

Minute Memes: Re-Animating the Relationship Between Copyright and Censorship

Project Summary:

The Minute Memes project is a series of one-minute animated videos about copyright restrictions and artistic freedom, to be made by award-winning graphic artist and animator Nina Paley – author of the film "Sita Sings the Blues", adjunct faculty at Parsons The New School For Design in New York City (teaching Visual Narrative), 2006 Guggenheim Fellow, and Artist in Residence at QuestionCopyright.org.

The Minute Memes are a response to widely-available videos and other materials from the copyright industry (see reference [1]), in which the message is that copyright is a natural and absolute property right that trumps freedom of expression and people's ability to share and reimagine the culture around them. The Minute Memes will counteract this through visual storytelling, backed by still-image and written supplementary materials, to show how artists and audiences can thrive in a more permissive, less monopolistic environment than the one envisioned by the current copyright system.

The Minute Memes will offer an aesthetically engaging and intellectually consistent framework for considering copyright's restrictive effects. Step by step, the series will build a new frame of reference to supplant received rhetoric about copyright – received rhetoric such as the notion of "balancing" the needs of creators and the public, which assumes that the two are in opposition; the idea that copying is a form of stealing; the idea that control over copies must be bound up with attribution; etc. We have already seen anecdotal evidence that there is a need for the Minute Memes; for example, see [2].

This application is for funding for three of the memes. The entire series is twelve memes long (see [3]). Here we are seeking funding to complete the three we think are most in line with the Warhol Foundation's mission. By enabling us to produce the first three, the Warhol Foundation would be helping to seed the entire project, because with three memes produced we can more easily find support for the rest of the series.

Rationale:

Due in part to ubiquitous, professionally-made public campaigns by the publishing and recording industries, many people – even those who share art and music online – identify unauthorized copying with stealing and with plagiarism, and feel that derivative works ought to require permission in almost all cases. It is very difficult to go from that frame of mind to one receptive to the notion that the freedom to share, and the freedom to create derivative works, might be civil rights. One must first accept that, for example, "editing a copy without the original author's permission" is not the same as "destroying someone's hard work".

In order for a different way of thinking to flourish, the issues must be reframed. We must enable the viewer to feel that formerly unquestioned terms and assumptions deserve a fresh look. Only after crossing that emotional barrier will the viewer be willing to consider copyright in a new way. But crossing that kind of barrier requires rhetorical tools that go beyond plain expository argument. For someone to consider ideas they may have previously felt were unrealistic or even immoral, they need to first give themselves permission – they must feel it's "safe" to go there. The Minute Memes will help build that mental permission structure, by making rigorous arguments through a combination of art and storytelling: compelling anecdotes, memorable images and music, high aesthetic standards and overall production quality. We aim to match or exceed the production values of the copyright industry's

campaigns, while simultaneously having a message that better fits how people actually want to treat copyable and remixable content.

Project outputs:

The three memes we are seeking funding for are:

1. *All Creative Work Is Derivative*

Takes well-known works of art and shows their derivative origins (such as Disney movies that are based on folk tales). Also, takes existing famous works that share elements and shows them dissolving into their component parts and fusing back together again. The goal of this meme is to use a compelling visual sequence to reinforce the ubiquity of derivation, so that other creative works appear differently to the viewer afterwards.

2. *Copyright and Freedom of Speech*

A video showing compelling and memorable examples of how copyright is sometimes used as a tool of censorship. There are many examples available; it's a matter of choosing which can be most compellingly presented. See questioncopyright.org/censorship_examples_wanted for a partial list.

3. *Copying Is Not Plagiarism*

Show how making a copy of someone's work is not the same as taking credit for its authorship. (E.g., when teenagers download songs from the Internet, they don't replace the artists' name with their own; in fact, they want to share it under the artists' name so they can easily find people with similar musical tastes. It is only fear of copyright infringement suits that causes them to obscure such information.) This meme involves showing memorable visual analogs for crediting and for copying, to show how plagiarism is a fundamentally different act from merely copying or using one work to help create another.

All the memes will be freely redistributable, and available online under open licenses that allow anyone to share them and to make derivative works. The raw production materials used to create the memes will be released the same way.

Organization mission:

QuestionCopyright.org is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that seeks to reframe public discourse about copyright and control, by re-introducing questions about censorship and civil rights, and by offering a reality-based view of the economics of artistic activity. Our projects are designed to show the actual effects (including restrictive effects) of modern copyright on creative expression, and to demonstrate how a cooperative relationship between artists and audiences can offer better results for everyone, artistically and economically. Our goal is to make the public aware of all of copyright's effects, to give an accurate view of the economic role copyright plays in most artist's lives, and to offer distribution methods that encourage artists to have mutually supportive relationships with each other and with audiences. See questioncopyright.org for more information, and see questioncopyright.org/projects for some of our activities.

Artist biography:

Nina Paley was born in 1968 in Champaign, IL, USA. She is a longtime veteran of syndicated comic

strips, creating "Fluff" (Universal Press Syndicate), "The Hots" (King Features), and her own alternative weekly "Nina's Adventures." In 1998 she began making independent animated festival films, including the controversial but popular environmental short "The Stork." In 2002 she followed her then-husband to Trivandrum, India, where she read her first Ramayana. This inspired her first feature-length film, "Sita Sings the Blues", which she animated and produced single-handedly over the course of 5 years on a home computer. Nina teaches at Parsons School of Design in Manhattan, is a 2006 Guggenheim Fellow, and is Artist in Residence at QuestionCopyright.org.

See also en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nina_Paley.

Budget:

We have budgeted an animation cost-per-minute of \$10,000, which is in the low-to-medium end of the spectrum for professional quality animation with sound and music. The overall cost-per-minute for modern professional animation ranges from \$3000.00 to over \$1,000,000.00. For comparison:

<i>Space Ghost: Coast to Coast (2000)</i>	\$3,301/min
<i>South Park (series) (2006)</i>	\$11,363/min
<i>The Simpsons (2000)</i>	\$55,023/min
<i>Howl's Moving Castle (2004)</i>	\$211,864/min
<i>Curious George (2006)</i>	\$581,395/min
<i>Treasure Planet (2002)</i>	\$1,678,262/min

(Source: Animation Budget History at cartoons.captaincapitalism.com/animgraph/animgraph.html; figures adjusted for inflation.)

Budget for three Minute Memes:

Animation production	\$15,000 (3 memes @ \$5,000/meme)
Music and sound design	\$9,000 (\$3,000/meme avg)
Researching, writing accompanying texts	\$3,000 (\$1,000/meme avg)
Equipment	\$3,000

Total: \$30,000

Animation production expenses include: animator's fee, office space, creation of broadcast-quality output masters, and standard production expenses (storyboarding, character development, test scenes, etc). Equipment expenses are primarily computers, and hard drives for transporting large digital video files. Equipment is listed separately from animation production because it's a one-time expense: the same equipment will be used for all the Memes.

References:

- [1] www.copyrightalliance.org/content.php?key=videos
- [2] nick.onetwenty.org/index.php/2009/03/28/copying-isnt-theft/
- [3] questioncopyright.org/minute_memes