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Critical and Creative Thinking
Synthesis of Theory and Practice
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Exit Self-Assessment

My synthesis shows that...

I enrolled in the Critical and Creative Thinking program as a means to better understand today's media environment. When I first started my synthesis, I had a hard time focusing on who I wanted to influence or otherwise affect (A). At first, I thought, everyone — governments, marketers, educators, activists, citizens. I wanted to re-conceptualize the public sphere model from its decades old origins, in a way that considered the primary form of information exchange and collaboration is now participatory media. The original model wasn't working so well when considering multinational debates in pluralistic communications environments. What's more, the forms of communication in a public sphere are vital to its democratic idealizations. People must communicate without restrictions or distractions.

After several weeks of compiling my synthesis, I stumbled on blockchain technology, a decentralized way to enable internet systems. Blockchains removes all third party trust barriers — no centralized data centers, no single service providers, no middlemen profiteers. Everything is encrypted and all transactions are recorded indefinitely into a public ledger. At the minimum, time and date stamps are available for members of the public to verify that a transaction took place, like someone licensing intellectual property. Smart contracts allow anyone to transact within any value system. That directed my focus on software developers and computer engineers. I work in digital communications, but I'm not a programmer. So coming up with the finer details of how to put participatory media on a blockchain was challenging. I mostly stuck with the philosophical side of what should be.

To get to the point of my synthesis, I researched the work of others by reading through academic journal entries, technology conference proceedings, relevant books and various news stories (B). I've been reflecting on the public sphere concept for several semesters. At first, my conceptual revisions used a basic configuration of shapes and lines. While explaining my work to a coworker, he suggested I stop thinking of a three-dimensional concept in a two-dimensional space. He was right. The sphere concept has evolved so much that it's no longer feasible to think of it as flat. More recently, I've spent considerable time watching online videos about blockchain technology, knowing that the more sources I get information from, the better I can understand a concept. But what was really exciting was revisiting the passport concept that I had considered during my first semester creative thinking course. That early idea came back in the final semester, as a way to link my participatory sphere concept to a blockchain system, where a participatory passport applies algorithms to interpret encrypted ledgers, as a means to synthesize intellectual journeys. But again, I get the blockchain concept but I cannot fully explain its nuances. I have to work with what I know is possible, rather than suggest ways to program it differently.

During my progress in the program, I have teased out my vision for the public sphere, re-conceptualized as a participatory sphere, which has expanded my view of how information is decentralizing and influence is democratizing (C). I've exposed possible new directions, while clarifying a direction within the scope of larger issues, and then deciding the most important direction for my research. Participatory spheres should now be considered within an ideological context, where people coordination from metaphysical dimensions more than physical locations. This idea has led me to several ancillary concepts, like public relations as participatory relations, mass media as influencer constituencies. I've adopted the term "socioliteracy" to explain literacy as a processes to perfect, rather than something to earn. Literacy is no longer about reading and writing. It's about knowing how to find and evaluate information. I've explored how understandings are impacted by external media frames and internalized perspectives, and how position stands help build support for ideas. Admittedly, I still need to tease out more unintended consequences for this sort of information environment.

I've ended up with a large body of work, which I'm refining for a book and a supporting website. Publishing what I've put together, and then getting it in front of blockchain developers is my next challenge. I want to start with anyone associated with the "Ethereum" project, which recently launched as an app-based blockchain that's similar to the World Wide Web.

I have identified many premises and propositions that my project depends on, and can state counter-propositions (D). For one, when I considered nodes, represented by thousands of participants who keep a blockchain backed up and accessible, I considered their role in approving new transactions in an information landscape. Wouldn't we centralize media by giving these people governing authority over what blockchain exchanges and passport algorithms are allowed? In the participatory sphere concept, nodekeeper status is earned through successes as a public educator, so the roles are constantly shifting based on who's leading a knowledge domain, while adequately embedded into the associated ideological foundation. Other counter-propositions relate to my futurist perspective. In many ways, I'm creating a vision for something that hasn't been done, or even adequately conceived. However, I think it's important to take this leap, especially when considering our possible futures. With information-communications technologies quickly progressing, we must start conceptualizing how it'll best support our social interactions. I do need to better recognize counter-propositions that relate to real world issues, such as the ways a person's inclusion in participatory spheres interacts with their sense of national citizenry.

I have arranged my work in a sequence to realize some important objectives (E). My synthesis itself convey a progression of ideas that ultimately get distilled into a concept for blockchain technology. I have also imparted many personal narratives, times in my life that stoked my passion for this sort of research. With further refinement of my synthesis, including the assistance of an editor, I'd like to publish in both tangible and virtual formats. I already designed a logo in Adobe Illustrator (scalable vector) and a book cover in Adobe Photoshop (high-resolution bitmap). I'm planning to use IngramSpark to facilitate hardcopy printing and distribution, and then CreateSpace for a downloadable e-book via Amazon. I registered participatoryspheres.com and participatory.media for website projects. For example, I'll make an interactive way to explore the participatory sphere model using an embedded Prezi. Down the road, it'd be great to hire an infographic designer. I do need to put a lot of attention on presenting the model in a comprehensive-yet- comprehensible way.

I have gained direct information, models and experiences not readily available from other sources (F). My global travels, to include living in the Middle East for seven years, and in a country with mostly an expatriate workforce, taught me a lot about the coordination of human cultures at the individual level. Through my current work in a school district, I've refined my ideas into cultural formative conditions and social lineages. For example, I recently influenced a

communications strategy for cooperative policy design. Our Board of Education was considering a need to allow cannabinoid products on school property. For several students, it's their only way to stop a series of daily seizures. Based on my observations, our community would share a loud normative voice against such a proposal. For that reason, I didn't think it would be appropriate for our school district to advocate for it. We needed a loud voice from district parents and local activists. We helped the families of students with severe needs who depend on cannabis to stop seizures share their stories with a YouTube video, which was used by the media. Prior to creating discussion threads on social media, I notified a local activist group and invited them to help share their stories. Among other things, I urged them to avoid speaking from behind logos, and to avoid soliciting for input from people outside our area — they agreed that could create an “us” versus “them” distraction. The strategy tested several participatory sphere concepts. It worked well. I need to keep testing my ideas behind adapting messages for certain formative conditions and social lineages, and how a specific message may challenge or change normative claims.

I clarified the overall progression or argument underlying my research and the written reports by creating a five-step approach to programming for participatory spheres (G). The steps first take the form of creating some common understandings, and then apply those into a theoretical, and somewhat practical, framework. Lastly, I consider some implications of universal truths and cultural convergence. What happens when people dug into ideologically based knowledge systems start integrating their knowledge practices with other spheres? As a sense for what's truthful starts to get shared, spheres mingle. As what's usefulness starts to agree within value exchanges, spheres gain intimacy. As what's normative homogenizes, spheres converge. This is a highly theoretical concept, so I need to keep revisiting and reconsidering it.

I try to use my writing and other products to grab the attention of my readers through personal narratives, as well as paragraphs of creative writing that focus on symbolism (H). After that, I try to orientate people by arguing some foundational concepts from a pragmatic perspective. These concepts are presented in steps, an supported by a glossary of terms and an illustrated participatory sphere model. I also drew illustrations into my book to keep conveying a key idea: Authenticity. I thought it'd help my readers to connect with me, and better appreciate my positions, by sharing my personal stories and even rendering my own drawings. I want to start exploring ways that this body of non fiction work my be a prelude to works of social fiction. Writing fiction is new for me, but I think it'd be a good way to keep fleshing out the concept.

My researched concepts suggest new avenues of classroom, workplace and public participation in digital information landscapes (I). I explain a direction for the decentralization of information that's entirely action-based and objectively measured. It integrates human thinking with computer processing. By using culturally acceptable algorithms to interpret how educational events contribute to a person's domain knowledge and sphere collaboration, it develops a more generative educational system. It shifts today's credit-based awards system to educators, who earn credit by how their students start contributing to knowledge domains. Students, on the other hand, earn credit like every other sphere participant: How they contribute to multidisciplinary and multicultural discussions. The workplace also puts a focus on individual actions. Through participatory relations, practitioners join spheres to understand consumer values, so they more appropriately reflect them as information producers. Before hiring a communications specialist, their passport could present the types of influence they've practiced in spheres. Again, there's a lot left for me to consider with real world applications.

To feed into my future learning and other work, I have taken stock of what has been working well and what needs changing (J). When developing a participatory sphere concept, I've both considered why the old public sphere model is antiquated, but also how it contributed to understanding empirical evidence that should persist. For example, our desire to socialize around certain values and beliefs, and how a socialized population achieves mutual understandings through validity claims, as well as how the public's ability to coordinate cannot be obstructed by market manipulations or government regulations. Public opinion must form without rhetorical devices or state restrictions that promote habits or divisions. I need to keep monitoring developments with blockchain technology, and how those developments impact its ability to help coordinate information flow within participatory spheres. The more I learn, the more I can help contribute to how blockchain are integrated into information exchanges.

Developing as a reflective practitioner, including taking initiative in and through relationships...

I have integrated several sets of knowledge and perspectives from the Critical and Creative Thinking program into my own inquiry and engagement in social and educational change (1). For example, the creative thinking skills in combining ideas and simply looking at my world differently, well beyond common comprehensions of social media, literacy and public education, are embedded throughout my research. The concepts of critical thinking and dialogue processes gave me the energy and desire to expect more from today's media participants. Courses in philosophy and conceptual learning built on my understandings surrounding the power of questioning information and bridging ideas. Lessons in action research and community engagement encouraged me to start testing some concepts in my professional role, while solidifying the concepts contributing to my models and equations. Putting my ideas into action helped me better understand where my ideas were headed, from their semantics to the various associations and relationships. I do want to know more about the issues of liberty, justice and democracy, and how participatory spheres may be programmed to retain those priorities.

I have also integrated into my own inquiry and engagement the processes, experiences and struggles discovered during my previous coursework in journalism (2). For example, the inept suggestions that anyone can exercise objectivity when reporting news for public consumption. None of us are objective. I find it ironic that we've institutionalized the capacity to teach objectivity as a civic virtue, so one may better inform the public, yet we struggle with recognizing that creative thinking isn't something one can learn. If anything, we should value an ability to teach creativity far more than objectivity. We're human beings, each of whom is capable of desire and innovation. We're not robots executing programs without question. Being reflective and taking initiative is being human. During my studies, I've acknowledged that human beings are divergent as one of our species' most important characteristics. I need help in promoting an idea that, as humans, we must collaborate to solve our most difficult problems, from social to physical.

I have developed efficient ways to organize my time, leverage computers and access research materials and bibliographies (3). While I progressed through this program, I collected many books and made many critical evaluations. I started sharing some of my work on blogs,

and presented for national public relations conferences. I knew the ideas were important, so part of my organizational scheme included talking to as many people as possible about them. As I realized how ideas became refined, and how concepts would start linking together a network of ideas, I started to organize all my writings into a cloud-based storage system that would let me keep working on my desktop, laptop, tablet or smartphone — with increased efficiencies, basic note-taking practices became part of my daily life. I often drift between devices while dissecting an idea tied to current events, and how information is presented in media. I don't consider myself a conspiracy theorist. That's way too inefficient. I see myself more as theorist driven by a desire to refine his ability to quickly recognize logic and intersecting concepts.

I have experimented with new tools and experiences, even if not everyone became part of my toolkit as a learner, and a facilitator of other learners, and a reflective practitioner (4). I felt privileged to take a developmental psychology course through the counseling college. My questions during class may have seemed less refined as the students interested in a career in family counseling, but I like to think I may have helped them dig into basic issues from a more creative and critical perspective. The ideas related to personality achievement and how we assimilate and accommodate information into existing schemes provided depth to my understandings of public discourse. It's my hope that CCT students will continue to benefit from multidisciplinary experiences, and finding intersections between their studies and those of others. I want to be an agent for integrating critical and creative thinking into any knowledge domain.

I have paid attention to the emotional dimensions of undertaking my own project, but found ways to clear away distractions from other sources (present & past) and not get blocked, turning apparent obstacles into opportunities to move into unfamiliar or uncomfortable territory (5). While I suggest a participatory sphere concept as necessary, if not a logical progression, I know it's uncomfortable for many different reasons. A lot of people in developed nations have yet to value social media as a tool for civic engagement. Despite how activists have used participatory media to coordinate citizens in the toppling of oppressive governments, many still find online communications as mostly trivial, perhaps useless. Beyond the uncomfortable suggestion of bringing accountability to online conversations, so it supports the development of knowledge within cultural underpinnings, the model I suggest threatens anyone connected to exiting systems of power and profits. My integration of blockchain technology would render today's commercialized media irrelevant, exploitable data centers nonexistent, and remove all governing

abilities to control how a public body discusses matters of common interest. I need to consider the risks of my work, but I mustn't withhold it because it may threaten current power holders.

I have developed peer and other horizontal relationships, including peer support and advice, and given support and advice when asked (6). Each summer while a CCT student, I presented about social media and online dialogue processes for the National School Public Relations Society. After a session about acting as online dialogue leaders, more than an authoritarian moderators, I was asked to discuss new and emerging media during an online "power hour" for public relations practitioners. Some admitted that I sounded too too eccentric at first, but entirely reasonable after I explained the concepts and showed domain support. Other feedback has asked for a less academic tone, which would help my peers better follow my concepts and their foundational ideas. This summer, I'm planning to informally discuss participatory spheres at an NSPRA conference in Chicago, while reconnecting with people who've previously shown interest in my work. Beyond that, as a graduate assistant, I attended monthly collaborative explorations. My research gained depth by participating in the scenarios with people, from around the world, who simply wanted an intellectual discussion.

I have taken the lead, not dragged my feet, in dialogue with my advisor and other readers (7). Because my coursework was online, and I'm not only digitally fluent and a veteran of dozens of online courses, I felt a compulsory roll in stimulating discussions and supporting developments in technical fluency. For example, whenever a peer activity stumbled due to confusion, I made suggestions until collaboration was enabled and unfolded. I had a challenging experience in one course, where the instructor was expecting a semester long ethnographical study without any classroom discussions or specific assignment tools about it. It did lead to a hoop-jumping feeling, but I was able to cram the work while better understanding observer roles in researching group dynamics. During my synthesis semester, I took some times to refine my ideas before coordinating with my adviser. I felt that delay was absolutely necessary, even if it challenged the course expectations. I felt the volume of my work required enough time to refine, before soliciting for feedback. I didn't want to burn out my adviser with too many weak spots that clearly wouldn't survive as part of the final of synthesis.

I didn't wait for anyone to tell me how to solve an expository problem, what must be read and covered in a literature review, or what was meant by some comment I didn't understand. I didn't put off giving my writing to my advisor and other readers or avoid talking to them because

I thought that they didn't see things the same way as I do (8). One example occurred during a critical thinking course, when we had to choose a couple of concepts. My buddy partner was making safe selections. I wanted us to explore something more challenging, so we'd learn something new. He thought trying to explain the differences between dialogical and dialectic discourse would be too difficult of an assignment. He eventually agreed to it, so long as I took the lead. In the end, we co-developed definitions and practical exercises. During my synthesis, our group mostly created a safe environment for weekly readers to openly vocalize ideas, so others could comment without reservation. We rambled a lot, but that's often what's needed to encourage divergent thinking. We also reflected a lot on how each of our topics had intersecting points of support, which helped with committing to a concept when commitment seemed otherwise difficult. A concept that survives various researcher perspectives gains a sense of validity and usefulness. We worked together as practitioners of reflective inquiry, until we could convey more powerfully to others what our research is about. My peer group helped get me to the idea of universal truths, and how they contribute to cultural convergence. Moving forward, I want to present a refined copy of my research to more academic minds, and PR professionals.

I have inquired and negotiated about formal standards, but gone on to develop and internalize my own criteria for doing work — criteria other than jumping through hoops set by the professor so I get a good grade (9). After my first semester, I was impressed at the ability to tailor each course to individual research needs, and how each student represented various areas of passion. After another semester, that flexibility made complete sense, while understanding CCT as a renewable degree, an area of study that's always relevant, multidisciplinary and multicultural. A unique quality of studying critical and creative thinking is the ability to recognize how coursework can actively contribute to personal and professional work. Considering it in any other way devalues the coursework. I ended up using the coursework to create work session presentations for school public relations practitioners over three summers. Now that I'm leaving the program, I'll focus more on presenting from a more practical sense, less theoretical.

I have approached the CCT synthesis and the CCT program as works-in-progress, which means that, instead of harboring criticisms to submit after the fact, I have found opportunities to affirm what is working well and to suggest directions for further development (10). Over the next couple of months, I will refine my synthesis into a book with a complimentary website. As a skillful researcher, artist and communicator, I have the tools to see this through without too many

roadblocks. Aside from finishing my synthesis as a manuscript, I've already created a vector logo and high-resolution book cover design. I came into this program dissatisfied by the domain knowledge available in participatory media studies. Books about participatory media mostly focused on what buttons to push while skimming over why we push them. With a new concept for the internet developing with blockchain technology, a philosophical perspective into why participatory media tools are important, as part of humankind's progress in knowledge and coordination, is necessary. Even if my concept is never fully realized, I hope it will advance conversations that lead to a better integration of computer processing and human thinking.

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