Darcie Wilder on finding your voice online

December 14, 2016 - Darcie Wilder got a BFA in film in 2012. She currently tweets as @333333333433333 and for MTV News. She's publishing her first novel in Spring 2017 with Tyrant Books. It's titled *literally show me a healthy person*.

As told to Brandon Stosuy, 2498 words.

Tags: Writing, Technology, Process.

When you started your Twitter account, was it something you did as a hobby or emotional outlet, or had you thought, "Hey, this could eventually turn into something bigger?"

I started Twitter because I was bored in college. I used it not really thinking about it, but then, I guess, there was a certain point when I started taking it seriously, or I started being more conscious of what I was putting on it and writing. But I never had a goal in mind. I just wanted to do things that I liked or entertained me. I would use Twitter all the time. I liked using it.

But I guess there was a point when I realized I was investing time in it and that it could be more of a creative outlet instead of me just being messy and dumb on it. So I kept doing it, and focusing on that. I felt a lot of angst after going to film school and then not working on films. That became part of it. It became a creative outlet.

I started doing that and then it became a book.

You were doing experimental documentaries and diary films and narratives. In a way, it's not that far removed from using Twitter the way you do. Do you see a relation between the two?

I totally do. I feel like the way I used to make films is pretty similar to the way that I use Twitter and the internet. They would often be either narratives about my life or experimental documentaries where it would literally be me recording me and my friends. Sometimes recreating a conversation that we had, and so editorializing real life. They way I use Twitter is like live tweeting my life and then taking that quasi-raw material and assembling it into something different… it becomes its own thing. I think that's essentially what I keep doing—piecing together something and trying to make sense of it later and trying to create something that conveys either an emotion or a loose narrative.

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I guess the main difference with Twitter is that the timing of it is really weird. With a documentary, it would take months and months and often just never be done. The internet is live, so there's a lot of stuff that we don't know how to talk about. For instance, you can see projects that people are working on unfold in real time. When it becomes part of a larger work, it's weird, because you've already seen some of the bones, though how the skeleton is actually assembled as a new thing.

I think that right now people are more quick to cheapen that experience and think that just because they've seen some of it online, they know where it's going. Like it's lessening the final product, because you've seen someone working on it.

Also, with documentaries versus writing online—I've never had as many personal repercussions before. I haven't made a film in years, but it would always be pre-understood that it was based on my life or that I was just speaking as myself, but making it a piece had this distance where people kind of knew how to talk about it. I have a lot of problems being online and having it affect my relationships in my life because of the border between public and private. I have strong boundaries between what I put online and what I don't, but because I don't discuss the boundaries online, people assume there aren't any. Also, I don't think that anyone knows how to talk about what we're doing online yet.

In a sense, Twitter was a workshop for writing the book. You have a real-time test audience for a project.

I think it *is* good for that. I found my voice through it. Writing things in that restricted way was helpful, and I needed the encouragement to keep doing things based on the reception to it, because I think if I'm alone in my room doing something, I'll have no confidence that I should keep doing it. The back and forth between people is helpful.

Also, you can use Twitter for so many different things. I feel like maybe no two people use it the exact same way, because it can just be a conversation tool or it can just be non-sequiturs or something. It's kind of weird if we're all shouting into the void and then seeing what attracts us to it. There's other art stuff going on, too. Twitter is writing, but Twitter is also performance.

The only thing that creeps me out is that Twitter is a corporation and that they definitely don't have our best interests at heart. I feel suspicious of trusting that and being like "Oh hell yeah, Twitter," but I also feel like we all use it so much… and it has problems, obviously huge problems. Everyone I meet now is usually from Twitter, and I do think it's cool that everyone can have it.

Most people that have successful Twitter accounts started that account as a personal thing. This versus someone cravenly thinking: "I'm going to create this to become the next big thing."

Yeah, it seems so insincere. Also, those gross accounts that are obviously trying to be viral and have five followers. I think about that a lot, why people are using it—if people are earnestly using Twitter because they enjoy the platform for either writing or discussing or whatever, versus the people that are using Twitter to promote things. I'm not into that. I have a weird thing about that where I'm not interested in it; but when people are just trying to connect with other people or make something that they like, I think that's interesting.

How much of the book came from what you've done on Twitter, and how much is new writing entirely?

Most of it is new writing, but a fair amount has already been tweeted in a different context. The book is a novel and it's made up of sentences and then paragraphs. There are no chapters, so it's one big thing. It's hard for me to place it in a percentage. A lot of it has been tweeted, but I think that the way that you read it online is really different from the way it acts in the piece. It makes sense in a different way. There are some punchlines that have been on Twitter before, but without the context of the story behind it, so it makes more sense now reading it.

How did you decide to do it as a novel versus a memoir or essays?

Someone asked me if I wanted to do a book and I said yes. I'd written a piece a few years ago that was made up of this time where I was using Facebook more as a creative outlet. It was assembled from Facebook statuses and then tweets, and it would be one line, or whatever. It looked like a poem, and it was functioning as literature, which I think is still true of the book. I was grabbing things that I had already written and editing them into this thing for a purpose.

A few months later someone asked if I wanted to do a book and I didn't really know. I was having trouble figuring out what form it was going to take. That was pretty difficult. Once I figured out the pacing and how I wanted it to be, it was kind of obvious. I think it took me realizing that the tweets I'd been writing *were* the writing. It was more the actual writing than it was the raw material or inspiration for the writing.

It took me a while to call it a novel or think of it as a novel because of how it came about and how I think people are making work differently. I was thinking about how maybe calling something a poem is limited. I don't want to get into that, but just how kind of opening up and letting it be what it wants to be instead of forcing it into a medium that has existed for years and years. If we're producing work in a different way, then why would we still be doing it in the same format? We're creating new ways.

Do you imagine putting out a novel based in part on your Twitter account will change the way that you use Twitter, or work on outside projects, in the future?

I was thinking of this recently, and about what's going to happen. Part of me feels like I've been doing the same thing for so long that it won't, that Twitter changed my brain and I'll just be like this for a while. But I was also thinking about how exhausting the whole process has been. When I was working on this project, there wasn't any blueprint for how to do it. I find myself thinking of the next project as being different, and being something to work on by myself before anyone can see any part of it. But then I thought maybe that wasn't possible based on how this happened, or wondering if it was against what I'm supposed to be standing for, or proving, with this book. I don't know how it'll change, because I also feel like the book is so different from my Twitter account—it's more of a static beginning and end thing. The Twitter account is like a faucet that keeps running and drowning me.

It's weird because when I started my Twitter, it was semi-anonymous. I had a job and no one knew my Twitter, and I had a decoy Twitter. Then I started working for MTV and MTV News. Now there's no going back. The book is mostly from when it was a secret thing and more of me shouting into the void. I feel like my Twitter has already changed in a lot of ways where there are so many repercussions if I fuck up. Even though I'm pretty free to say whatever, in the general realm of things. But that life change has already happened a little bit and I'm not sure if the book will actually change it anymore than it has.

Do you think that since you've been creating in public it's harder now to do something if it's not happening in that way? People need all kinds of tricks to get creative projects done.

Yeah, completely. I've done that where the format of a web page is more helpful when writing something. It's like something clicks in a different way. I also flip between word processors to use, which might just be me being crazy and trying to figure out which one feels right. But the idea of me handwriting anything is so ridiculous. I took a class a year ago and he gave us notebooks and it was like, I can't do this. It was so difficult. I learned a lot about what I can't do.

Also just like in a different sense, I think, if I'm having trouble thinking about how I feel about something, the idea of putting it into a sentence versus in a tweet is more inspiring than thinking it as, say, a paragraph. It affects both the actual thing I'm typing and also how I'm beginning to think of it. You know, how a bunch of tweets could become something, even though the formatting of tweets and a tweet storm is different than a larger written work. Also, when coming up with a project, the instant validation of Twitter is such a big thing. It's like being hit with dopamine. It's hard to go away from that and to keep a project a secret. To not get an instant response or validation for something.

On the flip side, after being online for so long and not having many boundaries, it's nice to keep something offline and to be able to work on it, and that's probably in reaction to over-saturating myself.

There's this romanticized notion of "good writing" taking a long time. Like, the idea that Flaubert would spend an entire day figuring out if he should use a comma or not. Some younger writers are maybe being less precious about that. The process can be public and part of a community, and it doesn't need to be hidden.

Yeah. It's cool when things take a really long time, but also maybe that shouldn't be as idolized as it has been forever. Like, it's a myth that the number of hours you spend on a piece makes it more or less worthwhile, but that doesn't mean it also isn't tragic to see a piece that could've been amazing if the creator had been more mindful or spent more time on it. And I think that's something to figure out now that timelines for work are changing. Like, this book took five years and came along in spurts, but most of the work was in shaping and editing. It makes sense that because the creation process is changing, the editing process would to, whether longer because of more material or less time because it might be easier to self-edit or something.

I also think that whenever anyone's waking up early and forcing themselves to do write… In film school, this would happen to me, where I would be working on a documentary and I would find myself treating it as a narrative, then I would realize that a documentary is recorded and I don't know what I'm going to be recording, and I realized it was a control issue. Then when I relaxed and I let the piece become what it was supposed to, that was the work of making it. I feel like whenever I've woken up early or done these things, they've been like forcing puzzle pieces together.

There's something about working online and working with Twitter where it's about the fleeting freshness of your thoughts. If I didn't have Twitter, I would be writing in a notebook and trying to figure out what I meant eight hours later, when the idea wasn't fresh anymore. Twitter allows you to express what you're feeling when you're feeling it, which is the best part of it. Sometimes that's also horrible, if you're having a meltdown, but when you're not having a meltdown, it's great.

Darcie Wilder recommends:

matching best friend tattoos
coffee
signature catchphrases and/or poses to rely on in moments of distress or confusion
taking awhile to get to know people
never changing your avatar

Name
Darcie Wilder

Vocation
Writer, Filmmaker

Fact

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