchange of images, ideas and information. This exchange could be influenced positively by such projects as Media Mural because it informs and enables student artists to participate intelligently in those interfaces.

II. Enabling Personal Expression Across Digital Interfaces

Digital technology is providing people with the tools to produce and share content like never before, and it is set to throw the relationship between them and institutions into turmoil. I am predicting 50 years of chaos. Loosely organized groups will be increasingly given leverage. Institutions will come under increasing degrees of pressures and the more rigid they are, the more pressures they will come under. It is going to be a mass re-adjustment.

-Clay Shirk, Technology, Entertainment and Design Conference¹⁰

The focus of Media Mural Project lies in the potential ability of youth populations to overcome the social, psychological and economic pressures they experience in their mass media environment through learning and participating in emerging digital art opportunities. It gives them the power to engage with mass media in new ways and contribute to it on their own terms with digital art work. The project addresses a perceived problem that revolves around the potential effect of the traditional one-way barrage of controlled information on the character of individuals and cultures - propaganda, biased news, advertising and more. The Media Mural Project engages young people in work that ensures their awareness of the manipulative approach of corporate, religious and political advertisers that arguably try to create an entire culture of people who don't feel intellectually or spiritually complete without using their products or subscribing to their belief systems. The project aims to increase the choices young people have to access information and ideas, offer them freedom of interpretation about what they see, and allows them to quickly to become part of a growing two-way mass media cultural exchange.

The students learn about how modern advertising and public messaging techniques are similar to political propaganda in that they function in public spaces to gain influence over the minds and behavior of mass populations. They have an opportunity to understand how advertisers and all other disseminators of public information, even private individuals, can attempt to control economic, social and political culture with products, information and images. Perceiving one of the greatest such threats to be the corporate and political entities that want to manipulate the demographic of "children with Internet and mobile devices" (which they carry on their bodies almost 24/7!), the founder of the Media Mural Project targeted youth populations and employed the content and venues they would interact with the most: music, video, the Internet and television.

The Media Mural Project starts instruction with discussions about the art genre of murals, as they literally illustrate the potential power of exposing people to social and political messages in the public spaces where they meet en masse. Classroom conversations expand quickly to include cave art and other public spaces historically used for social messaging such as ancient temple and church frescoes, street mosaics, and posters. Eventually, the mural-based discussions end with the topics of graffiti and billboard advertising. Students learn about those forms of public expression with emphasis on the function they serve to influence mass audiences, be it a mural with a social message, a tagger's spray paint or a billboard selling a product. As a prevalent, modern and metaphorical, public art form that young people readily identify with, murals in particular were chosen as the touchstone for the project.



Students painting a traditional mural

Although "mural" is a departure point for the project's pedagogy, the ultimate goal is to convey the concept of "interface." Students learn about social and technological interfaces, how they relate to the role of graphics/image of a known identity or how products may intentionally attempt to control those identities or affect access to, or interpretation of, the information behind them. The students compare one-way interfaces, such as television broadcast screens with two-way digital interfaces and the youtube.com comment boxes that are filled with millions of viewer responses to videos. But, mainly, the students learn how to navigate through basic media interfaces as a means of presenting their own digital media messages to the world (or merely to their chosen local communities.) Computer display screens, email, web sites, blogs, audio/visual editing programs, typical uploading or downloading conventions and comment boxes on video podcast screens are the principal digital interfaces with which the students interact.

An example of why the discussion about interfaces are important here can be made by a quick survey of web pages where people have uploaded work. When people are ready to upload their work to the Internet, they usually must also construct many pieces of content that serve to represent themselves as the producer or provider of a video. They are asked to provide at least a name and are often allowed to also post an image that serves as an identity marker for the uploader. People almost never offer their real names and portraits, although nothing prevents that. A mythical "subject" is often created by the user to fill in this information at point of interface, a virtual placeholder for the person and the media messages they post. Therefore, not only are the Media Mural students building art videos and music to post online, they also participate online as speakers by creating required user names, pictures, profiles and other data that contribute to the formation of their online "self." Their media postings intentionally influence a visitor's experience toward some personal motivation and invite response, potentially from other such "mythical subjects." The Media Mural Project ensures that students carefully consider this aspect of interactivity as part of the curriculum because other online "subjects" they encounter in mass media spaces, whether commercial or popular, may not be what they appear to be. They must understand this fundamental phenomenon across all interfaces to parse what they experience in the media landscape. Only then can they strategize how to present effectively the overall message they share in their own work and how to best respond to others.

III. Specific Activities and Outcomes of the Pilot Media Mural Project

The emphasis is on the character of this interaction, not the physical or formal integrity of a given artifact or the artist's experience in producing it. The object-based artwork (with some exceptions) is produced entirely by the artist and only subsequently offered to the viewer. As a result, the viewer's response has no immediate reciprocal effect on the constitution of the work. Further, the physical object remains essentially static. Dialogic projects, in contrast, unfold through a process of performative interaction.

-Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Art*¹¹

During the Winter and Spring of 2006, a 20 week project of The Media Mural Project with 25 students and 2 teachers at an alternative middle/high school produced: 8 complete and 2 partial art-based videos about "personal" messages; 10 videos about a painted mural they had made; 8 pieces of original music made with GarageBand and uploaded to iTunes; 15 video uploads to www.youtube.com and www.current.tv; text responses by 20 students about almost every video; other documents related to how the students interpreted the usefulness of the project; a painted mural; and a projected art show of the videos for the entire school. They used 2 \$250 miniDV video cameras, a small bank of iMacs with iMovie on a single server that were already at the school, 2 4'x8' plywood planks and 15 cans of spray paint.

That alternative school enrolls troubled and developmentally challenged students who are at risk of becoming permanent dropouts. The area is a coastal California agricultural community with a large immigrant population who don't speak much English. In addition, the surrounding counties all suffer from the unfortunate effects of a thriving gang culture, and many of the students come from

homes devastated by associated violence, drugs and economic insecurity. Their prior access to art education and computers was generally nearly nil. For those who spoke English well, their starting vocabulary of media and technical terms related to art was low. Most of the students had no prior experience with email, video editing, video cameras or file downloading and file transfers. Half of them said they had never carried a cell phone. Most of them said they had no prior art classes or other academic experience related to metaphorical imagery or abstract expression. Of course, all of them had watched TV news and MTV videos, played a lot of mainstream music on CDs, and were very familiar with murals around town and in their home countries. They already had a lot of insight about graffiti and contemporary music.

Before they started generating their own work, they had received lectures and slide shows about the history of murals and graffiti, background discussions about mass media, including propaganda and advertising, an overview of current conditions in television, music and Internet, and technical concepts related to digital media production. Some training in various forms of documentary and fictional filmmaking offered them ideas about potential approaches to making a video. Real musical instruments and digital music programs were both encouraged for music construction. They watched and commented on a lot of online videos at current.tv in order to get a good idea about what other people were doing with personal video messaging, what styles they used, what they were saying and how people were responding to it.

They needed complete instruction in iMovie, iTunes and GarageBand to begin their work, including basic use of hardware like cameras, scanners and so forth.

Some students were able to learn these technologies by simply using the tutorials provided by Apple or elsewhere, while others benefited from some classroom instruction to supplement those tutorials. It was a source of pride for students who picked it up easily to then show their peers how easy it was. Knowing the technology itself was empowering within their peer group, even without producing any artistic material with it. Several students who were previously unpopular and who were experiencing behavioral problems demonstrated an almost immediate transformation in self-confidence and began to interact positively with others as soon as they discovered they could actually learn the technology and produce a simple product like a "cool beat." Two such students became leaders in the room.

The curriculum was executed in two basic phases. In the first phase the students were to simply construct their own individual video/music-based messages. In the second phase the students would be given the opportunity to do the same, while also examining and commenting on the works produced in phase one.

During phase one, after receiving all basic instruction discussed above and guidance about the use of copyrighted material, each student was asked to decide on a personal "message" to convey in their work. They were free to choose any topic. Other than some regulations imposed by the school, they were not encouraged toward any specific kind of messaging, nor were they restricted in their idea formation. They were only allowed to use original content, with a small amount permitted from the public domain. They were free to choose the topic and style of presentation and whether they would work individually or in groups. All the voice,

video, music and text content they generated to complete their work was collected as a database of content to be available for use in phase two.



Excerpts from several Media Mural Project videos

Despite the huge learning curve they faced, the videos and original music produced during phase one were good and reflected a wide range of interests. The topics included war and evil behavior; product rip-offs; reasons not to join a gang and why people do; going to jail and dying as the only future for gang bangers;

problems with drug abuse and how to get help; rap about whether Chevys are better than Fords; how a group of friends built a private clubhouse and their experience about being judged negatively for doing so; personal experiences about racing motocross; why someone goes to church; and why Bugs Bunny is a hero, because he doesn't let people bully or get the best of him. Most of the class chose to work in small groups, but two made their own individual pieces. Generally, music was as important to them as the video work, and, in some cases, the message and spirit of the work were based on music with lyrics, with video playing a subsidiary role. But, in general, there were a variety of approaches, including rap video, fictional drama, voiceovers on autobiographical footage, simulated documentary, real documentary and montage-style reflections about a general concept.

During phase two, as many new students entered the program, some of the instructional information was repeated. After viewing the videos and blogs produced by the first phase of students, the second phase students decided that they wanted to make some new videos as well as make a commentary video about the entire process. It was at this point that they decided they should also collaboratively paint a real mural in addition to making videos, and that videos about making the mural would help tie the whole project together. They immediately wanted to create responses to the other students' works, a truly spontaneous dialogic experience.

Most felt a strong connection to the messages of the first group that related to the influence of gang life in their families and communities. They immediately wanted to express how they, too, had something to say about the unique underground culture they lived every day. Sometimes they reveled in predictable

glorification of the power of one gang over another; others wanted to go public about their aversion to it.

The title mural that the students decided on for their phase two collaboration is an illustration of how the students successfully became motivated and engaged in purposeful social messaging. They finally labeled their overall project and painted mural, "Central Cali Lifestyle: thizz iz what it iz." This title is encoded with several layers of meaning decipherable only by people related to the specific communities where the students live. It was important for them to use this term despite the fact that it would not be immediately parsed by most people. They were interested in identifying with, and targeting, a small, specialized audience as much as communicating successfully to a generic global audience. One student, who goes by the name of "Hypno," summarizes his thoughts about the project in rap lyrics:

It's the central coast and thizz iz what it izz.

Art is not a crime so pay attention.

Without a doubt, you know, we reppin' the vill like it's simp.

We Some Art Kings in this game

and the power movement just keeps getting big...

"Central Cali" is a reference to common gang terminology, revised from "NorCal" to be allowed at the school; the term demonstrates allegiance to their peers. The students had originally wanted to use the term "NorCal" (for northern California), but its blatant gang associations, including the potential of triggering violent reactions by rival gangs who see those words, would not be permitted by the school. The students came up with "Central Cali" to indicate who and where they

were. Although the use of "Central Cali" was a compromise to avoid censorship by school regulations, it was still important for students in the second phase to associate with a certain cultural group, rather than as individuals or students. Their target audience was people who would understand that. They also explained that the word "lifestyle" was important, because, for them, it implied a sense of freedom to do what they want. They felt it was more or less a reference to their strongly Latino-based cultural association, and, in some cases, they felt that it also referred to the freedom to engage in their unique culture as they saw fit.

The specific words "thizz iz what it izz" are from a song by Mac Dre, a rap hero who "passed away." The students explained that on the surface it means that people just do what they want. But off the record, the students explained that the Mac Dre song it was borrowed from is about doing drugs. Part of the point about the work during phase two of this project was about ways the students could get away with using language and references that would normally be censored by the school authorities. Many of them demonstrated an unrelenting interest during the entire process to associate their messages with all the aspects of their life forbidden by the law or school authorities. Many stated that they were excited to use their new skills to mythologize the illicit aspects of their environment in ways they saw everyday on MTV, such as gangs, drugs, guns, bling, pimp culture, sexism, poverty, rebellion. That would gain them respect when they showed their videos to their peers and family, especially if they were published online.

This gang aspect of their real lives, as it turns out, is deeply rooted in their family and peer environments, inescapable in their actual daily lives. The public comments about their work, their life or their opinions often engaged in community

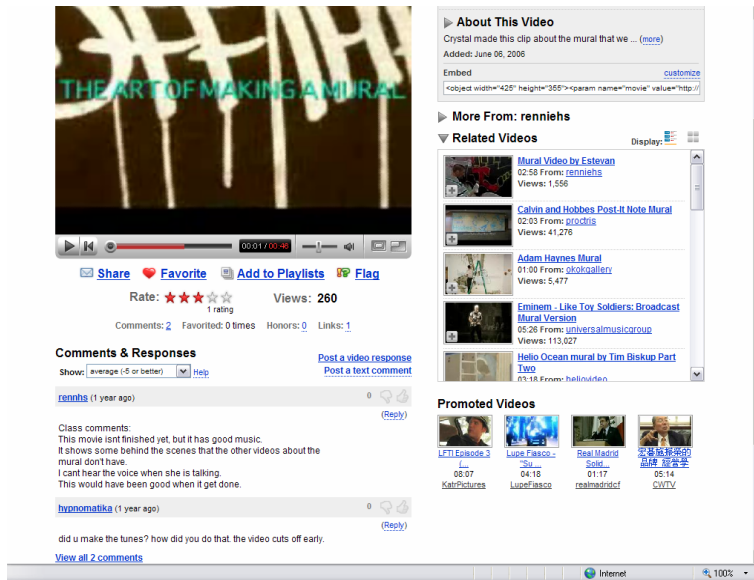
identification by displaying to others that they were interested in performing anti-authoritarian behavior and that they supported the gang lifestyle of their peers. However, in private conversations, they often mentioned that such pressure to do those things was oppressive and was constantly reinforced at home and on the street. Fortunately, the quiet, voluntary comments they made about wanting to get away from such almost inescapable influences was also a constant element in their communications.

In the end, many students said they had experienced some transition in their thinking about how they had used to "automatically buy into " the glorified gang lifestyle pushed on them by friends, family and rap music videos. Some eventually displayed considerable critical analysis about different ways to get around that pressure, as illustrated in several of their videos. Some students made a point of "going public" with thoughts about the disadvantages of bowing down to that peer pressure. Those students made videos that discourage gang life, that de-glamorize drug use and that mention the failures of families to offer positive and supportive environments.

The students responded with great interest to lessons about propaganda and such, but they were most highly energized by the fact that they could easily learn to make music and videos. In fact, one of the site teachers explained that the students were so highly motivated by the work that quite a few were energized to make it to school enough days to graduate, many of them would not have made it otherwise. But they were not as motivated about commenting directly to each other about the work, nor about the opportunity for non-anonymous written dialog in general. They generally resisted any attempt to produce much writing in text,

partially due to lack of confidence with language skills. However, in analyzing the kinds of text other people all over the Internet contribute ,they observed that they, too, are extremely brief and simple. For example, short phrases such as "cool video," "march on my sister in Christ," and "sick beats" were the kind of text replies that youtube.com viewers submitted to Media Mural students after watching their videos. The Media Mural students were not unlike thousands of other commentators at the youtube.com and Current.tv sites. That said, many students wrote rap lyrics for hours to drive their music.

A different kind of layer of response communication is discerned in the student's messaging patterns. It appears that, rather than focusing on any highly informative direct text response, people tend to email links to their friends, and then people reply with other links. In some way, references or links to other videos and music are often a primary response rather than the direct address forms of text reply. The students seemed to be intuitively responding to their media experiences by sharing digital pointers to other media. They already are using other people's videos and music as a sort of representative statement about something they appreciate or want to share. For example, one student emailed a link to a web site about Chevy cars with minimal text comment along the lines of "check the chevs they rule." It set off a flurry of response emails that included more links to Chevy related sites or pictures and also sparked an argument about Fords being better. Ultimately, two students made a rap video of their own song, "Chevy vs Ford," which still receives very agitated commentary at its location and blog at youtube.com. One year after posting, that video has received about 6,000 visits.¹²



The "comments page" for a Media Mural Project video on www.youtube.com

One reason that this project is highly suited for such alternative education locations is that it offers students a way to communicate non-verbally, across many socio-economic strata. The students eagerly grasped the opportunity to say something that people wanted to hear. They expressed shock and excitement that anyone thought their ideas mattered, that they could easily express their ideas in a very fashionable format, and that they could find new ways of interacting with their local peers that would give them supreme respect. Some, including a developmentally disabled student, were intensely proud and made comments implying that the freedom for them to make a video or great beat was a healing experience. Many were astounded that their videos were going to be on the Internet for everyone to see. (At the time of this project, youtube.com had not yet become a global phenomenon.)

The pilot project at Renaissance High School was very successful for several primary reasons that also indicate it could be successfully duplicated elsewhere other kinds of environments:

- Music and video seem to be the most relevant art forms that excite young people today. The new phenomenon of viewer-generated content and dialog is the big buzz and everyone is curious about it. Other forms of art and interaction are sometimes ridiculed as "old school" by the students. They are clamoring to learn the new ways, to show them off after they learn it. They even voluntarily stay after school to learn it. The computer room became the cool place for all the students in school to hang out at lunch every day. Every student was extremely surprised at how easily they could learn to build audio and video art. They expressed that it was not only fun, but that it compelled them to think seriously about the message they would convey: they felt that people would actually care about looking or listening to their work, that it would matter what they did. The immediate success they had in creating good music and video about something important transformed about a third of the students who experienced a visible and significant rise in self esteem and academic motivation. Several students changed from jaded, belligerent and barely functioning students on the verge of failure to students who attended class everyday and were excited about becoming media artists.
- Many students said that they were not accustomed to being given a forum to freely express their ideas as valid opinions. They said that the emphasis on communicating their personal ideas was the most exciting and challenging

aspect of the program. For example, several students who had signed up for a video class at a previous school had no interest in it and dropped because, although it provided great technical skills, there was no room for creative expression, especially as they were restricted from addressing the topics of interest to them, including drugs, gangs, violence, etc.(all the topics these students live with every day and have a lot to say about!)

Many people will produce creative work , upload it and dialog about without any educational programs whatsoever. The work of the Media Mural project is only one of many endeavors to help the masses appropriate popular communication empowerment. Part of the important work of the Media Mural project is to provide intelligent discussion about safe, creative and responsible media creation and consumption The Media Mural project hopes to help launch thoughtful, artistic people into this cybernetic dialog. The corporate and big organizational entities that are providing massively accessible technology may be in for a big surprise about what people do with their new tools. Individuals may also be surprised about the corporate strategies and responses.. Already, the power of bloggers and instant news videos from Joe Public is being felt by mainstream news, government and business. Open source work is becoming a mainstream ethic. The question is how the players will jockey for position, who will try to become the next band of manipulators. The difference about this new kind of interaction is that the rules and roles are still undefined and up for grabs. We can foresee it as a popular and fully exposed conversation composed by a trillion hits on buttons called: "play," "record," "send," "buy now," "block" and "reply."

Notes:

¹ Bourriaud, Nicholas. "Relational Aesthetics." Les Presses du Reel, 2002 (English Translation)

² Created by Jess Damsen while developing MFA thesis work at the Digital Art and New Media program of The University of California, Santa Cruz.

³ Apple includes the entry-level software iMovie and iTunes in every computer they sell. These programs integrate with their online programs, such as iLife and GarageBand.com, in ways that encourage people to use their software and share the results in online communities that range from private to global groups. Other technology providers are following a similar approach. Their commercial motives for doing so are not a major topic for this paper. Youtube.com posts almost anyone's video content and includes search, share, email and subscribe mechanisms. Current.tv is a new satellite television channel and web site that broadcasts "VC²" (viewer created content) through a system of online posting and voting by members. Their format limits what is accepted to the site, but they ultimately air many viewer-generated videos and archive many others online, along with comments posted by viewers. They include their own station-produced segments about viewer opinion such as "top Google searches of the day," and corporate sponsor videos that are created by the viewers. However, they recently started broadcasting standard corporate commercials and web ads, although they initially claimed an effort to avoid broadcasting ads or posting sponsors on their web site.

⁴ Bourriaud, Nicholas. "Relational Aesthetics." Les Presses du Reel, 2002 (English Translation)

⁵ Lacy, Suzanne. Mapping the Terrain. Bay Press, Seattle, 1995.

⁶ Kester, Grant. "Conversation Pieces." University of California Press, Berkeley, LA, 2004.

⁷ The Media Mural project is designed to operate as short-term classes or workshops, usually in a school or similar educational environment. The artist provides educational presentations about public art and media messaging related to murals, propaganda and advertising. The students then receive technical instruction to produce digital music and video and to upload and transfer those files in platforms that generate text dialog, such as comment boxes and email. They also dialog with other people outside the project who have posted videos and music. In addition to the individual videos made by the students, the organizing artist constructs a separate "reflection" video that is designed collaboratively by the group to make a statement about the experience and outcomes of the unique experience of that group. The "reflection" pieces are audio-visual art works also archived at the project web site and other digital, public platforms. Generally, they

are also to be presented in a projection or monitor-based version for a gallery or other physical public space.

⁸ Bourriaud, Nicholas. "Relational Aesthetics." Les Presses du Reel, 2002 (English Translation) pg 14 and 22, Relational Art is also offered in definition in the glossary of this book as follows: "A set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space.

⁹ People can engage with entry-level software and Internet site memberships that facilitate file sharing without charge. However, participants become subject to advertisements and offers to upgrade services for sale. Also, content uploaded to some sites is subject to loss of copyright control for the producer.

¹⁰ Twist, Jo, BBC News online, July 15, 2005: "Co-opting the creative revolution"

¹¹ Kester, Grant. "Conversation Pieces." University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 2004

¹² To view videos posted on youtube.com by students in the pilot project, go to the "RennieHS" postings at http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=renniehs

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