

# IMMERSE

Re-imagining the personal narrative

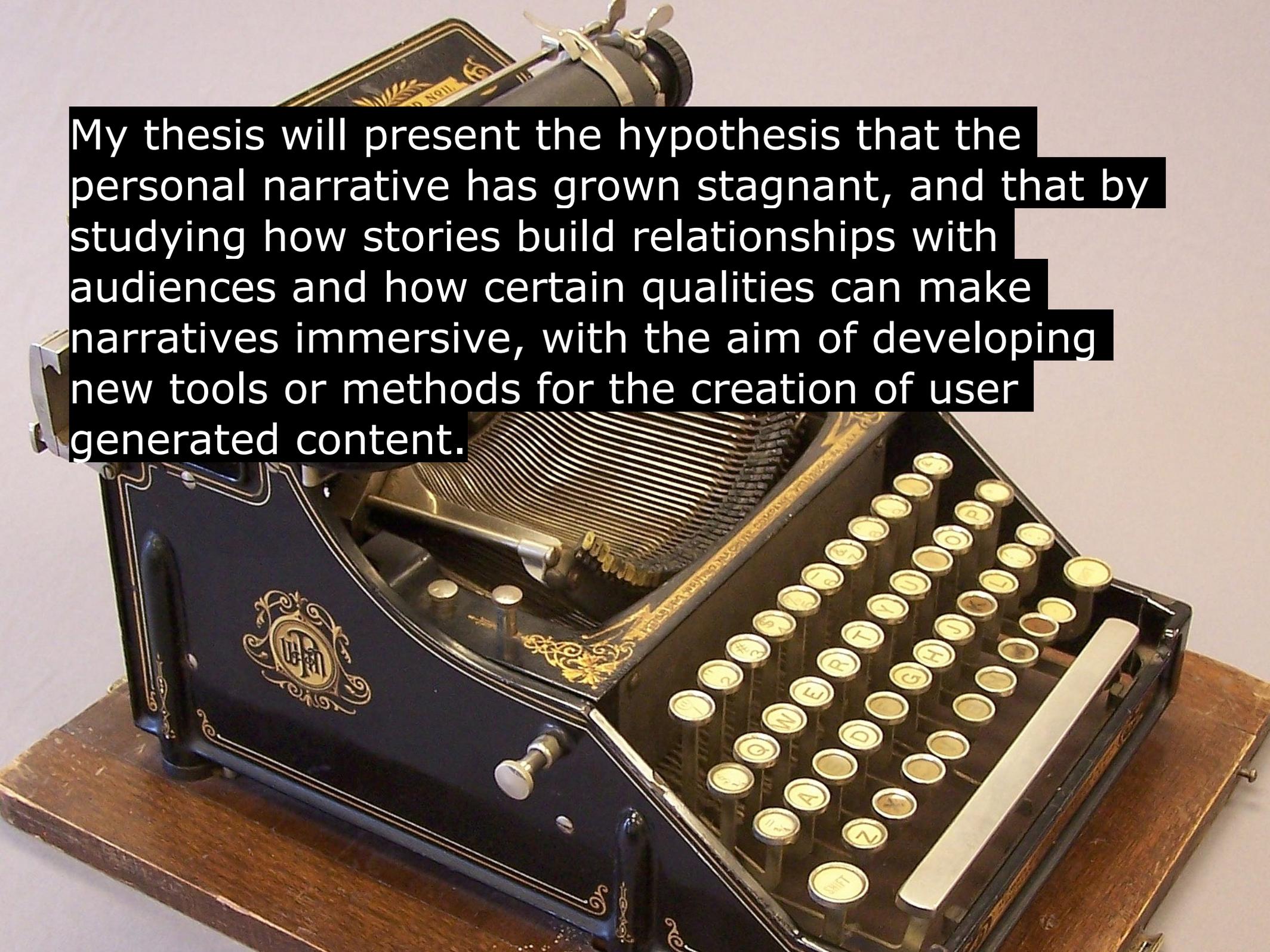


Four Corners looking east Charlotte

Handwritten notes in cursive script on the left side of the page, partially overlapping the photograph. The text is written vertically and includes the words "are you coming?", "with several a word", "members would", "be in from you", and "best since London".

R. J. B.

My thesis will present the hypothesis that the personal narrative has grown stagnant, and that by studying how stories build relationships with audiences and how certain qualities can make narratives immersive, with the aim of developing new tools or methods for the creation of user generated content.



*Morning*  
*Morning clear and d...*

*Morning*  
Wind easterly, and quite  
pleasant, somewhat  
cloudy. No rain.

A personal narrative is:

Stories people tell - creative writing, a wedding  
video, a series of pictures from a vacation,  
humorous anecdotes, an account of what happened  
at the bar last night, a tweet about the food  
they're eating.

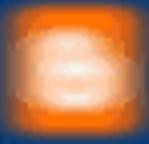
*9 o'clock*  
*fore*  
*with*  
*in*  
*de*  
*to*  
*with*

*Word received*  
*night - confirm*  
*at 11 o'clock*  
*a few household effects*  
*clothing &c removed. Refuts*  
*in his hands*

The key here lies in the purpose of the content -  
there is a tale to tell - a series of events to relate.  
This tale reflects on the personal experiences of  
the author.

*5/2*  
*in*  
*inc*  
*at the*  
*at the*  
*at the*

*\$600 = deposited in Del City Ok*  
*on a/c of Return N° 1669*



Publicly created works are:

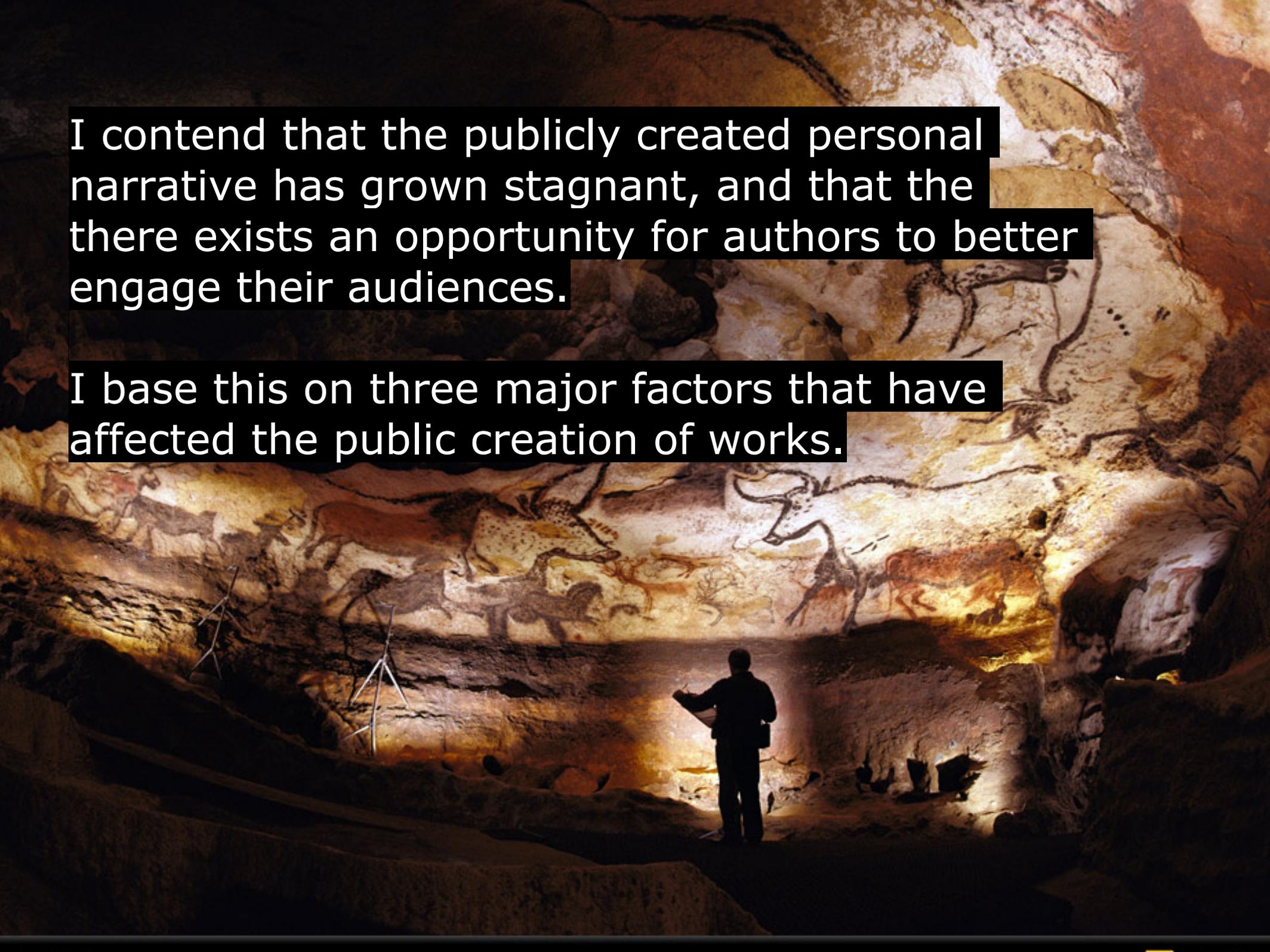
-User generated, which is to say, a product of the population at large. These are individuals contributing to the creation of content in all formats. A youtube video uploaded by someone of a cat rolling around, or a letter to the editor of the Times.

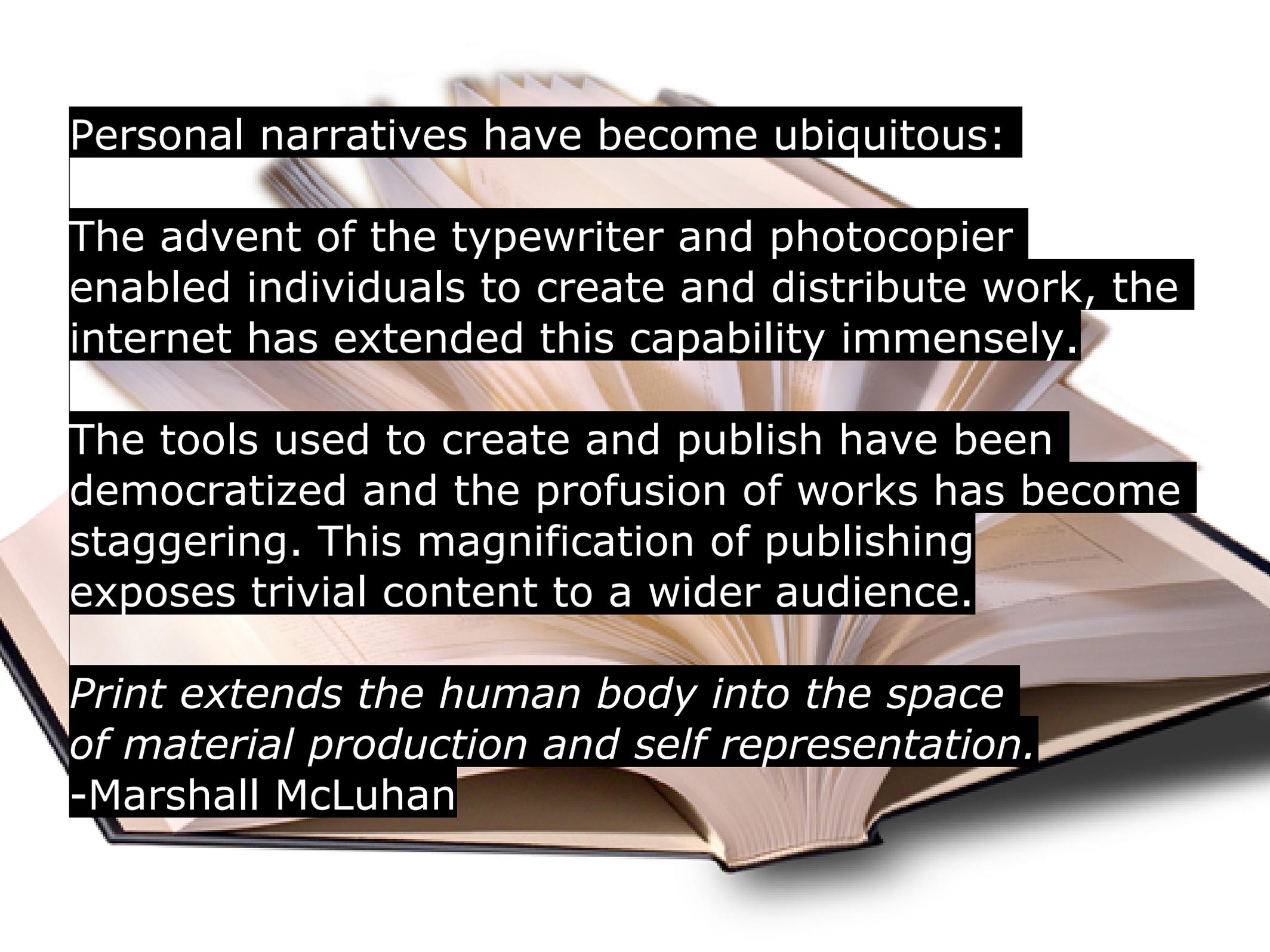
-Created to be seen by others. They are synthesized and then published, in some form or the other, for the consumption of others.



I contend that the publicly created personal narrative has grown stagnant, and that there exists an opportunity for authors to better engage their audiences.

I base this on three major factors that have affected the public creation of works.



The background of the image is a stack of several books, with their pages fanned out, creating a sense of depth and texture. The books are in various shades of brown and tan. Overlaid on this background are several black rectangular boxes containing white text. The text is arranged in a vertical sequence, starting from the top and moving downwards. The first box contains the text 'Personal narratives have become ubiquitous:'. The second box contains 'The advent of the typewriter and photocopier enabled individuals to create and distribute work, the internet has extended this capability immensely.'. The third box contains 'The tools used to create and publish have been democratized and the profusion of works has become staggering. This magnification of publishing exposes trivial content to a wider audience.'. The fourth box contains the italicized text 'Print extends the human body into the space of material production and self representation.'. The fifth and final box contains '-Marshall McLuhan'.

Personal narratives have become ubiquitous:

The advent of the typewriter and photocopier enabled individuals to create and distribute work, the internet has extended this capability immensely.

The tools used to create and publish have been democratized and the profusion of works has become staggering. This magnification of publishing exposes trivial content to a wider audience.

*Print extends the human body into the space of material production and self representation.*

-Marshall McLuhan

The purpose of the personal narrative has changed:

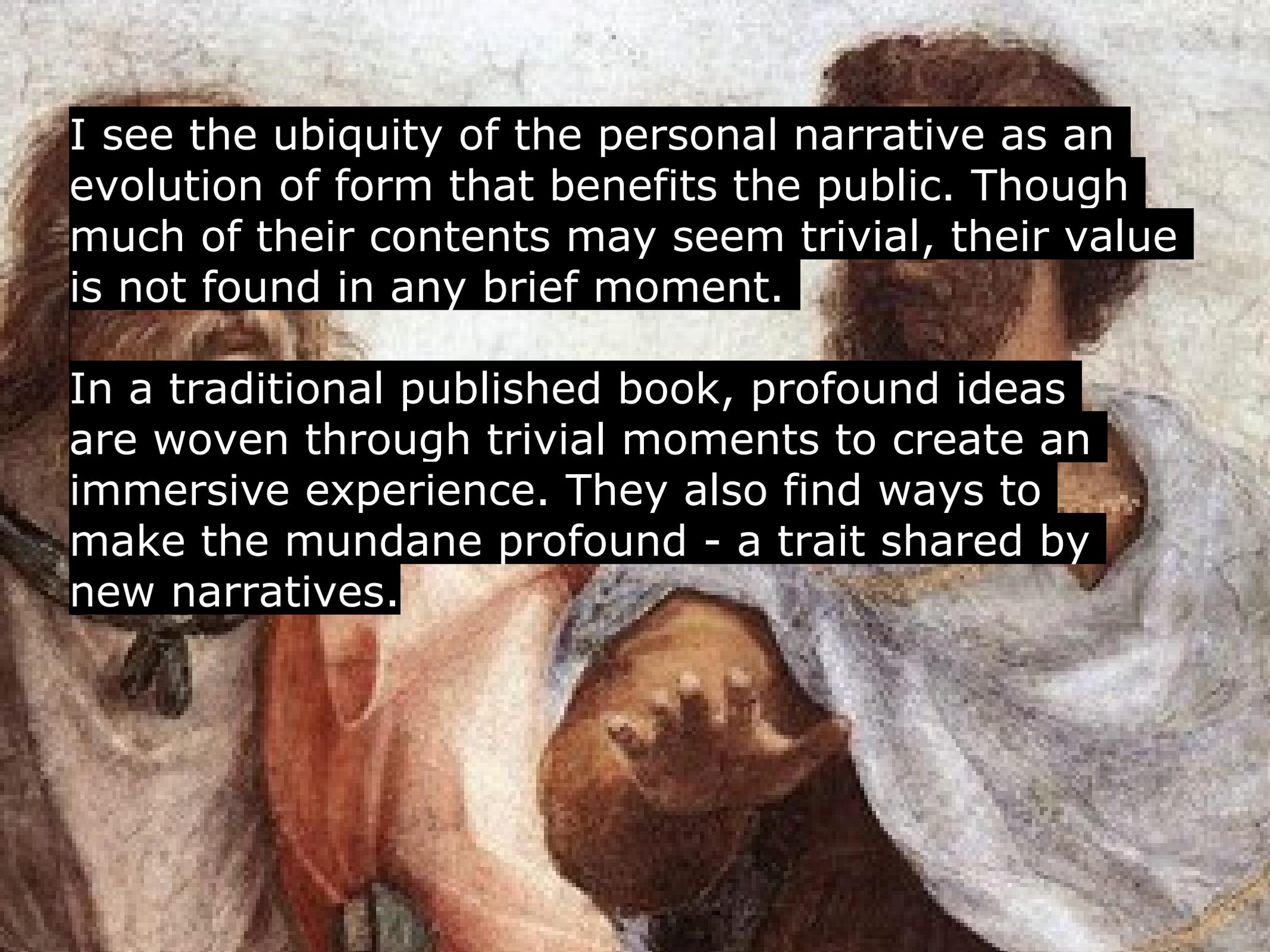
There is a growing tendency towards the creation and distribution of material previously considered pedestrian. Where stories were once published only if they had an assured audience, they can now be published regardless of their importance.

The personal narrative is no longer distributed only for readership, but also for the creator's satisfaction, or sometimes for no other reason than the ability to distribute. Their sheer number has an impact on their collective social effect.

The format of the personal narrative has changed.

While they were once limited in format, new narratives take advantage of media such as photography, sound and video.

These new narratives also allow change how long a piece of content can be, at both ends of the spectrum, from the concise (Twitter) to the verbose (the upper limit is now boundless).

A painting of a woman with a white headscarf and a blue garment, looking down with a somber expression. The background is a textured, light-colored wall.

I see the ubiquity of the personal narrative as an evolution of form that benefits the public. Though much of their contents may seem trivial, their value is not found in any brief moment.

In a traditional published book, profound ideas are woven through trivial moments to create an immersive experience. They also find ways to make the mundane profound - a trait shared by new narratives.

New narratives create a personal relationship with the audience through trivial moments over time, and then suddenly become important with brief moments that are profound.

Sorry ppl, my battery died but I am back now.

3 minutes ago via Twitter for BlackBerry®

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Stupid me didn't charge my mobile properly! Grrr

about 3 hours ago via Twitter for BlackBerry®

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Consider this example taken from Twitter:

*"Usually I use Twitter for really personal things, so I just share moments from my work or moments from my love life or I talk about my cats or my family. And it engages lots of different people, so when these people are following you and suddenly you are talking about a torture case, some of them might not usually be exposed to such cases. But because they are following me and there is an ongoing conversation between us, they would suddenly be engaged in this, as well."*

-Mona Seif, Egyptian Protester

By adapting the structures and immersive attributes of the traditional narrative and combining them with the media and personal relationship building advantages of new personal narratives, I aim to enable the public creation of personal narratives that connect with audiences more personally while encouraging profundity.

The first part of my process involves finding the common denominator between successful narratives in different media – the nature of the relationship they form with the audience.

Let us consider two works created for diverse audiences in disparate media:  
Mona Seif's Twitter posts and Homer's *Odyssey*

Mona's posts about her daily life speak to her followers on common ground - they are relatable experiences shared by many. These moments take very little time to absorb, and elicit from the audience brief comments about their humor and emotion. These comments are frequently from those who know Mona.

The profound posts relate experiences that are less accessible - protest and torture, battle and survival. These generate a more philosophical and heartfelt discussion. Yet this would not be possible were it not for the previously established, 'mundane', relationship.

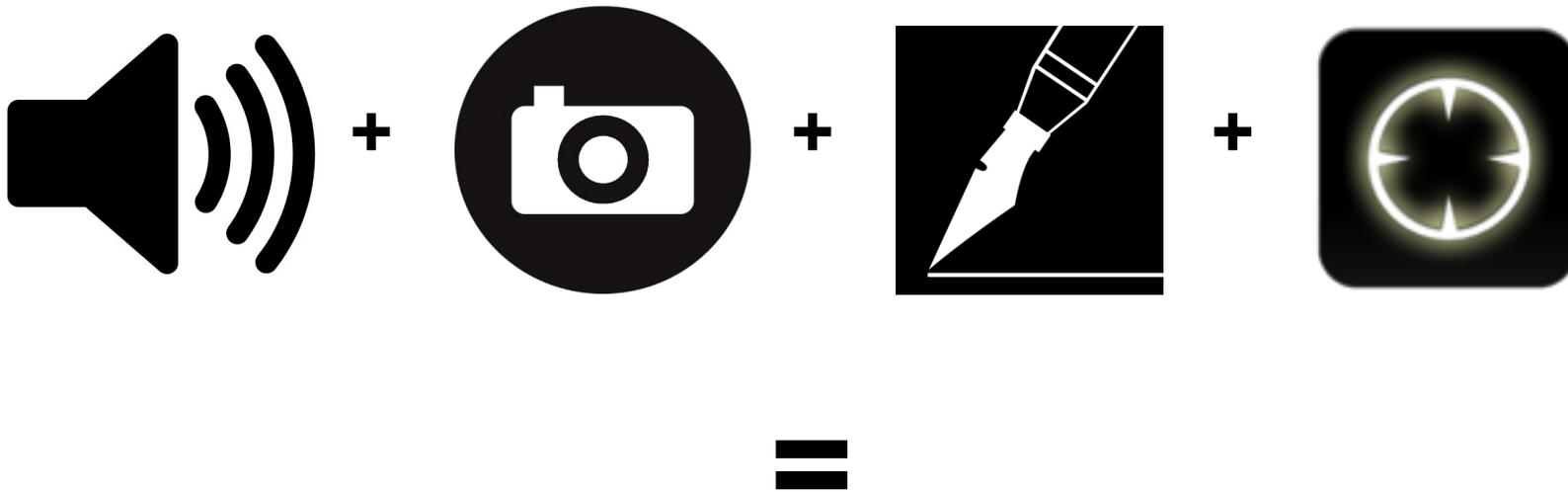
Homer's *Odyssey* can be considered in two forms, first as an oral tradition, second as a transcribed work. In the first case, the allure of the narrative and the strength of the epic rely on...



The second part of my process involves identifying personal narrative generating techniques that will ameliorate the existing conditions of physical form, audience participation and audience interest.

## Possible Developments:

- Integrate storytelling vocabulary with media
- Intertwining sensory cues
- Developing tools for creating cross-medium narratives



A new method creating immersive user generated stories