

From Capturing to Receiving a Story Alive



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An unfolding 'a-ha' about crafting stories that are truly generative

Wednesday, November 4, 2015 -- Michelle Strutzenberger

I've been struck by the hunting and claiming language cropping up in our conversations about our work as journalists and specifically Generative Journalists here at Axiom News recently.

While we've moved past expressions such as "covering" a story — which team member Yvonne Hollandy has noted conveys this nuance of smothering — or "telling" a story, which we've all agreed limits the possibilities we sense in the work of Generative Journalism, some of the other words we're choosing may be less

aligned with our deepest intentions than we mean.

Such as the phrase “capturing a story.” I have certainly used this wording, but have been feeling this lurking and growing sense of ickiness about it. Especially when I’m talking about attempting to capture an individual person’s story or, even deeper, the story of their soul. Reflecting more on this, I find both the implied authority — I am greater and powerful than you, thus I can capture your story — not to mention the binding, bringing down, netting imagery actually makes my skin shrivel.

Until now, one of my favourite ways to talk about and understand our work as Generative Journalists has been to reference it as discovering a story. I especially love the adventure nuance about that.

But lately I’ve felt that that word too, though certainly much more aligned with the spirit and practice of this work, still has some discomfiting connotation of the journalist doing something to others, digging, prodding. Even if it’s all from the most generative of stances, there’s this hint, maybe just very subtle, but a hint nonetheless of working on someone.

Recently the a-ha came to me — receiving a story. Is that how the work might be framed? Does that convey what the deepest aspirations and imaginings for Generative Journalism are all about?

I love the implication in the receiving terminology that the story is a gift bestowed, an offering, and the storyteller, storymaker, Generative Journalist, is the humble recipient. It is a gift I receive, that changes me.

And then there’s the whole notion of receiving a story alive, a living story. But that is another blog.

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