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1

The Personal Media Revolution

GROWING UP IN A FLYSPECK TOWN IN SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI in the early 1980s, ten-year-old Chris Strompolos stared out his bedroom window and dreamed. He fantasized about what it would be like for a whiff of adventure to breeze through his humdrum little burg. On a sticky June afternoon in 1981 he found a vehicle for his wanderlust in the darkness of a local movie theater. He watched, jaw agape, as Harrison Ford outran a rolling boulder, dodged a swarm of blow darts, and dangled over a pit of slithering snakes in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

Chris Strompolos was blown away. The movie captured his imagination like nothing he had ever encountered. He thought, *I want to do that*.

And so he did.

Chris first mentioned his outlandish idea to an older kid, Eric Zala, a seventh-grader at their school in Gulfport. Chris did not suggest a quick

and easy backyard tribute to *Raiders* that they could pull off on a summer weekend. Oh, no. He proposed shooting a scene-by-scene re-creation of the entire movie. He wanted to create a pull-out-all-the-stops remake of Steven Spielberg's instant blockbuster, which was filmed on a \$20 million budget and made \$242 million in U.S. movie theaters.

Chris and Eric agreed they would have to cut a few corners, given their somewhat more modest savings account, but, yes, of course they could do it! Eric, a budding cartoonist, began sketching out costumes for each of the characters. Soon a third movie-loving misfit, Jayson Lamb, came on board. Jayson was already heavily into special effects, makeup, puppetry, and lighting. He took charge of the camerawork with a bulky Sony Betamax video camera. Eric created storyboards for each of the movie's 649 scenes. The outgoing, slightly chubby Chris assumed the lead role of Indiana Jones.

The production took on a life of its own. Months passed, then years. On birthdays the boys asked for props and gear: Chris got a bullwhip, Eric a fedora. Jayson bought a VHS camcorder after a summer of delivering pizzas and saving money. Weekends were spent not hitting a baseball or playing a new game called Atari but in memorizing lines, creating plaster face masks, and filming take after take until they knew they nailed a scene exactly right. Nearly seven years later, they wrapped.

The result, according to those who have seen the work—including Harry Knowles, creator of the movie fan site Ain't It Cool News, and *Vanity Fair* writer Jim Windolf—is a filmic tour de force.

In the teenagers' version of *Raiders*, the actors grow older in the span of a few minutes. Voices deepen. Chris sprouts chin whiskers and grows six inches. He gets his first-ever kiss by a girl, captured onscreen. The girl who plays Marion, the Karen Allen character, develops breasts. Over the course of the movie the kids jump through windows; blow up a truck; sew together forty traditional Arab costumes; fill a basement with pet snakes; create giant Egyptian statues; surround Indy with spear-carrying, half-clothed blond warriors; dress up friends as prepubescent Nazis and Himalayan henchmen with glued-on beards; and kill Eric's little brother Kurt over and over again. In one special effect, an actor is shot, and fake blood oozes out of a condom hidden in his shirt. The filmmakers also made some inspired substitutions: a motorboat replaced a plane, Chris's puppy filled in for Marion's pet monkey, downtown Gulfport stood in for Cairo, a dirt mound became the Sahara. But they had done it, a faithful re-creation of the original film: the rolling boulder bearing down on Indy in a cave in Peru (actually, Eric's mom's basement), the live asps

(actually, rat snakes and boas), the World War II submarine, the 1936 copy of *Life* magazine, the pulse-racing truck sequence. And everywhere, explosions and fire and flames. (Jayson would later explain how they managed to pull off the pyrotechnics: “I’m like twelve years old and was able to go into a store and buy gunpowder.” This was, after all, Mississippi.)

They had a few misadventures, like the time they built a fake boulder in Chris’s room and discovered they couldn’t get it out the door. Or the time they poured three inches of industrial plaster over Eric’s head to make a face mold; when it wouldn’t come off, they rushed him to a hospital to remove it in a procedure that cost Eric his eyelashes and half an eyebrow. Or the time they re-created the bar scene in Nepal where the entire set was set ablaze. Eric played a Nepalese villager whose outfit catches fire, and nobody could put it out until Chris resourcefully grabbed a fire extinguisher.

When filming ended and editing was completed at a professional studio, the boys’ families staged a world premiere in Gulfport, complete with tuxes and a stretch limo. Almost two hundred friends, family, and cast members turned out to watch the hundred-minute film. But soon their little master-work became all but forgotten as they parted ways and went on to college and careers.

Then, one day in early 2003, it resurfaced. At the New York University film school, which Eric Zala had attended, someone passed along a years-old videotape of the movie to the horror film director Eli Roth. Roth did not know the boys, but he was bowled over by what he saw. He slipped a copy to an executive at DreamWorks, where it quickly found its way into the hands of the master himself. Spielberg watched it—and loved it. Days later, he wrote letters to all three amateur auteurs. “Wanted to write and let you know how impressed I was with your very loving and detailed tribute to our *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. I saw and appreciated the vast amounts of imagination and originality you put into your film. I’ll be waiting to see your names one day on the big screen.”

Roth also shared a copy of the video with Knowles and Tim League, owner of the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema in Austin, Texas, who were equally impressed. League set aside three days in late May 2003 for the “world premiere” showing of *Raiders of the Lost Ark: The Adaptation*, though before the screening he was careful to sub out the John Williams musical score because of copyright fears. The trailer of Strompolos dodging a giant boulder sparked such interest in the weeks leading up to the event that hundreds of people had to be turned away at the door.

Flying in for the occasion were all three filmmakers: Strompolos, now an independent film producer in Los Angeles; Zala, who works in the video game industry in Florida; and Lamb, an audiovisual technician in Oakland. The three men, now in their early thirties, hadn't seen each other in years, and they were a bit baffled by why anyone would turn out to see their childhood project. To their amazement, the screening was packed to the rafters. The audience watched Chris Strompolos with his wiseacre smirk and rumpled fedora capture the spirit of Indy. They watched, mesmerized, as the kids credibly pulled off one scene after another.

When the credits rolled and the screen went dark, the audience gave them a four-minute standing ovation—almost twenty years to the day after they had shot their first scene.

Knowles wrote on his Web site the next day: "I feel this is the best damn fan film I've ever seen. The love and passion and sacrifice is on every single frame of this thing. . . . This is what fandom to me is about. . . . This is the dream of what films can do. Motivate kids to learn and make it."¹

Vanity Fair's Windolf agreed: "We have been so entertained for so long that we have, in a way, reached the end of entertainment. An audience jaded by one mega-budget blockbuster after another is all too ready for an action movie made with love instead of money."²

It would be wonderful if audiences everywhere could share the love. Only a few hundred people have ever seen *Raiders: The Adaptation*. But the boys are older now and wise to the bare-knuckle realities of federal law. A work that bears "substantial similarity" to the original copyrighted work is punishable by up to a year in prison and a \$50,000 fine—even if not a dime changes hands. Happily, Spielberg and Lucasfilm have no intention of pressing charges, but the young men are taking no chances. Strompolos no longer passes out copies of the film to those who want to see it. In fact, he has asked those who do possess copies to return them to him, for fear that the remake will wind up in the Darknet.

As a lark, Strompolos invited Lucasfilm and Spielberg to include their home-brew tribute in the Indiana Jones DVD boxed set that came out in 2003. The studio passed. Lamb then bought an old three-quarter-inch Sony Betamax on eBay so they could digitize hundreds of feet of old out-takes, and in early 2004 a Hollywood producer bought the rights to tell the boys' story. As for showing their *Raiders* homage to others, Strompolos tells me, "We have legal constraints. We can't take advantage of opportunities

for theatrical release or home video because the intellectual property doesn't belong to us.”³

Thus the law gives us the absurdity that you will be able to watch a documentary about the teens' undertaking, but you won't be able to watch *Raiders: The Adaptation* itself. If you want to see our young heroes' handiwork, you'll have to wait until the year 2076, when the original *Raiders* copyright expires (unless Congress extends copyright terms yet again). The boys will be teeing off on their 105th birthdays right about then.

An entertainment consultant who worked as an adviser to Disney management for many years related a meeting he took with executives of another major Hollywood studio in early 2003. As he ruminated on the profound impact that people creating their own media will have on the entertainment giants, the faces around the table grew puzzled.

Finally one of the executives asked, “What did people do before television?”

Well, the consultant said, there were other mass media, like radio.

“Oh, yes, I suppose people listened to the radio.”

And before that, people read books.

“Oh, right.”

And even before that, people entertained one another.

“How would they do that?” The studio exec seemed genuinely at a loss.

Well, the consultant explained, many years ago people told each other stories, played musical instruments, and sang to one another.

Smiles from the studio people. How quaint.

If I had to bet, the consultant went on, I'd say society is returning to that tradition. The generation of young people now growing up would prefer to watch each other's digital movies—the ones they produce themselves. They would rather experience the worlds they create rather than what Hollywood makes for them.

All the studio people at the table shook their heads. “You're crazy,” one said. “No one will turn their backs on Hollywood entertainment.”

Inside the Hollywood bubble, it's business as usual. Outside, on the streets, much more interesting things are happening. Kids are taking up digital tools and creating movies and video shorts. Some are remixing big media television shows and movies into fan-style DVD (digital versatile

disc) commentaries. Others are creating new musical forms on computers in their bedrooms. While millions sharpen their digital photo techniques, many also have begun using camera phones and mobile devices to post photos or homespun wisdom to a global audience.

The world has changed since Chris Strompolos was ten. What once took seven years to pull off could likely be done in a single summer of youthful exuberance. What once required expensive, bulky equipment and professional editing studios can be done with a palmcorder and desktop computer. As the tools become cheaper and easier to use, the kind of storytelling that infuses *Raiders: The Adaptation*—the grit, the passion, the wide-eyed wonder—is spreading throughout our culture. Such personal works remind us that it is in our nature to tell stories and be creative—instincts that have been too often repressed during the couch potato era of force-fed mass media.

That's not to say that Strompolos and company or other little islands of creativity will give MGM, Disney, or Paramount a run for their money. The motion picture studios, record labels, television networks, book publishers, and makers of video games won't be done in by camcorder-toting teens, Web journal authors, or garage musicians armed with Apple Powerbooks. Make no mistake: personal media will complement, not supplant, the old order of mass media and consumer culture. Most of us will continue to watch entertainment created by professionals working at media companies. High-quality entertainment takes time, talent, effort, and money to pull off.

But that's no longer enough. In ways large and small, individuals have begun bypassing the mass media to create or sample digital music, video diaries, film shorts, weblogs, visually arresting multimedia Web sites—in short, personal media. Sometimes these personal works will be an entirely original creation, borrowing techniques and ideas, perhaps, but no music, video, or photos created by others. At other times these creations will be a collage or hybrid, borrowing bits and pieces of traditional mass media mixed with material supplied by the user or remixed in interesting new ways and transformed into something new.

"People are no longer satisfied with read-only media encapsulated in whatever proprietary formats the entertainment industry sees fit to distribute," Greg Beato writes in his music weblog Soundbitten. "True interactive media isn't just a movie with three alternate endings: it's media that's flexible enough to allow users to do whatever they want with it. Which means copying it at will, using it on different platforms, modifying its contents,

combining it with other media, and basically doing anything else that can be done to turn centuries of copyright law on its ear.”⁴

Something new is happening. While the pros go about their business, amateurs,⁵ and hobbyists experiment with new ways to inform, entertain, and communicate with one another.

Call it personal media, open media, bottom-up media, or home-brew media—it all comes down to people plugging into the larger culture in creative ways. “Today no more than 5 percent of the populace can create. The others watch, listen, read, consume,” says Marc Canter, a multimedia pioneer who cofounded the software giant Macromedia. “The new technologies promise to change that, enabling the rest of us to express our creativity. Amateur filmmaking, digital photography, writing in online journals about a topic you know well—all are forms of creativity. All are on the rise.”⁶ Why is it happening now? Technology is one reason. Personal computers have become so powerful and pervasive (now in two out of three U.S. households) and professional-level software has spread so far and wide that most people now have the tools of digital creativity at their fingertips. Communication is another reason. Smart search engines and community forums let peers collaborate and exchange ideas in ways that were once available only to insiders or those who took expensive training courses.

But there may be a deeper reason for the rise of personal media: a hunger for authenticity in the land, perhaps a Jungian shared memory of a time when stories held power and when creative expression was not reserved for a privileged class.

“If you go back one hundred years, most media were personal media,” observes Henry Jenkins of MIT. “The impulse to create stories or make up songs or paint pictures is what culture wants. There was a brief moment in human history where mass culture pushed the other stuff out of the way. Somehow we became convinced that only a few special people have talents or visions worth pursuing. But that moment is ending, and now mass culture and participatory culture have to negotiate their relationship with each other. And that scares the bejesus out of media companies that are still resisting the public’s participation in the culture in a more direct way.”

A look at the fundamental differences between the two kinds of media foreshadows the battles ahead and hints at the reasons why the major media companies haven’t begun to appreciate the shifting sands beneath them.

Old media, born in the industrial age, rely on the economics of conveyor-belt mass production and scarcity of atoms. Broadcast-style media send

programming down one-way pipes to a mass audience of consumers, requiring a one-size-fits-all content model catering to mass tastes. Members of the public rarely participate in the media process. Some write letters to the editor. Others might call a TV station when a favorite show gets bumped. But pity the renegade who wants to excerpt material from a song, movie, television show, magazine, or book for use in his or her own work. The game of copyright lawyers, chutes, and ladders makes sure that such a player will rarely reach the finish line.

Add to this equation the disruptive effects of personal media in the information age. While the analog world has long featured a stable landscape of mass media, fixed objects, and predictable atoms, today we swim in a turbulent digital sea of nearly limitless bits. Digital tools now allow people at the edges of the network to create high-quality material, to make as many copies as they like, and to share them worldwide. Hundreds of millions of us are flocking to the Internet as an alternative media source not because it's more authoritative (although it can be), but because we're lured by a medium that allows people like us to become part of the conversation. In this new space, built with two-way pipes, we can choose from not a hundred or two hundred channels but from a million topical niches. Interactivity and personalization are the coins of the realm. In the old paradigm, mass media never let you inside. Conversely, as MIT's Shigeru Miyagawa put it, "In personal media, you are always inside the media, by virtue of being able to control the point of view."⁷ Old media demand strict adherence to a rigid, arcane set of laws. By contrast, the rules and social mores surrounding creative reauthoring and sharing in the digital era are still very much in flux.

The differences between personal media and traditional media go even deeper. These are not parallel media universes but worlds that intersect and coexist in the same space. Almost invariably, personal media borrow from popular culture. Mass culture provides the building blocks for the stuff we create. In the emerging digital culture, what we fashion from our own materials and what we borrow from others can sometimes blur. As media become increasingly digital, such remixing becomes the rule rather than the exception.

Take the dance club scene.

On a Saturday night in lower Manhattan, a wiry, brown-haired video jockey outfitted in baggy jeans and a fashionably ill-fitting T-shirt surveys the dance floor of the Roxy nightclub. An ethnically mixed crowd of young hipsters grinds to the drum 'n' bass jungle beat, while those twenty-one and

over pool around the bar to buy overpriced drinks. As Asian boys with dreads and young women with peasant tops, Lithium wear, and Kangol hats bop near the raised stage, the VJ takes on a cigarette and unleashes a big-beat assault over the Phazon sound system. Suddenly a wave of images splashes onto a pair of four-by-six-foot projection screens hovering above the throbbing crowd. For the next three hours, an LCD projector streams kitschy images of our culture. Break dancers from a 1970s flick fill the screens. Sean Connery swaps DNA with a Bond girl. Fred Astaire busts a move, speeding up and slowing down in step with the syncopated tunes.

The footage fascinates. At once endearing and absurdist, it manages to perfectly capture the heart and tempo of this scene. Hands flail in the air, breakers writhe on the floor, and above it all a skinny VJ named Bruno Levy holds forth, fashioning a digital party from disparate bits of sound and scenes, all the while communicating with the clubgoers on an invisible level that elevates the experience to something approaching the mystical. Chalk figures, Japanese anime characters, clips from old TV shows and obscure movies, and the recurring motif of Fred Astaire stutter-stepping in sync with the music—the images flow together in a trippy, free-form visual montage.

Later I ask Levy about the unauthorized use of such Hollywood images. “Oh, what we’re doing is completely illegal,” he says bluntly. “But so is sampling music, and that’s the lifeblood of the club scene.”⁸

Levy often pops into Blockbuster and comes out with two or three dozen videos, which he uses to weave a visual cultural montage. “We live in a cut, sample, and paste world,” he says. “With today’s generation, you sample ideas, you copy and borrow beats and sounds and images, and rehash them into something new and serve them back to the public. The technology has made it so easy to do that now. The creative movements in art and music and culture only work when everyone is copying from each other.”

Borrowing from earlier works has always been a time-honored and accepted part of the creative tradition. Every painter learns by emulating the masters. Every musician acquires her own voice and style by first imitating those who came before. Fledgling filmmakers imitate the oeuvre of a Spielberg, Kubrick, Kurosawa, or Cassavetes. The fandom phenomenon celebrates pop culture by appropriating it: young adults publish comic-book fanzines that borrow copyrighted images; on Internet fan fiction sites, viewers write episodes that add new story lines for characters from more than five hundred television shows; amateur video buffs have created more than four hundred homemade versions of *Star Wars* and circulated them online.

Every night, dance club DJs and MCs digitally splice together bootleg remixes of Top Forty hits in remarkable new ways.

“Using the omnipresent sea of symbols, images, sounds and texts as source material, millions of people are laying claim to their cultural inheritance,” the *National Post* writes. “Call it postmodern, call it open source, call it rip/mix/burn, the upshot is a culture transformed.”⁹

If Bruno Levy and his audiovisual dance club collages stand at the leading edge of a cultural shift in our attitudes toward personal media, middle-class America is not far behind. In the analog world, when we bring home a vinyl album and run our fingers over its grooves or read a book and leaf through its pages, such tactile experiences suggest to us that we own that record or book. And in a real sense we do: we can mark up the book, resell the album, give them to friends, donate them to a library. Today, as digital media begin to stream through our homes, we want to hold on to that tangible relationship. When an article of broadcast media enters our domain, we claim it as our own. The songs on our iPods, the television shows we capture on TiVo, the music videos in our new portable video players, the movies we watch in our DVD collections—we believe that these digital slices of media also belong to us in a real sense.

From there, it is a short leap for people to want to remix songs that we’ve captured. Many of us will want to swap music videos on our portable video players. We’ll want to add “our” video snippets of Brad Pitt or Cameron Diaz to a birthday DVD we’re creating for a friend. Some of us may want to send a news clip or recipe from a cooking show across town to a relative—or across the world to a friend.

In short, changes in technology usher in changes in cultural norms. Cultural experts Sheldon Brown and Henry Jenkins are among those who say society is undergoing a remarkable transformation in its approach to media. They suggest that young people in particular are adopting a new set of expectations governing our interactions with media.

Brown, director of the Center for Research in Computing and the Arts at the University of California, San Diego, says the looming cultural war over digital media is the result of an epic transition from one set of societal rules to another. “We’re right in the middle of this turmoil today as one kind of culture dies out and gives way to the next, creating a new space.” He has seen the changes in attitude firsthand during his classroom instruction over the years.

The graduate students he teaches, the thirty-year-olds, hail from the

Atari generation. They grew up with low-resolution video games and cable TV, and they come from a world where technology was task-specific, Brown says. To this crowd, media are independent of each other. Television, the telephone, the stereo, and the personal computer are considered separate domains.

Brown describes his undergraduate students, the twenty-year-olds, this way: “They’re more comfortable with the idea that technology is actively upsetting all of those cultural, social, and technological domains. They get excited about that and dive in and experiment with new ways of communicating, socializing, and sharing information—text-messaging with friends, making dates. But they still think in terms of these separate domains that exist.”¹⁰

When you get to junior high and elementary school students, he says, “It comes as a complete surprise that there’s a difference between the computer and the television, that there are different rules governing each. You almost have to explain to them why can’t they turn to Channel 3 on the Internet and why can’t they Google the TV to find out what’s on. It just doesn’t make any sense to them that there are these separations and limitations. The younger kids move more fluidly between these different media spaces.”

As the digital generation matures, he says, young people won’t be satisfied with traditional forms of linear storytelling. Their expectations are bound to alter entertainment as we know it.

“Sometimes I think that 30 years from now it will be funny to think back on these kinds of clean distinctions in media forms, that there are movies and television and video games being separate entities. It’s more likely our media experiences will have multiple dimensions simultaneously. It will be more about: Are you engaging this with four other people? Are you looking at this by yourself on your cell phone or in a room 60 feet high? Each medium will be authored with these multiplicities embedded within it.”

Brown sees changes in our expectations about media not only in his students but also in his own family. He recalls that when his daughter was four, her first media interfaces came with a computer mouse and interactive learning books, not a television remote control. “She found the remote control very frustrating, because it’s connected to this device that doesn’t have the viewer at the center. She became upset by the device of the television. The story was exciting and the pictures were nice, but where was the place for her? The only option was to look at something else or turn it off.

“Television never asks you, what do you want to watch now? It just

throws stuff out there and you have to figure out how to dodge ads and sift through programming. By contrast, the modern computer interface has been designed around the idea of you telling it what to do next. For young kids, they want and expect things to respond to them. That's why computer games are such a powerful lure. The kids become active participants in the media experience."

Across the continent, you can almost see Henry Jenkins nodding in agreement. The director of MIT's Comparative Media Studies Program and author of nine books on popular culture, Jenkins says that from an early age, children reimagine what you can do with characters and settings from movies and TV. They play video games that permit control over a character within limited boundaries. Newer games allow an even broader range of interactivity and behaviors. When they get online, they can share stories, and children as young as seven are posting to fan fiction sites with simple but interesting stories about Harry Potter and Pokémon.

Jenkins calls Pokémon "the first form of storytelling for a converged media world," sprinkling elements of its universe across the media spectrum. The story can come at you from multiple directions: as a TV series, video games, books, movies, and playing cards. Entertainments like Pokémon or *The Matrix* teach young fans to hunt and gather in their own entertainment experience, he says, letting them drill down to the level of engagement they desire.¹¹

When young people get a little older, they might expand their media horizons with a camera or camcorder. "In my early teens I had a Super 8 camera, but if I wanted to show the movies I made, I had to put a sign on the front lawn and a couple of neighbors would take pity on me to watch it in my basement," Jenkins says. "Today, I'm talking to high school kids who have digital cinema sites and have put their films up on the Internet, and their work is being seen all over the world. In some cases they're getting invitations to compete in film festivals."

Jenkins points to his son, now twenty-one, as a child of participatory culture. At age five, the younger Henry started telling stories, which the family would type into the computer, and he drew pictures to illustrate each story. For the next five years, the family printed out little books and sent them to his grandparents during the holidays. Most of his stories were about characters from popular culture. "These stories had two effects," Jenkins says. "One was to encourage him to see the media as something that could be rewritten on your own terms. And the other was to give us an insight into

how he was processing the media he was consuming, letting us know his fears and values.”

Most parents can relate. My five-year-old son is already directing home movies (I’m the camcorder operator) featuring titanic clashes between heroes and villains. Bobby is big into LEGO, the original “remix” toy, but he draws his iconic figures from mass media and mass merchandising: Power Rangers, TransFormers, Scooby Doo, and the like. Generations ago, children did the same thing with Superman, the Green Hornet, and the Lone Ranger.

“For most of human history, people sat around campfires and told stories about great warriors and cultural heroes,” Jenkins says. “In modern times we borrow from television, movies, comic books, and video games. Pop stars and the characters of mass media are the things we have in common regardless of our backgrounds or our local reality.” As young people acquire more sophisticated tools, they begin using these cultural touchstones as props in their own works—for example, by grabbing the image or video of a pop star, remaking it with special effects on a computer, and sharing it with friends. Media, after all, exist to be rewritten.

Because these new forms of personal media often include pop culture figures we all can relate to, and because individuals now have the power to distribute media to a global audience, you have a built-in recipe for conflict with the media companies, Jenkins says.

The kids, naturally, come away confused. “They’re encouraged to wear corporate logos and brands, and to put them on their backpacks and lockers,” he says. “But the minute they put that logo on their Web site, they get a cease-and-desist order. So the media companies are sending profoundly mixed signals.”

As more of us create media rather than merely consume it, as more of us turn away from one-way mass media and become immersed in more open media such as the Internet and the virtual worlds of video games, media companies and their allies can respond in one of two ways: resist and place barriers in the way, or bend to the winds of change and embrace the culture of participation.

Hollywood is not known for its warm embrace of change. *Raiders: The Adaptation* has a relatively happy ending in that no one was sued and no cease-and-desist letters were issued (even if the movie itself is now off-limits to the public). But what’s most striking about Spielberg’s congratulatory letter to the amateur filmmakers is how out of the ordinary it was by Hollywood standards. Threats and confrontation have become the norm in

the battle between the entertainment industry and those who make use of their media in unauthorized ways—not only Internet pirates, but also tech innovators, small-business owners, indie record labels, restaurateurs, artists, and regular folk.

Young people especially view intellectual property in a different light than their elders. To many, it's not unusual to see authorship and ownership as a shared, collaborative experience. Remixing and borrowing are native to the culture, and if Bruno Levy did not bother to ask the studios for permission to use their movie clips in his collages, it's because they surely would have said no. (If you have any doubt of this, see chapter 4.)

Today's students see personal media and file sharing as given, even banal, parts of contemporary life. "It's important to understand this as an articulation of their cultural moment," Brown says. "College students today are bombarded with thousands of streams of media information, so their cultural products themselves start to reflect that. They have so many other things dragging on them, screaming at them for attention, whether they're going from the digitally enabled classroom to the broadband-connected dorm room to their color cell phones to their wireless PDAs. So they exercise mastery and control over this media domain in a way that the previous generation did not. They see media as the raw materials out of which they will author their own cultural forms. Instead of fetishizing the record album, as my generation did, they're annoyed by things tied to a physical object. Their attitudes about ownership are changing dramatically and are being shaped by the Internet. Their entertainment centers on collage and meshing music and repurposing media. It's all about mixing, remixing, and re-remixing of these things."

Media companies need to begin catering to this "mix-up culture," Brown says. "The solution isn't to throw college kids in jail for creating online music trading sites, but in creating media forms that have this hybridity built into them, so that the kids can integrate these elements into their own works of personal media." We should begin thinking about how to build online narrative spaces with "enabling hooks" that let us incorporate elements of *The Matrix*, *The Simpsons*, and Jane Austen, he suggests. Instead of buying a DVD of *The Matrix*, we might buy a software engine that creates the character of Morpheus for use in other media.

But that would mean media companies would need to give up some measure of control over their works—a move they have been loath to make.

Jenkins says that media companies aren't prepared for the borrowing and appropriation inherent in participatory culture. "People are making their own versions of popular entertainments, with or without the sanction of media producers. So the question becomes, what will the relationship between those two spaces look like? Will it be an antagonistic one, where those kinds of activities are shut down by legal means and your ability to manipulate content is reined in by technological measures? Or will it be one where there's a greater collaboration between professional and amateur media producers?"

The burden of change does not fall completely on the media companies. Individuals bear a responsibility to set limits on acceptable forms of online behavior. The Internet has not ushered in a new morality, and digital tools will always enable us to go one step farther than we should. At the same time, the mainstream media rarely understand share culture, confusing it with plagiarism and theft. They don't know what to make of kids who mix and match the ideas and images they find in today's culture. The digital generation, meanwhile, looks upon such borrowing, transforming, and sharing as an affirmative, interactive, creative act, akin to artistic license.

The ways in which people appropriate mass media cover a broad spectrum, Jenkins points out, and he draws some sensible lines in our virtual sandbox. He believes the laws should be changed to draw a legal distinction between appropriation by amateurs and appropriation for commercial gain. He would allow the kinds of borrowing and creative remaking that takes place in fan fiction and certain kinds of song sampling. He would allow some kind of celestial jukebox where music or excerpts from other media could be sampled. But he would prohibit the distribution of wholesale works that haven't been altered or remixed by the audience, like the file trading that takes place in the movie underground.

"I think people who care about the public's right to participate in media culture should speak up against forms of media distribution that amount to out-and-out piracy," he says. At the same time, Jenkins and others believe entertainment companies are only hurting themselves when they brand any unauthorized use of their works as piracy.

As more people engage with personal media, obstacles loom. The entertainment companies and their allies on Capitol Hill and in the high-tech sector seem determined to herd us into digital speakeasies, trying to reimpose the old order of top-down media and consumer culture. But

participatory culture has no rewind button. People are becoming less tolerant of one-way media. They expect to be able to interact with visuals and songs and games, to manipulate them, and sometimes to share them with others.

Some have gone so far as to suggest we have reached the end of the consumer age. In an essay on his site titled “RIP the Consumer, 1900–1999,” the influential new media theorist Clay Shirky wrote dismissively of consumers, “Media is something that is done to them.” The Internet has changed the media equation, replacing consumerism with the power of shared connections. “In the age of the Internet, no one is a passive consumer anymore because everyone is a media outlet. . . . There are no more consumers, because in a world where an email address constitutes a media channel, we are all producers now.”¹²

Will the new rules being formulated by industry and government help lift us up as partners and collaborators? Or will they attempt to put us in tightly controlled straitjackets, shunting us into virtual shantytowns as their pipes continue to flow in only one direction? The evidence to date is not encouraging.