



SUBMITTED BY MICHAEL WESCH

Kansas State professor Michael Wesch crafted his video in the basement of this St. George home, where he lives with his wife, Sarah. He said he wanted to make a video to help him describe the Web in a visual way.

Cultural video becomes international sensation

A Kansas State University professor working out of his basement caused an online sensation that is sweeping the globe.

Late last month, Michael Wesch, an assistant professor of cultural anthropology at K-State, uploaded a simple, 4½-minute video outlining how the World Wide Web has changed the way people communicate. Within three days, "Web 2.0 ... The Machine is Us/ing Us" became the No. 1 blogged-about video on the Internet.

As of Thursday, Wesch's video remained at the top of the list of popular videos on the blog-tracking site Technorati.com. It has been viewed more than a million times.

Why did you make this video?

First, I wanted to provide a quick history of the Web for my students and get them thinking about how the Web might impact their future. We will live in a different world as the Web becomes more and more our primary mode of conversation.

Second, I was trying to write a paper on the history of Web 2.0, and I thought, "This is ridiculous." It is really hard to describe the Web, which is visual, in a print medium.

The students you talked about are in your "digital ethnography" class. What does that mean?

Ethno refers to

culture, so ethnography is a study of a culture. When it is digital, it is a study of the culture of the Web or of the different cultures in the Web.

My class is doing an ethnography study of YouTube. There is a whole community of people who actually speak through these communities. They turn on the Web cam and talk for five minutes. Then they upload it and wait for someone to respond. It's kind of beautiful to see.

How interactive is this community?

I'm in a basement in St. George, Kan., in the middle of nowhere. I spent three days making a video, and now I am getting calls and e-mails from all over the world. I got an e-mail from a guy from New York City, and he said I am all the rage on Madison Avenue.

When you write something in a blog

about another blog, the Web automatically contacts the other blog and puts a note in that person's blog. Other blogs know you are talking to them, and they can blog about you.

It may seem foreign to a lot of people, but ultimately, what people are doing with the Web is talking to each other.

And you believe this technology will change our culture?

When the Web first came out, we only thought of it in terms we were familiar with. It was like a souped-up TV or a souped-up newspaper.

In the past few years, we finally started to see that the Web can do all these things that paper and TV can't. We can interlink people in all sorts of new communities. Some of the social networking, like on myface or spacebook, those couldn't exist in paper form. Now, translate that to voting or political stuff. When you change the means of communication, you can expect culture to change dramatically.

Is that why at the end of your video, you said we may need to rethink things as diverse as copyright, identity, privacy and ourselves?

One of the big dangers on the Web right now is that we can expose so much of our private lives.

I didn't think this video would be seen by a million people. I thought, "If I can get 1,000 people to think about this, that's good."

