

VIDEO VORTEX Reader

RESPONSES
TO
YOUTUBE

EDITED BY
GEERT LOVINK AND SABINE NIEDERER
INC READER #4

The Video Vortex Reader is the first collection of critical texts to deal with the rapidly emerging world of online video – from its explosive rise in 2005 with YouTube, to its future as a significant form of personal media.

After years of talk about digital convergence and crossmedia platforms we now witness the merger of the Internet and television at a pace no-one predicted. These contributions from scholars, artists and curators evolved from the first two *Video Vortex* conferences in Brussels and Amsterdam in 2007 which focused on responses to YouTube, and address key issues around independent production and distribution of online video content. What does this new distribution platform mean for artists and activists? What are the alternatives?

Contributors: Tilman Baumgärtel, Jean Burgess, Dominick Chen, Sarah Cook, Sean Cubitt, Stefaan Decostere, Thomas Elsaesser, David Garcia, Alexandra Juhasz, Nelli Kambouri and Pavlos Hatzopoulos, Minke Kampman, Seth Keen, Sarah Késenne, Marsha Kinder, Patricia Lange, Elizabeth Losh, Geert Lovink, Andrew Lowenthal, Lev Manovich, Adrian Miles, Matthew Mitchem, Sabine Niederer, Ana Peraica, Birgit Richard, Keith Sanborn, Florian Schneider, Tom Sherman, Jan Simons, Thomas Thiel, Vera Tollmann, Andreas Treske, Peter Westenberg.

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Institute of
network cultures

XS4ALL

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University of Applied Sciences

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Video Vortex Reader: Responses to YouTube

Editors: Geert Lovink and Sabine Niederer

Editorial Assistance: Marije van Eck and Margreet Riphagen

Copy Editing: Darshana Jayemanne

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Contact

Institute of Network Cultures

phone: +3120 5951866

fax: +3120 5951840

email: info@networkcultures.org

web: <http://www.networkcultures.org>

Order a copy of this book by sending an email to:

info@networkcultures.org

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INC Reader #2: Katrien Jacobs, Marije Janssen and Matteo Pasquinelli (eds),
C'CLICK ME: A Netporn Studies Reader, 2007.

This anthology collects the best material from two years of debate from 'The Art and Politics of Netporn' 2005 conference to the 2007 'C'CLICK ME' festival. The C'CLICK ME reader opens the field of 'internet pornography', with contributions by academics, artists and activists.

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INC Reader #1: Geert Lovink and Soenke Zehle (eds),
Incommunicado Reader, 2005.

The Incommunicado Reader brings together papers written for the June 2005 conference 'Incommunicado: Information Technology for Everybody Else'. The publication includes a CD-ROM of interviews with speakers.

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THE ART OF WATCHING DATABASES

INTRODUCTION TO THE VIDEO VORTEX READER

GEERT LOVINK

Die Zeit: Do you concern yourself with new media and technology?

Jean-Luc Godard: I try to keep up. But people make films on the Internet to show that they exist, not in order to look at things.

If we're all watching cats flushing toilets, what aren't we reading? What great writer are we missing? What great story are we ignoring? This is societal, it's cultural, I can't change it. Like everybody else, I can burn an hour on YouTube or Perez Hilton without breaking a sweat. And what have I just not paid attention to that 10 years ago I would've just consumed? - *Brian Williams*

This reader brings together recent critical research into the rapid-growing field of online video. Even though this technology was already there around 1997 with platforms such as RealVideo, it was only in 2006 that millions of users got familiar with the small video screens when YouTube reached a critical mass of short video clips. The video-sharing website YouTube, founded early 2005 as one of the many Web 2.0 start-ups, was sold to Google in late 2006. Soon after, the first students approached our Institute of Network Cultures with the request for titles of YouTube publications. We can have a laugh at such a naïve demand for instant theory, but the question seemed legitimate: is it possible to develop a critical theory of real-time developments? Can concepts be developed that go beyond the uncritical fan culture, as promoted by Henry Jenkins, and question the corporate PR management rhetoric, without downplaying the creative-artistic and social-political use of online video? That's what fascinated us when we initiated the Video Vortex project early 2007, resulting in a Brussels conference (October 2007), an exhibition in Amsterdam (Fall 2007, organized by The Netherlands Media Art Institute), and a two-day conference in Amsterdam (January 2008). The project is now about to travel the world and the seven seas, with Video Vortex 3 scheduled in Ankara, Turkey, in October 2008. But before we turn global, it is good to present here the original ideas behind the event concept.

The Database Turn

We no longer watch films or TV; we watch databases. Instead of well-defined programmes, we search one list after another. We are no longer at the mercy of cranky reviewers and mono-cultural multiplexes. What we run up against is the limitations of our own mental capacity. Which search terms will yield the best fragments? What was that title again? Does anyone know that director's name? What was that band called? What category was it under?

Does he know someone else with interesting tastes? Was that reference blogged anywhere? Does she know the URL? Was it under pets or entertainment? Welcome to snack culture: watch a clip and move on.

Searchability

At this point, the far-reaching implications of database-watching are somewhat uncertain. The technological character of the search process deserves more attention. The hunt for (and among) moving images is becoming just as important as looking at the search results. But we're all too happy to integrate YouTube into our busy daily lives so we don't have to think about the implications of watching the computer 24/7. It's already a cultural fact that we take TV everywhere with us and watch a quick clip while we're waiting at the bus stop. What does it mean that our attention is being guided by database systems? Is searching really more important than finding? Why has searchability become such an essential organising principle? Why is our personal relationship to the relational database being pushed? Who will show us around and tell us which keywords will find us something interesting? And are we really in dialogue with the Machine? Cultural awareness of how the algorithms work is still a long way off. Are the answers to our questions really democratically determined by users, as is often suggested, or are there editors in the background recommending the 'most popular videos'?

WWW-ADHD

But cultural pessimists complain all too gladly about the fall of the Grand Narrative. Not only do we read too few books, we now also watch too few films and too little TV. Like small children, we are unable to sit still and pay attention while Father Cinema reads us a story. The 'modern neurosis' Freud spoke of now manifests itself in the way we scatter our attention in cyberspace. Attentive watching and listening have given way to diffuse multitasking. When we sit down at the computer, we all get ADHD. During video clips, which last an average of just 2 ½ minutes, we jump up and down, sing along, play air guitar. We behave like hyperactive children receiving too little attention, and if we don't like something, we scream at the drop of a hat, or immediately turn to something else, conclude psychologists who study online behaviour.

Collective fun

Automatic infantilisation occurs because Authority is nowhere in sight. Power definitely exists but remains invisible and unnameable. Google permits everything, from porn to politically incorrect jokes; no one notices anyway (or so it seems). In this danger-free communication zone, which is itself barely out of diapers, we relive our childhoods, aware that unknown companies are watching over our shoulders. The power that controls us is just as anonymous as we believe we are. As long as we have not yet internalised the Network as authority, there's no problem. So it's important to extend the naïve phase as long as possible and avoid spoiling the collective fun. This is the dilemma of radical YouTube criticism: why spoil the fun of millions of people who have long known how intimately they are being watched?

A baby boy dancing on YouTube has wound up tangled in a legal dispute with pop star Prince and one of the world's biggest record companies. Stephanie Lenz shot a video of her toddler bobbing to Prince's 1980s hit 'Let's Go Crazy'. In the video, the little boy is

running around the kitchen while the song plays in the background. After shooting the video, Lenz uploaded it on to YouTube so that friends and family could see it.¹

The camera as *stilo*

Old-media YouTube commentary usually goes no further than complaining about the Decline of the Occident in general and of copyright in particular. What users are searching for – and finding – we never find out. The popular YouTube videos with their lame entertainment character are not just random junk; they touch the essence of this cultural technology. Think of the 'happy slapping' category, which mimics Hollywood film violence for fun down the street. Or the Turkish band with offensive lyrics whose videos were banned. After the phase of entertainment as diversion, we are now being literally and figuratively diverted all over the Net. Every situation and thought is YouTube-worthy. The *cinéma-vérité* generation's wish for the camera to become a '*stilo*' has come true: the billions are scratching away with abandon.

Mirror

YouTube's slogan, 'Broadcast Yourself', is put into action by less than 1 per cent of its users. In this Long Tail age, we know that it's mainly about 'Broadcasting to Yourself'. The Internet is used mainly as a mirror. In a macroeconomic sense, it's about the millions of films watched every day, which provide Google (YouTube's owner) with a treasure trove of user data. What is your 'association' economy worth? Am I really aware of why I'm clicking from one clip to the next? If not, we can always reread our own history on YouTube. We can find out everything – but mainly about ourselves: what the most popular channel is, which friend has watched this video. And then, after a while, we get tired of all the mediagenic American college students with their mainstream rock-'n'-roll tastes, and we click away again.

Total Attention

As we watch YouTube material, other windows are naturally also open. One person is chatting or Skype-ing, sending an email or reading a blog; the other is playing a game or talking on the phone. Cultural studies researchers established long ago that we daydream while we watch films and do the washing up while the TV is on. The Total Attention ideal is achieved only in retirement homes. Online video has incorporated this discovery into its architecture. As a clip plays on the left, 'related videos' by the same uploader appear on the right. The computer interface is geared toward more of the same. Antagonistic or dialectical programming is still a long way off. Similarly to other social networks, which assume we have an incestuous desire to be just like our friends, online video sites assume I want to be exactly like you. The essential fact of postmodernity – namely that we seek difference, not similarity – has not yet got through to the Web 2.0 entrepreneurial class.

Teenage blues

The coded maxim here is: I want to see what you see. What are my friends watching? What are their favourite videos? Associative surfing is out. Getting lost in the teenage blues is for losers who don't understand what fun is. It's about brief peaks. Those who seek depth are

1. <http://www.ctv.ca/news>

simply barking up the wrong tree. Online video interfaces aren't about increasing the information overview. The many open programmes signify intensive engagement; they're not signs of a misspent life. Today, rather than an unintended side effect, multitasking is the essence of the media experience.

Time is the message

We must take database-watching seriously, not dismiss it as 'consuming video clips'. Watching videos online is something people occupy themselves with for hours – longer than the average feature film's 90 minutes. It is inherent in the interface that we keep going and going and the clip chain continues forever. Allowing oneself to be led by an endlessly branching database is the cultural constant of the early 21st century. The online dream trip must not end. The brevity of many online videos does not detract from this. Their short-lived character suits the meagre concentration people can muster for the average media product. Why watch when we already know the message in advance and figure out which one it is within a few seconds? Packed within a few minutes of video can be hours of material whose deeper meaning viewers can spend years deciphering. Have fun decoding the images. But no one will ever get around to that again. Time Is the Message: what we are consuming with online video is our own lack of time. And in all our haste, we forget to click 'clear viewing history'.

'CONSTRUCTIVE INSTABILITY', OR: THE LIFE OF THINGS AS THE CINEMA'S AFTERLIFE?¹

THOMAS ELSAESSER

The Historical Avant-gardes: Shorten the Distance between Art and Life?

One of the driving forces of the historical avant-gardes – Futurism, Dada, Surrealism, Russian constructivism – according to Peter Bürger's influential theory, has been to 'reintegrate art into the practice of life', partly as a reaction to aestheticism and partly to counter the anti-technological stance of *l'art-pour l'art*-modernism. Embracing 'the new' and 'the contemporary' – and following Rimbaud's advice: *'il faut être absolument moderne'* – avant-garde artists aimed to shorten the distance between 'art' and 'life': usually in the form of group activism, including staged happenings, but also individual acts involving serendipity and contingency, while making coincidence productive of meaning. Key techniques were montage and collage, assemblage and collision, i.e. the combination of seemingly unrelated elements or materials. In literature, individual intentionality was short-circuited by automatically recording contiguous associations, borrowed from psychoanalysis or games of chance. For the surrealists, 'life' entered the artwork when the banal, the ephemeral, the overlooked and the everyday could be incorporated into canvas or text, but verbal and physical attacks on the institution of art itself also formed part of tearing down the barriers. Instead of claiming autonomy for the individual work, or examining the specificity of the artistic medium, the artist practiced 'displacement': a change of place and context defined what was to make an object into an art-work, and an openness to chance gave an act its authenticity, rather than the search for sincerity and personal expression. The most famous art-object of this kind was Marcel Duchamp's Urinal, and the most infamous provocation was the assertion by André Breton, that the aesthetic act par excellence was to get down into the street and shoot off a pistol randomly into the crowd.

Several kinds of objections/revisions have been raised about this definition of the avant-garde as being informed by the desire to 'bring art closer to life'. One is that the political implications of this form of agency and of 'life-as-a-work-of-art' have to be seen in their broader historical context, which often meant that tacit support was lent to reactionary movements, from the dandy anti-humanism of Wyndham Lewis' Vorticism in London and of Ernst Jünger's poetics of the cold eye in Weimar Germany, or endorsing undemocratic politics or anti-egalitarian values as supported by avant-garde artists in Italy, Spain, Germany and the Soviet Union during the 1930s.

Jacques Ranciere, for instance, has argued that 'art-for-art-sake' proved a better defence against totalitarian temptations than avant-garde activism, although neither autonomy nor

1. © Thomas Elsaesser, 2008

the fusion of art and life can rescue the hoped-for subversive potential of art, because each involved what he calls a 'double heteronomy':

Whether the quest is for art alone or for emancipation through art, the stage is the same. On this stage, art must tear itself away from the territory of aestheticized life and draw a new borderline, which cannot be crossed. This is a position that we cannot simply assign to avant-garde insistence on the autonomy of art. For this autonomy proves to be in fact a double heteronomy. [...] The 'autonomy' of the avant-garde work of art becomes the tension between two heteronomies, between the bonds that tie Ulysses to his mast and the song of the sirens against which he stops his ears.²

The second objection to Bürger's thesis concerns the role played by technology for the historical avant-garde, and in particular that of the technical media – that is photography, film, and sound recording. Dietrich Scheunemann noted that there was a danger of 'underexpos[ing] the significant role, which the new means of technical reproduction played in bringing about the revolutionary changes in artistic techniques. Brushing aside technological considerations as formulated with great clarity and far-sightedness in several essays by Walter Benjamin, [Bürger's *Theory of the Avantgarde*] failed to notice that the advent of photography and film had caused the storm in the ensemble of the arts and that the re-grouping and vibrant interaction between the old and new art-forms provided much of the driving force for the radical changes in the landscape of the arts'.³

The third counter-argument, offered among others, by Benjamin Buchloh,⁴ has been that Bürger's theory leaves no space for the so-called (New York) neo-avant-gardes of the 1950s and 1960s, which in his account appear as mere nostalgic reprise and warm-up of the failed objectives of the first or 'historical' avant-gardes.⁵ This seriously underestimates the major achievements of minimal and conceptual art, or the degree to which modern art in the 20th century quite generally has worked with allegorical or semiotic, as opposed to iconic or representational modes, the only ones considered when 'art' and 'life' are conjoined and interrelated in this way.

I want to add a further consideration and suggest that at the turn of the 21st century, life and art have, on the contrary, come too close together, leaving the avant-garde with the task of repositioning both 'art' and 'life'. More specifically, against the background of renewed concerns with 'life' (bios and zoe) as reflected in the topical yet often contradictory debates

2. Jacques Ranciere 'The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes', *New Left Review* 14, March-April 2002, 137.

3. <http://www.arts.ed.ac.uk/eurogstudies/rprojects/avant-garde/TheoreticalBasis.htm>

4. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, review of Bürger, in: *Art in America* vol. 72, no. 10 (November 1984): 19-21.

5. 'Arguing persuasively against Peter Bürger's view of the avant-garde as failed and the neo-avant-garde as recuperative by positing the importance of *Nachträglichkeit*, Foster traces this 'deferred action' of the historical avant-garde from minimalism, pop art, and the textual turn in conceptual art to 'The Return of the Real' and 'The Artist as Ethnographer', the two chapters of his book that deal most explicitly with the art of the present', Douglas Crimp.

around bio-power, bio-politics and the condition of the post-human, it is Ranciere's 'double heteronomy', as a mutually conditioned 'outside determination' that defines the relations between art and life, rather than straight oppositions or binaries. In other words, 'art' and 'life' are both coming under pressure from external forces, but in such a way that they seem to be mutually refiguring each other.

This has consequences for the place one assigns to the 'media technologies' just mentioned, the unnamed 'other' whose structuring absence has so often marked the avant-gardes' self-understanding and modes of action. Instead of modern painting's more directly antinomic relation to photography, the historical avant-gardes often embraced the technical media, without reconciling themselves to their social implications. If on the side of a 'fusion' with life, the Russian constructivists saw themselves as engineers and their art as part of the machine of modernity (which soon swallowed them up), Arnold Schönberg's music, on the side of 'autonomy', was able to denounce the capitalist division of labour only by taking that division even further: 'to be still more technical, more 'inhuman' than the products of capitalist mass production'.⁶ Mass production and technical media would here be part of those outside forces re-appearing inside, so that neither their embrace, nor their rejection releases the avant-garde from this heteronomy whose effects undermine the very polarity that the avant-gardes set out to bridge. My thesis would be that the effects of such double heteronomies are still with us, albeit in different configurations. Today it appears that 'art' and 'life' are neither opposed to each other, nor have they merged; rather, they have changed places in relation to the outside forces that once more determine their antagonistic relation to each other. But what are these outside forces, other than the 'untranscendable horizon' of capitalism?

Let us begin on the side of 'life'. One of the developments of the latter half of the 20th century has been that life does indeed look more like art, and this in three distinct ways; firstly, in the Western world, everyday life has in almost all its aspects fallen under the regime of style, usually seen as the consequence either of a relentless aesthetisation (to use a Benjaminian term) or of commodification (to use the Marxist term). But in the form of design, this will to style has become much more than either aesthetisation or commodification: it has become the very term of our self-determination and self-reference as individuals and as political collectives: we want to take control of our life by giving it shape and design, not just by 'preserving it' as long as possible, but to improve, maximise, optimise it. Continuing in the same Foucauldian vein, one might say: the 'care of the self' is increasingly reformulated as the 'care of the future self' - a forward-looking venture that converts personal ethics into a kind of self-'serving' entrepreneurialism (to which the idea of a *res publica*, a public space, has been sacrificed), so much so that the 'business' of government in many Western countries seems to consist of virtually nothing else but health reform and pension rights.

Secondly, this notion of design, coupled to the concept of engineering, is a pervasive force not just in the sphere of 'social engineering', 'planning' or personal life-style choices: the so-called life-sciences (biology, anthropology, molecular genetics) are obliging us to rethink our

6. Ranciere, *loc. cit.* 137.

understanding of 'bios' (the individual life and its finitude) and 'zoe' (the natural life with its cycles) not as an opposition but in terms of a double heteronomy. The forces operating on both are now those usually associated with engineered or constructed environments and of technological systems, while biological processes (including death itself) become increasingly available as 'technologies' in the development of new materials or in the research and manufacturing cycles of industrial products.⁷ Organ transplants and tissue grafts have become standard medical practice, while enzymes or proteins are grown and harvested as the 'building blocks' for new products, while plants and other naturally occurring organisms are patented and trade-marked.

Even without going into more details about biological engineering, genetically manipulated food or nano-technologies, it has become another commonplace to note that the nature/culture divide, in many of the traditional definitions, no longer applies. To quote one of the many programmatic statements on this subject: 'If today there is a feeling of particular urgency for re-engaging with this dichotomy [of nature and culture], it is in part prompted by the revolutionary developments in science, particularly in biotechnology, medicine, neurobiology, and artificial intelligence. Strange life forms such as clones, transplants, genetically modified crops, etc. do much more than challenge the opposition between nature and culture: they establish a praxis that ... implodes a dualism that not so long ago was conceived as unsurpassable. How is one to decide whether these life forms are on the side of culture or nature?'

The Post-Human, Knowledge and the Prospect of A Contemporary Avant-garde

Another, more specifically Anglo-American horizon of this thinking about the collapse of the nature/culture divide and its associated models of progress, enlightenment and linear evolution is the condition of the post-human. Definitions of the post-human vary, but a useful checklist might be something like this: First, the post-human privileges informational pattern over material instantiation, so that embodiment in a biological substrate (such as our bodies) is seen as an accident of history rather than an inevitability of 'life'. Second, the post-human considers consciousness, regarded as the seat of human identity in the Western tradition long before Descartes' *cogito*, to be an epiphenomenon, an evolutionary upstart trying to claim that it is the main event when in actuality it is only a minor sideshow. Third, the post-human thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending the body or replacing body-parts with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were even born. Fourth, and most important, the post-human view configures human beings so that they can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. In the post-human, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, between cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, between robots running on programmes and humans pursuing goals.

One of the implications of such a post-human horizon is that not only the practice, but the idea of art – whether as a medium or even of art as a 'technology' – will all but disappear.

7. The historian Hughes P. Thomas, defines the term technology as a '...creative process involving human ingenuity ...'. This approach to technology associates technology with art and, by extension, aesthetics. (Hughes P. Thomas, *The Human Built World*, 2004).

Even the concept of 'medium' will be expendable, so that, for instance, notions like 'cyber-space' will become as quaint, and 'virtual reality' as obsolete as the idea of an ether – which, so dominant in the late 19th century, became obsolete at the beginning of the twentieth once the properties of electromagnetic fields and of radio waves became common knowledge. Computers and chips will leave their metal boxes and screens, and embed themselves in just about every object we come into contact with and just about every environment we find ourselves in. Human-computer interfaces, now still modelled in most cases around our presumed familiarity with the cinema (the screen), with the book (the laptop) or the office desk, will increasingly model themselves around our primary perceptual organs and senses, that is: sight, hearing and touch, and thus also become 'transparent'. The sudden passion for the 'haptic' in the humanities, and the hype around the Apple I-phone are (contrary to claims about 'embodiment') indicative of the same post-human trend. As N. Katherine Hayles argued some years ago: 'What [...] is already happening, is the development of distributed cognitive environments in which humans and computers interact in hundreds of ways daily, often unobtrusively.' In the terminology of Marcus Novak, quoted by Hayles, we are moving from 'immersion' (our old-fashioned cyberspace) to 'eversion' (localized virtual reality environments, like wifi hot-spots or other information-rich niches).⁸

If Bürger is right, and the avant-gardes did aim at fusing art and life, and if Katherine Hayles is right about the seamless fusion of humans and machines, then it could be argued that in the mutual interpenetration (or the double heteronomy) of art and (media) technology, as well as (media) technology and life, the avant-garde's aspirations have fulfilled themselves with a vengeance, to the point of making the very possibility of an artistic avant-garde obsolete. In other words, the post-human position implies a more or less smooth alignment between bios and techné, and thus it operates with an adaptationist model of evolution. However, there is hope: according to many of the recent studies of evolutionary biology (signed by such notable figures as Francisco Varela, Thomas Metzinger, as well as Antonio Damasio and Daniel Dennett), this smooth transition model is too large an assumption to make.⁹ As Slavoj Žižek puts it, in his review of the debate on evolutionary biology, adaptation and the birth of consciousness, human beings are constitutively un-adapted.¹⁰

In other words, the obsolescence of art and the avant-garde may not be an inescapable conclusion to the post-human position. Yet surely any project of an avant-garde for the 21st century is obliged to reflect on the definition not only of art and life, both of which now stand under the sign of techné, but this techné needs itself to be refigured around

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8. 'Computers aren't just in boxes anymore; they are moved out into the world to become distributed throughout the environment. 'Eversion,' my colleague Marcus Novak has called this phenomenon, in contrast to the 'immersion' of the much more limited and localized virtual reality environments.' N. Katherine Hayles, in conversation with Albert Borgman on *Humans and Machines*. <http://www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/borghayl.html>
9. 'A living system resolves its problems not simply by adapting itself through modifying its relationship to its milieu, but rather through a process of self-modification in which it creates new structures that mediate its connection with the environment.' Hugh P. Thomas, loc. cit.
10. Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View*. London: Verso, 2006, 150-200.

the notion of artifice as a practice situated between design, engineering and programming: life becomes more 'artificial' by being understood to be both engineered and programmable, which raises an interesting prospect and may even hold out a promise: namely, the possibility that art will become more life-like (in the sense of emulating reproduction, generation, replication, mutation, chance and contingency), in order to remain 'art'. This is what I meant by my speculation that art and life might be about to change places, under the condition of their mutual, outside determinations.

Consider a similar situation in the area of knowledge production and cultural memory: the post-human perspective implies the notion of a self-organizing intelligence, of a bottom-up aggregation of knowledge, whether in the form of 'tacit knowledge', smart mobs or 'swarm intelligence'. With the Internet an everyday reality, these concepts, which had previously been mostly in the realm of the speculative endeavour of experts ('six degrees of separation') became a practical reality: for instance, the wiki-principle of user-generated and user-regulated content, most notably in the form of a summary of knowledge on a wide range of topics – assembled on the Wikipedia sites, and with links to all kinds of specialized sources of knowledge and reference – gave hundreds of thousands of people their first experience of the practical value of the internet to their lives, in the aggregation and access of information and knowledge. And yet, voices that question the efficiency and feasibility of this 'bubble-up' or 'bubble-sort' method of acquiring, adjudicating and policing knowledge have become quite loud in recent times, and not only from those quarters who might be suspected of having their own motives in retaining the '*ancien regime*' privileges of monopolies and titles. Jaron Lanier, himself once a guru and hacker-hero of the first Internet generation, has spoken out against what he calls 'digital Maoism', by which he specifically targets Wikipedia and other 'creative commons' initiatives.¹¹ And we could all contribute anecdotes that prove how unreliable a Google search can be, not to mention how dependent we still are on the fast eroding standards of investigative journalism, when we want to know what is 'really' going on in the world.

Human-Machine Systems: Instability and Fallibility as Evolutionary Advantages

Does the same sense of de-professionalization haunt the sphere of art and aesthetic production? If the principles of art and life coalesce or converge around replication and repetition, self-regulation and aggregation, what kind of an avant-garde can make its home on the Internet? In short: Can an avant-garde be a swarm phenomenon, or vice versa, can a 'smart mob' or 'the hive mind' become avant-garde?

In order to answer this question, I propose to conduct an experiment. The aim of this experiment is to test the very hypothesis I am starting with, namely that replication and copy, 'accident' and contingency, are generating life-like processes and cycles in the sphere of the media and media-art, which it is worth trying to understand in their own dynamics, as well as in their wider implications: in this case, how they impact, or might be made productive for, the self-understanding of a contemporary avant-garde. My contribution, in the first instance, is thus aimed at a conceptual clarification and a terminological shift, whereby part of our

11. Jaron Lanier, 'Digital Maoism', *Edge Third Culture*, http://www.edge.org/3rd_culture/lanier06/lanier06_index.html

common and current vocabulary derived from modernism and postmodernism, can be re-tooled and updated, in light of bio-politics and the post-human,¹² while also taking account of more specific media phenomena and media applications, such as the Internet, search engines and so-called social networking.

Besides heteronomy, to which I shall return, I want to introduce another concept, which appears in my title: that of 'constructive instability'. Its engineering provenance has been overlaid by a neo-con political usage, for instance, by Condoleezza Rice when she called the deaths among the civilian population and the resulting chaos during the Lebanon-Israel war in the summer of 2006 the consequence of 'constructive instability'. What draws me to constructive instability is not the implicit cynicism of Rice or the Bush Administration's use of the term, but the idea that 'failure' has a place in the narratives of adaptive, 'dynamic' or emergent situations, for one of the points often made about self-regulatory systems is that they are inherently unstable. As indicated, very real concerns exist about the kind of agency and control handed over by individuals and collectives, when 'intelligent systems' run so much of everyday life, in the areas of medicine and government, in the conduct of modern warfare and of financial transactions. Information systems such as they proliferate today are considerably more fallible than is usually realized, as can be seen from electricity power-station failures, the gridlock chaos that ensues when in a large city the traffic lights are down, or the knock-on effects that come from a local disturbance in the international air-traffic systems. Of course, the internet was conceived and built precisely in order to minimize such domino-effects typical of linear or top-down forms of communication and exchange, but volatility on the stock-exchange or damage to underwater cables highlight that even the famed package distribution system is neither invulnerable nor risk- and accident-proof.

Mindful of this fragility and fallibility of both humans and machines, I want to posit the structural value of factoring in 'failure': not as a negative feature that needs to be eliminated, but as the very point where potential failure can be seen to be productive. A specific example of such productivity, or rather where potential failure is a special engineering feature are some of the USA's advanced fighter planes such as the X-29, which were designed in such an aerodynamically unstable fashion that not only could they not be piloted by humans alone (which of course is to a lesser extent already true of many commercial transatlantic airlines or jumbo jets): they became extremely dangerous at most normal aircraft speeds: 'In the early 1980s, the United States Air force was testing an experimental fighter called the X-29. The unusual feature of this aircraft was that its wings were swept forward rather than back. This configuration is aerodynamically unstable so the plane required a triply redundant computer monitoring system that checked the plane's motion 40 times per second and made constant

12. Terms such as pastiche, parody, palimpsest, belonging to the vocabulary of post-modernism, but also such classically modernist terms as reflexivity, self-reflexivity and mise-en-abyme – with their provenance in literature and fine arts – are widely felt to no longer possess the relevant precision for grasping the present situation; but I also suspect that a number of more recent coinages, such as appropriation or remediation, or the terms beginning with trans-: translation, transposition, trans-national – not to speak of multi-mediality, inter-mediality, hybridity or in-between-ness – may also have a hard time surviving, when applied to contemporary media phenomena.

control adjustments necessary to keep it on course. If this system were to fail for even one-quarter of a second, the X-29 would have tumbled out of control. The advantage gained was manoeuvrability. While an ordinary fighter with swept-back wings requires energy to change course, the X-29 would simply 'fall' in the direction indicated. Although this particular plane was never produced, aircraft designers are well aware of the trade-off between stability and manoeuvrability. Fighter planes today are, by design, very close to being unstable, while passenger planes are designed for stability'.¹³ In other words, there are cases when the principle of instability and volatility, and indeed, fallibility is built into human-machine systems right from the start: not a design fault, but specially engineered as a design advantage: 'constructive instability' in other words, as a positive case of double heteronomy.

Put differently, in good European fashion, I want to write the concept of failure into this narrative of post-human hybridization between art and life, art and artifice, artificial intelligence and artificial life, between Life and life. But it is a concept of failure not exclusively owed to Kafka, Beckett or Lacan, and instead, also includes the performative dimension one has come to associate with postmodernism (in questions of gender, speech acts and ethics) as much as with high-tech products, such as automobiles (where it refers to the quality or manner of functioning). I call it by its German (Freudian) term: *Fehl-Leistung*, which means failure of performance, but also performance of failure, and for which, in shorthand, I have elsewhere used the neologism coined by James Strachey in his translation of the text of Freud, namely 'parapraxis': the Freudian slip.¹⁴ A first provisional definition of an avant-garde for the 21st century – especially in the era of the man-machine symbiosis – would be that it will need to come to terms with the principle of 'constructive instability' and develop a poetics of parapraxis, or of 'performed failure'.

Performed Failure: Narratives of Collapse, Or: in the Destructive Element Immerse

How might such a poetics of performed failure look like, if it is to address both the internal principle of constructive instability and the external condition of heteronomy? In the circumscribed field that I started with – namely the necessary triangulation of the avant-garde, of 'life' and of media technology – I find it in the kinds of transfers that these three forces exert upon each other when placed against the now obligatory horizon of globalisation, embodied in the Internet, where terms like linear change, influence and transformation are increasingly inappropriate, but where the postmodern vocabulary of appropriation, pastiche, remediation also has less and less traction, while the notions of 'resistance', 'critique', 'opposition' seem unable to mobilize a viable response.

13. Burton Vorhees, 'Virtual Stability: A Principle of Complex Systems' http://necci.org/events/iccs/2002/Mo14_Vorhees.pdf

14. I have reconstructed (or perhaps merely constructed) a performativity of significant failure in a number of American films, including mainstream Hollywood films, such as *Forrest Gump* or *Saving Private Ryan*, and of ways of accounting for the peculiar performativity of a film like *Pulp Fiction*, the iconic movie of the 1990s, and more recently the kind of performativity of ontological doubt in movies like *The Sixth Sense*, *Donnie Darko* or *The Others*. See Thomas Elsaesser, *Melodrama and Trauma: Modes of Cultural Memory*. New York: Routledge, 2008.

The centre of gravity for the notion of 'constructive instability' as a systemically precarious equilibrium on the Internet will be the social networking and user-generated content websites, one of the most commented-upon features of what has come to be known as the dynamic web or Web 2.0.¹⁵ Within the Web 2.0 environment, the most relevant to my experiment is the combination of user-generated content sites, such as Flickr, YouTube, social network websites, like MySpace, Facebook, with data-mining marketing giants like Amazon, e-Bay and Google, as well as knowledge-aggregating sites, such as Wikipedia or the Internet Movie Database.

Among these websites, I have chosen the one most closely associated with what has come to be known as 'convergence culture' (a term introduced by Henry Jenkins),¹⁶ namely YouTube, the video-sharing site that was purchased by Google in 2006. Utilizing what I understand to be the underlying structure and dynamics of these sites, i.e. a combination of search terms or 'tags', the built-in aggregation and sorting mechanisms as well as 'cut & paste', I began by following up the trail of a link sent to me in an email to a site on YouTube, featuring a two-minute advertisement. In 2003 this ad had 'made history' not only because its fame and success proved the power of the internet as a 'window of attention' for advertisers, but also because its production values – around six million dollars for these two minutes – put it squarely in the Hollywood league of blockbusters. It also demonstrates the ambivalence of the idea of *collapse*, when understood as a bipolar principle of destruction and creation, with moments in-between: of transition, of balance, of chain-reactions. Or – to use a favourite term of urbanists and sociologists, as well as of ecologists and climatologists: of 'tipping points' (more on this, below).

The Honda Cog

The advertisement is for the Honda Accord, and is generally known as the 'Honda Cog'. It generated, besides a huge amount of Internet traffic, also serious coverage in the press, with articles in *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, and on the BBC. In short, it had a substantial cross-over effect into the traditional media as well, and became, in fact, an 'urban legend'. Such is its reputation and recognition factors that it has even spawned a Monty Pythonesque parody.

Looking at the original advertisement more closely, one notes that the setting is clearly intended to connote a gallery space: white walls, wooden parquet floor, no windows, controlled

15. Web 2.0 can be identified by seven categories (according to Sara Bentley, BBC Radio), all of which can be summarized as follows: rather than content being created by a web site, and users consuming this information, it is the users who create and monitor the content of a website: 1. Social networks (MySpace, Facebook) targeting exact community connections; 360 degree networks on your interests 'anytime all the time'; sms into the social network about where you are and then meet your friends in a city (Dodgeball) 2. Social media (community media news, blogs, podcasts): Media news (OMyNews) 3. Webware (Linux, applications shared, creative commons, freeware): Jabber Software Foundation 4. Aggregators (file contents, filtering one particular subject) 5. Mash-Ups (add features to other sites) 6. Internet TV (YouTube, Daily Motion, U-Motion) 7. Convergence and file-sharing websites (Bit-Torrent, Limewire).

16. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

light-sources. It alludes in a playful fashion to the work of several canonical artists of the 20th century, notably in the field of sculpture and installation (Alberto Giacometti, Alexander Calder, Jean Tinguely, Carl André: the use of the 'floor', as opposed to the wall, as display area, for instance).

It also seems very fitting that a Japanese car maker should have commissioned this ad, for it was Japan that first showed Europe and the US how to make cars with robots, how to reduce costs by just-in-time delivery: in short, it was Japanese auto firms that pioneered several of the principles we now lump together under the term 'post-Fordism', but which, on this analysis, could just as well be called 'Toyota-ism' (or 'Honda-ism'). What we see, then, is the ironic mise-en-scene of a meta-mechanic assembly line which says 'look: no hands! Pure magic' or (as the Honda slogan has it) 'the power of dreams' (alluding to the oneiric life of objects so beloved by the surrealists).

The links on YouTube around the 'Honda Cog' quickly lead to an extract of a 'making of' video which gives an extensive account of the immense effort that went into the production of such an effortless and yet inevitable concatenations of collapsing moments and obedient parts. The 'making-of' video ends up celebrating in the language of cinema our fascination with the engineering marvels that are contemporary automobiles, but it also takes on the generic features of nature documentary, about the patience it takes to 'train animals' ('our friends, the [car] parts'), in order for them to perform for humans.

The director of the *Honda Cog*, Antoine Bardou-Jacquet is a well-known filmmaker of high concept ads and music videos, working in both France and Britain, and a good friend of Michel Gondry.¹⁷ His agency highlights him on their website ('Since signing to Partizan in 2000, Antoine Bardou-Jacquet's work has consistently wowed the crowds') and Partizan also features some of his clips, among them, another car commercial for Peugeot.¹⁸

But back to the *Honda Cog*; besides the sly allusions to Japan, there is the voice at the end: I associated it immediately with Sean Connery and James Bond (and so did the users of YouTube). Very soon I discovered tags that led from the Honda Accord to the Aston Martin DB 5, Bond's famous car; the link immediately connected the 'life' of the parts of the Honda Accord to the Aston Martin's gadgets, and especially those fabulous demonstrations given at the modifications workshop in the belly of the MI 5 headquarters by the immortal engineer-inventor Q, played by Desmond Llewelyn, notably in *Goldfinger* (1964). Another link

17. Antoine Bardou-Jacquet signed to Partizan Midi Minuit in 2000. He had previously studied graphic design in Paris before setting up his own graphic design company, situated within the same offices as his close friends from Solid (an independent record company that is the centre of the French electronic music scene with such artists as Alex Gopher and Etienne de Crecy). Antoine designed album covers and logos and soon began exploring the idea of using type in a representational and more meaningful way than just as words. The album cover for Demon was created with this idea in mind and Antoine quickly built-up the process and idea of translating a static image with type rather than illustration to moving film.

18. http://www.partizanlab.com/partizanlab/commercials/?antoine_bardou_jacquet

brought me to a French mash-up of this scene, which gives it a quite different sub-text and cultural atmosphere: references are now to Christopher Lambert, Bob Marley, the Rastafarians, Californian beach culture and air lift suspension, Rizzla cigarette paper, rolled joints, all played out against intense homophobic/homo-erotic banter between Q and Bond.

The gruff boffin-engineer from MI5 who 'never jokes about his work', but visibly delights in his playful as well as lethal modifications, immediately associates another obvious father also of the *Honda Cog*: Rube Goldberg, already flagged by several YouTube=YouRube links. The name Rube Goldberg (1883-1970) stands for a kind of machine that does simple or useless tasks in an especially complicated, ingenious or roundabout way, utilizing the mechanisms of traction and transmission, but in a manner that makes them meta-mechanic (reminiscent of both Marcel Duchamp and Charles Chaplin).

Der Lauf der Dinge

However, the tag line of the *Honda Cog* ('isn't it nice when things just work') nods-and-winks not only at the knowing cognoscenti (of modern art, James Bond films or of Margaret Thatcher's first successful political campaign in 1979). It also anticipates possible legal problems (which did indeed arise), by acknowledging (not so obliquely) where and from whom the makers had 'appropriated' the basic idea for the ad: not from a London gallery, nor from a billboard, but from the Kassel documenta of 1987. There, one of the most widely celebrated art-pieces was a half-hour video, entitled 'Der Lauf der Dinge' literally 'the course of things' (generally translated as *The way things go*, but I think better rendered, exploiting the possibility of a bilingual pun, as the translation/ transition from 'der Lauf der Dinge' to 'the life of things'). Its authors are two Swiss artists, Peter Fischli & David Weis, who have been working together since the early 1970s. This tape was their international breakthrough. *Der Lauf der Dinge* follows the domino effect of a series of simple objects such as string, garbage bags, soap, Styrofoam cups, rubber tires, plastic pails, balloons, and mattresses; when combined with fire, air (gas), water and gravity, these objects form a hypnotic chain of kinetic energy that disturbs and delights the viewer with its chaotic potential and precise timing.

When I first saw *Der Lauf der Dinge* in Kassel, it had given me a quite regressive delight in seeing things enchain, knock-on and interact with each other, in a sheer endless, self-generated and self-propelled but carefully crafted, staged sequence, whose anxiously anticipated increments of disasters, collapses, explosions and conflagrations were matched by the infinite patience and delicacy with which each mini-event was thought up and set up, each one enacting often quite literally a precarious balance, in which the possibility of failure is palpably and positively inscribed.

But for an art-historically trained eye, the rough, para-industrial set-up, the processes put in motion as well as the materials used inevitably recall many of the key elements of modern sculpture, conceptual art and other avant-garde practices, notably but not only from the post-WW II period: the concern for balance and suspension recalls Suprematism and Constructivism; assemblage art (from the late 1940s) and kinetic art (from the 1950s and 60s) are evoked, while trash objects, garbage and recycled materials remind one of the New Realism and Pop. Finally, the idea of small wasted energies made useful is an homage to

Marcel Duchamp, while the energies inherent in apparently inert matter allude to the work of Carl André, not forgetting the macho-engineering skills of Richard Serra, combined with the action paintings – here duly automated and pre-programmed – reminiscent of Jackson Pollock.¹⁹

Precarious Balances: Tipping Points, Montage Effects and Long Takes

But there is another way to view and describe the Fischli & Weiss' installation, which takes it out of art-history and the avant-garde context, and instead, brings it closer to the world of technology, physics (gravity), chemistry (chemical reaction) and even evolutionary biology. Its obsession with principles of concatenation and repetition, of controlled contingency and simple processes leading to complex effects, its invocation of the four elements and their micro- as well as macro- scale interactions not only give us a 'scientific' view on the world, but one inflected by 'chaos-theory': leading at one end to 'emergence', and at the other, progressing inexorably in the direction of entropy, the irreversible winding down of heat and energy. Its meta-mechanics are thus intimately related to our second concern: that of the perceived need to redefine what we understand by life: the new 'life forms' and the new 'life-sciences'. At the same time, the overarching principle – be it cybernetic, ecological, or aesthetic – organizing the series into a flow of continuous interruptions is that of the 'tipping point', a metaphor for sudden change first introduced by Morton Grodzins in 1960, then used by sociologists, such as Thomas Schelling (for explaining demographic changes in mixed-race neighbourhoods), before becoming more generally familiar in urbanist studies (used by Saskia Sassen, for instance, in her analysis of global cities), and finally popularized by mass-psychologists and trend-analysts such as Malcolm Gladwell, in his best-seller by that name.²⁰

While initially referring to incremental changes once a certain threshold has been reached, the concept of the tipping point is now applied to any process (chemical, sociological, envi-

19. 'Mit 'Der Lauf der Dinge' wird der Lauf der Dinge auf der Ebene der materiellen Phänomene, der Geschichte der Skulptur, der Vermittlung über den Film oder das Video und der Beziehungen zur Kultur und Infrastruktur der Kunst beleuchtet. Die vergängliche Installation baut auf einem architektonisch strukturiertem Weg auf. Sie ist mit physikalischen Prinzipien (statisches Gleichgewicht, Gewicht usw.) und chemischen Produkten ausgerüstet, die darauf warten, durch Kombination erschüttert bzw. entzündet zu werden. Auch die Eigenschaften von Luft (Luftballons, die man zum Zerplatzen bringt), Wasser (Behälter, die man umkippt) und von Feuer (angezündete Kerzen) spielen eine Rolle. Die räumliche und zeitliche Koordinierung ist präzise und intelligent, so dass das Verdrehen eines in einer gewissen Höhe befestigten Müllbeutels den ersten Impuls für eine Abfolge spielerischer Katastrophen gibt (das Herunterfallen von Objekten, das Verspritzen von Flüssigkeit usw.) Die Ursachen und Folgen dieses Chaos, der Verlauf und die Materialien werden gezeigt und faszinieren den Zuschauer. Diese explizite Konstruktion unterstreicht eine wissenschaftliche Sichtweise der Welt und erzeugt die Metapher einer erforschten Welt', – Thérèse Beyler.

20. Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, New York: Little Brown, 2000. Ian Bremmer, whose Eurasia Group advises on political risk, sums up the challenge in a simple graphic that is this year's tipping point – the 'J Curve', which outlines 'how to turn authoritarian regimes into stable, open democracies'. See Ian Bremmer, *The J Curve: A New Way to Understand Why Nations Rise and Fall*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005.

ronmental, etc.) for which, beyond a certain point, its rate of change increases dramatically. What is relevant about this metaphor for my experiment is, of course, its multi-dimensionality and multi-functional semantics. Besides the fact that it foregrounds scale, and that it works, when analyzed mathematically, according to the cybernetic principle of 'positive feedback', it implicitly also refers to a cognitive moment of collapse (of categories, of modes, and of perceptual registers), comparable to 'Gestalt-switches' or Ludwig Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit rebus picture. It also brings to mind the (literary) conceit of stillness and poise in a field of (destructive) energy (eye of the cyclone, crest of the wave), and it obliges us to align the concept of equilibrium with a whole range of other, more contested aspects of existence, from mathematical equations to Greimas' semiotic square, from the 'Nash equilibrium' as used in game theory and economics, to stochastic systems in general, not without memories of Hegelian transformation or sublation (*Aufhebung, Umschlag*) of quantity into qualitative change.

And yet, *Der Lauf der Dinge* is unthinkable without current media-technologies and especially the almost viral proliferation of cinema: from the movie house to the home entertainment centre, from the big screen to the portable phone, from the television in the home to the monitor in offices and airports, from surveillance control centres to electronic billboards, from portable laptops to museums and art galleries. A product of the latter, Fischli & Weiss' appearance at the documenta in 1987 was an early harbinger of a trend that found itself consolidated ten years later, in Catherine David's documenta X (1997), now remembered for giving many well-known filmmakers (Chantal Akerman, Jean Luc Godard, Harun Farocki, Sally Potter) their cross-over point from avant-garde cinema to installation art, while also encouraging visual artists to move into film (William Kentridge, Pierre Huyghe, Johan Grimont).

Without exploring this topic here further, it is nonetheless crucial to my argument that both the *Honda Cog* and the tape of *Der Lauf der Dinge* are the work of bona fide filmmakers. I already highlighted this in my comments on the *Honda Cog*, but it is worth pointing out that *Der Lauf der Dinge* only exists as a tape: it is not the filmic record of a performance of machinic self-destruction, such as Tingeley staged them in New York in the 1960s, or the Fluxus Happenings of Wolf Vorstell and the Vienna Actionists, but an event staged specifically for the camera. The mise-en-scene in each case is that of an auteur-director, who decides exactly where to place the camera, when move it, how to frame and reframe each action and its (con-)sequence. An entire half-century of film theory comes alive in these mini-films with maxi-budgets, around the 'long take' and 'montage', between 'staging in depth' and 'cutting in the camera'. While some 'invisible edits' are discernable, long take classic continuity editing is the deliberate option in both pieces, as calculated as Orson Welles' opening tracking shot in *Touch of Evil* (famously pastiched in Robert Altman's *The Player*), or the bravura zoom in Michael Snow's *Wavelength*.

In both works one also notes a studied anachronism, a retrospective temporal deferral at work. This has two aspects: one concerns their artistic technique, the other their (meta-) physics. Regarding technique, the *Honda Cog* team are proud to certify in the 'Making of' video (indeed it is the condition of their success) that they engineered this extraordinary concatenation 'for real' and not with the aid of digital effects, which for the aesthetic they

are committed to would have amounted to 'cheating'.²¹ And yet, by 2003 digital effects had already become the norm in advertising, so that their decision is a deliberate self-restriction such as one knows it from minimalism or concept art at the highpoint of Modernism. Likewise, Fischli & Weiss produced their tape at around the time when artists were seriously considering their response to the new media technologies of video compositing and digital editing. Their work is clearly a manifesto in favour of materiality and indexicality, an ironic finger pointed at the digital to come, and taking a stand in the heated debate about the loss of indexicality in the post-photographic age.

The second studied anachronism concerns the physics used in both works, and the way it figures causality. Neither *Roadrunner* gravity-defying antics here, nor the oneiric dream logic of a Salvador Dali or Hans Richter film sequence. Causality in these films operates at the familiarly middle-level and within human proportions. Rooted in Newtonian physics, the makers celebrate a visible, tangible world, fast disappearing into invisibility at both ends of the scale (at the macro-astronomic as well as at the micro-sub-atomic level), but also a linear causality vanishing in the media in which we encounter their work: the Internet and YouTube are, precisely, non-linear and rhizomatic. The 'old physics' on display are in the case of the Honda Cog highly stylized and deliberately tweaked for humorous effect, while in *Der Lauf der Dinge* the concatenation of build-ups and disasters has also a more sombre, cosmic dimension, as if we were invited to be once more present at the moment of the 'Big Bang', i.e. the birth of our own physical universe.

Around the World in Eighty Clicks

Fischli & Weiss have as their motto: *Am schönsten ist das Gleichgewicht, kurz bevor's zusammenbricht* (balance is most beautiful just at the point when it is about to collapse). While clearly applying to their work as a whole,²² this aesthetics of the tipping point also encapsulates the main challenge that my experiment with tagging and user-generated links on Internet sites such as YouTube poses. For at this juncture in my test, the question arose: where would this semantic knot or node around constructive instability and the performativity of failure take me, once I had chosen the Honda Cog and *Der Lauf der Dinge* as my epicentres, once 'collapse', 'concatenation' and 'chain reactions' were my search criteria, and once YouTube's tag-clouds circumscribed and defined my self-imposed constraints? One answer was: nowhere at all; a second one: all around the world; and a third answer would be: into the philosophical recesses of what it means to be 'singular-plural' against a horizon of incremental changes of scale.

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21. 'In 2003, Antoine [Bardou-Jacquet] directed the internationally acclaimed and multi award winning Honda 'Cog' commercial for London's Weiden & Kennedy. It is a 2 minute commercial showing Honda parts bumping into each other in a chain reaction. It took months of meticulous planning and trial and error, with a four day shoot at the end. It was shot in two takes and was all done for real. It was a victory for patience and passion! It first caused a stir running throughout the entire commercial break during the Grand Prix and went on to win a Gold Lion at Cannes, Best commercial and Gold at BTAA and a Gold Pencil at D&AD to name but a few.' Partizan website.
22. As demonstrated, for instance, by their series *Equilibres - Quiet Afternoon* (1984), on show in the Fischli & Weiss 'Flowers & Questions' retrospective at the Tate Modern in London Oct 2006- Jan 2007).

Nowhere at all: following the YouTube tags puts one on a cusp, precariously balanced and perilously poised over an abyss: of hundreds, if not thousands of similar or even the same videos, commented on and cross-referenced to yet more of the same and the similar, plunging one on a serendipitous descent into chaos. In Foucault's epistemic terms, the Internet is 'pre-modern' in its regime of representation: resemblance rules, but unlike the Great Chain of Being rising to God, this concatenation extracts the terrible price that everything looks like everything else, precipitating a Fall into the Hell of eternal in-difference and infinite repetition.

All over the world: searching the *Honda Cog* and *The Way Things Go* on the Internet and YouTube also started off several other chain reactions, which opened up many wholly unexpected avenues, in a wonderful efflorescence of rhizomatic profusion, beckoning in all directions and sending one on a most wonderful journey of discovery, more stupendous than Faust and Mephisto on their Magic Carpet in F.W. Murnau's *Faust*, and more recursive, reflexive and self-referential than the Marx Brothers' *Duck Soup* or Buñuel's *The Phantom of Liberty*. But it also took me to many different places: to Cairo in Egypt and Ohio in the US, to Groningen in the Netherlands and Yokohama in Japan, to Manhattan and to Hamburg, to Purdue, Indiana and to a science lab in Utrecht, to teenagers in Germany and an artist in a New York loft, to a gallery in Tokyo and a television studio in Paris. Not all of these journeys or forking paths can be retraced here, so for convenience's sake, I have sorted and bundled some of them into clusters, and allowed the clusters to become small 'cluster-bombs', ignited and radiating outwards from the *Honda Cog* and *Der Lauf der Dinge*.

Cluster 'Rube Goldberg'

That the tags from Fischli & Weiss should quickly bring one to Rube Goldberg was to be expected. But little did I suspect that 'out there', the idea of building such elaborate mechanical contraptions serving a very simple purpose, has an enormous following, and that several countries, including Germany and the US, hold annual Rube Goldberg conventions, while trials, test-runs and rehearsals of their (usually imperfect) functioning take place in high-school workshops or in large public halls, but are most often videoed in the proverbial Dad's garage in New England, or on the little brother's bedroom floor in a Cairo apartment. With the camcorder always at the ready, geniuses of little more than eight or ten years of age, try out how to fill a cup of coke from bottle catapulted down a chute by a mouse-trap snapping tight, or show us how to use the ringer on their mobile phone to set off a chain reaction that switches on the radio. At a major Rube Goldberg convention organized by Purdue University among engineering graduates from all over the US, the task was to squeeze fresh orange juice using a minimum of twelve different mechanical, self-propelling steps.

Cluster 'Pythagoras Switch'

From the Rube Goldberg connection it was but 'one degree of separation' that led – 'laterally' but also by the simple addition of an adjective in one of the user comments – in an apparently quite different direction. The unlikely combination 'Japanese Rube Goldberg' landed me among a cluster of videos from a Tokyo-based educational television programme, called '*pitagora suicchi?*'. This is the Japanese pronunciation of 'Pythagoras Switch', and is aimed at children. It shows simple, but ingenious combinations of everyday

objects (tea-kettles, books, pencils, rubber bands, steel tape measures, chinaware spoons) aligned in such a way as to allow one or several small balls (or coloured marbles) to travel in a circuitous but downward motion. Subjecting the ball to the laws of gravity (Newtonian, for sure), the objects create intricate obstacles, which interrupt but cannot finally stop the ball's downward trajectory across balancing mechanisms of suspension, reversal, dispersion, and through levers, switches and gates that open up unexpected detours, provide surprising side-effects and cause delightful distractions. The journeys always end with a tiny flourish, a point of recursiveness and self-referentiality: signalled by the moment when the ball falls into a receptacle or hits a mini-gong, it confirms the identity of the show and plays a maddeningly addictive jingle. A Pythagoras Switch is a minimalist exercise in creating closure out of indeterminacy, miraculously conjoining the pleasures of free play with the strict rules of physics.

Why is it called Pythagoras Switch? Nobody seems to know, and on the NHK website the makers merely hint at 'the Eureka-experience' that children are supposed to have, thanks to a sort of category switch: 'Pythagoras Switch' wants to help kids have that moment of A-HA! We want to raise thinking about thinking, to flip that epiphany switch in every child'. Granted that these short performances do indeed flip a switch, I nevertheless tend to think of the name 'Pythagoras' as a misnomer and even a *parapraxis*, a *performance of failure*: namely, not only is 'Eureka, [I have found (it)]' usually attributed to Archimedes (and not Pythagoras), but it should really also be called the Archimedean switch for another reason. After all, the principle of *pitagora suicchi* resembles the famous fulcrum associated with Archimedes' name: the single point of equipoise that he said could lift the universe from its hinges. But the fact that it is called Pythagoras leads one in other no less intriguing directions: to geometry and to Euclidean solids, as well as to the so-called Pseudo-Pythagoreans, the first important Gnostics of the ancient world, who survived right into the Middle Ages and beyond, and whose main analysis of the universe was in terms of the magic of numbers and the mysteries of mathematics. Pythagoras would have been a fitting grandfather of the prodigious power of algorithms, and thus the appropriate patron saint not so much for the Pythagoras Switch and instead for the sort- and cluster-algorithms of YouTube that made me discover *pitagora suicchi* in the first place, right next to Rube Goldberg.

Cluster 'Domino Toppling' & Celebrity TV: Oriental(ist) Excess

If the Pythagoras Switch is minimalist and haiku-like, in its elegant economy and delicate epiphanies, a close cousin of the Pythagoras Switch, by contrast, is all on the side of excess, the incremental and of the nearly 'getting out of hand': I am referring to that other major Japanese pastime, having to do with knock-on effects, namely 'Domino toppling'. Here, too, Japanese television is in the forefront, since it appears to stage regular domino telethons, such as the one I happened to hit upon with another mouse-click, and which featured the entire inventory of Dewi Sukarno, a notoriously rich and flamboyant society-lady and television personality (who models herself on Imelda Marcos, not least by owning racks and racks of shoes). All her belongings – fur coats, shoes, jewellery, books, furniture, etc. – are lined up so as to topple and fall on each other in a descending cascade of conspicuous consumption and commodity fetishism from the top floor of her villa to the basement and out to the swimming pool.

Another of these televised Japanese shows on YouTube features a more high-tech contraption, where the steel ball's trajectory is only one phase, releasing other mechanical agents and setting off further reactions, including small explosions in the manner of Fischli & Weiss, but also gravity-defying underwater action in goldfish bowls. The show is commented on by experts, who fire up and encourage the performing parts, as if they are players in a competitive sports event, like a sack race or a steeple-chase, and one of the videos in particular combines the conceptual grace of '*pitagora soichii*' with the rumbunctiousness of Sumo-wrestling, while serving a typically Rube Goldberg purpose, namely to make a simple task – in this case to serve a bowl of Ramen noodles with an egg on top – very complicated and intricate indeed. Once again, it is worth noting the aesthetic that oscillates between the cinematic and the televisual: while the Pythagoras switch programme prefers long takes, with a camera that pans and reframes rather than cuts, the Japanese Rube Goldberg contest and the Domino telethon, by contrast, favour the typical action replays of televised sports events, but with their spoken commentary are also reminiscent of the '*benshi*' tradition of silent cinema, and even re-invent the action overlap from the very first films.

The domino toppling contests also brought home another lesson of globalisation: 'don't follow the flag, follow the tag'. Just as commodities, trade and labour no longer 'respect' the boundaries of the nation state, so the tags 'chain reaction' or 'domino telethon' easily cross borders and even continents. The world of domino toppling, for instance, also has an annual championship, the 'Domino Day', which made the Netherlands a mere click away from Tokyo. For it seems that for several years now (in alternation with the South Koreans), the Dutch have been world champions and holders of the Guinness record for toppling the largest number of dominoes in one go: 4, 079 381 million of them, to be exact, at the 2006 world championship, held on Nov 27, 2006 in Groningen, on the theme of 'Music in Motion' designed by the Weijers Brothers Domino Production Company and televised by Endemol. As the dominoes fell, they formed an ever-changing kaleidoscope of images that fitted the year's theme. Music, magnitudes and motion were all in the service of an 'image', comparable to the formations one sees at the opening ceremonies of Olympic Games or to the flag-waving girls in North Korea, whose assembled multitudes make up a gigantic portrait of their Dear Leader.

Between Epiphany and Entropy

Perhaps it is fitting to interrupt this 'tour of the YouTube world' with an 'image', and one of totalitarian domination. While multitudes (of dominoes or of young women) forming a recognizable likeness highlight the coercive, normative power of such software as operates the Internet at the level of the algorithms, the codes and protocols, mostly hidden from view and in any case incomprehensible to the ordinary user, the idea of an image reminds us of the fact that in the man-machine symbiosis predicted with such apparent equanimity by the post-human, two very different kinds of system are expected to communicate with each other, once more 'heteronomous' in their doubly implicated and mutually determining relation of constraint and possibility. For this 'image' is nothing but the filter, membrane or user-friendly face – the 'interface', in short – between stupid but infinitely patient (and performative) machines, running on programmes relayed to gates and switches (electric-electronic dominoes, one might say), and intelligent but increasingly impatient (as well as accident-prone) humans, requiring visual representations that provide a sense of recogni-

tion and self-presence, relayed through words, sound and above all: images. The loops would seem to be closed.

But here, then, is the first paradox: YouTube, as indicated, is a user generated content site, with a high degree of automation, where nonetheless a certain structured contingency obtains, as indicated by the remarkably coherent clusters I was able to extract via the tags attached to the videos. The structured contingency is, then, strongly informed and shaped by mathematics, via its programming architecture and design, as well as its search and sort algorithms. At the same time, it seems to mimic certain primitive forms of life, comparable to the swarms and clusters of bacteria (such as in yeast, algae, slime mould or other 'emergent' life-forms), not least because what exists on YouTube is constantly growing, changing and adapting (at a rate of some 60.000 a day, with almost as many removed because they infringe someone's copyright). The site, traversed by a semantic traveller like myself, presents the impression of an organism, alive and in full evolution, where things mutate, accumulate, disperse, die and re-emerge.

This then, would be the second paradox: what the 'stupid' machine and the 'intelligent' tags, supplied by users, produce when thus 'interfaced' is far from either trivial or meaningless. Among the tide-pools of amoebic life, I have encountered a most varied and interesting cast of characters: some known by name, such as 'Rube Goldberg', 'Pythagoras', 'James Bond', 'Dewi Sukarno'; others known because they sign their work: Antoine Bourdou-Jacques, Fischli & Weiss, Tim Fort, Sato Masahiko, the Wijers Brothers; many more merely present themselves to the camera in low-res home-made videos. Thanks to all of them, I have found on YouTube ways of knowing and ways of being that are ludic and reflexive, educational and participatory, empowering and humbling, in short: marking an unusually soft dividing line between creative design and hard-core engineering, art and technology, singularity and repetition: preconditions if one wants to come to an understanding of the possibility of new 'life-forms' emerging at one of the sites of the post-human: the electronic world of algorithms and statistics, of contingency, constraint and collapse, in short: of constructive instability and performative failure, in a world divided, but also held together by Ranciere's 'double heteronomy'.

This presents the third paradox: anyone conducting this kind of research soon realizes there is another downside to the upside, which I have hinted at all along. On the one hand, a site like YouTube can be addictive, as one video drags you along to another. Yet after an hour or so, one realizes on what fine a line one has to balance to keep one's sanity, between the joy of discovering the unexpected, the marvellous and occasionally even the miraculous, and the rapid descent into an equally palpable anxiety, staring into the void of a sheer bottomless amount of videos, with their proliferation of images, their banality or obscenity in sounds and commentary. Right next to the euphoria and the epiphany, then, there is the heat-death of meaning, the ennui of repetition and of endless distraction: in short, the relentless progress of entropy that begins to suck out and drain away all life. The point of the exercise is thus not one or the other, not cherry-picking the gems like the Hondo Cog or *The Way Things Go* and skipping the rest, but to sense the trembling tightrope at all times, to remain suspended between epiphany and entropy: *am schönsten ist das Gleichgewicht ...*

Can one detect here the outlines of a mode of being that does indeed cross back and forth between the traditional boundaries of nature and culture, of technology and biology? As far as the future of art and of knowledge is concerned: it is hard to say where to draw the line between the nerdy ingenuity of Aaron, Daniel and Tejas, the creators of a 'cell-phone to I-pod' Rube Goldberg machine of special imaginativeness, and the lunatic artistry and allusive erudition in the endeavours of a loft-genius like Tim Fort? How is one to evaluate the anti-music-video 'music-video aesthetics' of Antoine Bardou-Jacques and his team on the *Honda Cog*, compared to the certified 'documenta-to-Tate Modern' art-world status of Fischli & Weiss? And how to square the gallery work of Sato Masahiko with his Pythagoras Switches for NHK Children's' television?

What we seem to be faced with is the uncanny possibility that the avant-garde techniques of the first part of the 20th century, and the 'life' processes of the 21st century reveal important common features, across a medium, the Internet destined to disappear as a medium because of its very pervasiveness and ubiquity. It does indeed oblige us to rethink the role of art and the avant-garde, in the face not so much of technology, but in the face of 'life'. As this form of life becomes more engineered, programmed and 'made', so art - I have been arguing - may need to become more like life than life itself (as opposed to life-like) in order to survive. In the sense of the heteronymous relations with which I began, and which I re-encountered on YouTube in the recto and verso of epiphany and entropy, 'art' will be the very bearer of life, by being the guardian of life's own antinomy: what Freud called 'the death drive', at once the energy behind repetition and redundancy, as well as the moments of breakdown and interruption. It could be the same heteronomy or parallax view that makes evolutionary biologists hesitate between evolution as adaptation to environment, and evolution as that which 'progresses' through contingency and catastrophe, singling out human being by the constitutive way in which they are in-adapted to their environment. This might be yet another reason why Fischli & Weiss' performance of 'balance and collapse' has a terrifyingly 'cosmic' but also reassuringly 'comic' dimension, for it corresponds in important respects to what I now want to call 'the necessary performance of failure', at the very heart of the avant-garde as well as of 'life'. The *telos* of entropy in *Der Lauf der Dinge* reminds us of our finitude, and - held against the open horizon of the Internet whose Web 2.0 feedback loops signify unimaginable and yet palpable magnitudes - it suspends us between infinity and indefiniteness, a state only made bearable or even pleasurable, thanks to the subversive balancing act of art.

THE PRACTICE OF EVERYDAY (MEDIA) LIFE

LEV MANOVICH

From Mass Consumption to Mass Cultural Production

The explosion of video content on the web (2005-) has unleashed a new media universe. On a practical level, this universe was facilitated by free web platforms and software tools which enable people to share their media and easily access media produced by others; rapidly fallen cost for professional-quality media capture devices such as HD video cameras; and addition of video capture to mobile phones. What is important, however, is that this new universe was not simply a scaled up version of 20th century media culture. Instead, we moved from media to social media.¹ Accordingly, we can also say that we are graduated from 20th century *video/film* to early 20th century *social video*. This essay will explore the meaning of these developments.

Today 'social media' is often discussed in relation to another term 'Web 2.0' (coined by Tim O'Reilly in 2004). While Web 2.0 refers to a number of different technical, economical, and social developments, most of them are directly relevant to our question: besides *social media*, other important concepts are *user-generated content*, *long tail*, *network as platform*, *folksonomy*, *syndication*, and *mass collaboration*. I will not be summarizing here all these concepts: Wikipedia, which itself is a great example of Web 2.0, does this job better. My goal here is not to provide a detailed analysis of the social and cultural effects of Web 2.0; rather, I would like to put forward a few questions and make a few points that I have not seen expressed by others and that directly relate to video and moving image cultures on the web.

To get the discussion started, let's simply state two of the important themes of the Web 2.0 concept. Firstly, during this decade we see a gradual shift from the majority of Internet users accessing content produced by a much smaller number of professional producers to users increasingly accessing content produced by other non-professional users. Secondly, if the Web was mostly a publishing medium in the '90s, since the year 2000 it has increasingly become a communication medium. Communication between users, including conversations around user-generated content, take place through a variety of forms besides email: posts, comments, reviews, ratings, gestures and tokens, votes, links, badges, photo, and video.²

What do these trends mean for culture in general and for professional art in particular? First of all, it does not mean that every user has become a producer. According to 2007 statistics, only between 0.5 – 1.5 percent of the users of most popular social media sites (Flickr, YouTube, Wikipedia) contributed their own content. Others remained consumers of the con-

1. See Adrian Chan, *Social Media: Paradigm Shift?*, http://www.gravity7.com/paradigm_shift_1.html

2. Ibid.

tent produced by this small group. Does this imply that professionally produced content continues to dominate as the primary source from which people get their news and media? If by 'content' we mean typical twentieth century mass media - news, TV shows, narrative films and videos, computer games, literature, and music – then the answer is often in the affirmative. For instance, in 2007 only 2 blogs made it into the list of 100 most read news sources. At the same time, we see emergence of 'the long-tail' phenomenon on the net: not only the 'Top 40' but most of the content available online – including content produced by individuals – finds some appreciable audience.³ These audiences can be tiny but not 0. This is best illustrated by the following statistics: in the middle of this decade every track out of a million or so available through iTunes sold at least once in a given quarter. In other words, every track, no matter how obscure, found at least one listener. This translates into new economics of media: as researchers who have studied the long tail phenomena demonstrated, in many industries the total volume of sales generated by such low popularity items exceeds *en masse* the volume generated by the more recognisable 'Top 40'.⁴

Let us now consider another set of statistics that show that people increasingly get their information and media from social media sites. In January 2008, Wikipedia has ranked as the 9th most visited web site; Myspace was at number 6, Facebook was at 5, and MySpace was at 3. (According to the company that collects these statistics, it is more than likely that these numbers are biased towards U.S. traffic, and do not necessarily accurately represent numbers for other countries.⁵ However, the general trend towards increasing use of social media sites – global, localized, or local – can be observed in most countries.

The numbers of people participating in these social networks, sharing media, and creating 'user generated content' are astonishing – at least from the perspective of early 2008 (it is likely that in 2012 or 2018 they will look trivial in comparison to what will be happening then). MySpace: 300 million users.⁶ Figures are similarly impressive for Cyworld, a Korean site similar to MySpace: 90 percent of South Koreans in their 20s, or 25 percent of the total population of South Korea.⁷ Hi4, a leading social media site Central America: 100 million users.⁸ Facebook: 1,400,000 photo uploads daily.⁹ The number of new videos uploaded to YouTube every 24 hours (as of July 2006): 65,000.¹⁰

If these numbers are already amazing, consider a relatively new platform for media production and consumption: the mobile phone. In Early 2007, 2.2 billion people have mobile phones; by the end of the year this number is expected to be 3 billion. Obviously, today people in an

3. 'The Long Tail' was coined by Cris Anderson in 2004. See Cris Anderson, 'The Long Tail', Wired 10.12 (October 2008), <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/12.10/tail.html>

4. More 'long tail' statistics can be found in Tom Michael, 'The Long Tail of Search' (September 17, 2007), <http://www.zoekmachine-marketing-blog.com/artikels/white-paper-the-long-tail-of-search>

5. Alexa website, http://www.alexa.com/site/help/traffic_learn_more

6. Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myspace>

7. Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyworld>

8. Wikipedia, <http://www.pipl.com/statistics/social-networks/size-growth>

9. Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facebook>

10. Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Youtube>

Indian village all sharing one mobile phone do not make video blogs for global consumption – but this is today. Think of the following trend: in the middle of 2007, Flickr contained approximately 600 million images. By early 2008, this number has already doubled.

These statistics are impressive. The more difficult question is: how to interpret them? First of all, they don't tell us about the actual media diet of users (obviously these diets vary between places and demographics). For instance, we don't have exact numbers (at least, they are not freely available) regarding what exactly people watch on sites such as YouTube – the percentage of user-generated content versus commercial content such as music videos, anime, game trailers, movie clips, etc.¹¹ Secondly, we also don't have exact numbers regarding which percentage of peoples' daily media/information intake comes from big news organization, TV, commercially realized films and music versus non-professional sources.

These numbers are difficult to establish because today commercial information and media does not only arrive via its traditional channels such as newspapers, TV stations and movie theatres but also on the same channels which carry user-generated content: blogs, RSS feeds, Facebook's posted items and notes, YouTube videos, etc. Therefore, simply counting how many people follow a particular communication channel can no longer tell you what exactly it is they are watching.

But even if we knew precise statistics, it still would not be clear what relative roles exist between commercial sources and user-produced content in forming people's understanding of the world, themselves, and others. Or, more precisely: what are the relative weights between the ideas expressed in large circulation media and alternative ideas available elsewhere? If one person gets all her news via blogs, does this automatically mean that her understanding of the world and important issues is different from a person who only reads mainstream newspapers?

The Practice of Everyday Media Life: Tactics as Strategies

For different reasons, media, businesses, consumer electronics and web industries, and academics converge in celebrating content created and exchanged by users. In academic discussions, in particular, the disproportional attention given to certain genres such as 'youth media', 'activist media', 'political mash-ups' – which are indeed important but do not represent the more typical usage of hundreds of millions of people.

In celebrating user-generated content and implicitly equating 'user-generated' with 'alternative' and 'progressive', academic discussions often stray away from asking certain basic critical questions. For instance: To what extent is the phenomenon of user-generated content driven by consumer electronics industry – the producers of digital cameras, video cameras, music players, laptops, and so on? Or: To what extent is the phenomenon of user-generated

11. According to research conducted by Michael Wesch, in early 2007 YouTube contained approximately 14 percent commercially produced videos. Michael Wesch, DIY Video Summit, International Conference by The University of Southern California, February, 2007, <http://www.video24-7.org/panels>

content is also driven by social media companies themselves – who after all are in the business of getting as much traffic to their sites as possible so they can make money by selling advertising based on their usage data?

Here is another question: Given that the significant percentage of user-generated content either follows the templates and conventions set up by professional entertainment industry, or directly re-uses professionally produced content (for instance, anime music videos), does this mean that people's identities and imagination are now even more firmly colonized by commercial media than in the twentieth century? In other words: Is the replacement of *mass consumption of commercial culture* in the 20th century by mass production of cultural objects by users in the early 21st century a progressive development? Or does it constitute a further stage in the development of 'culture industry' as analyzed by Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer in their 1944 book *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception*? Indeed, if the twentieth century subjects were simply consuming the products of culture industry, 21st century prosumers and 'pro-ams' are passionately imitating it. That is, they now make their own cultural products that follow the templates established by the professionals and/or rely on professional content.

A case in point is anime music videos (often abbreviated as AMV). My search for 'anime music videos' on YouTube on February 7, 2008 returned 250,000 videos.¹² Animemusicvideos.org, the main web portal for anime music video makers (before the action moved to YouTube) contained 130,510 AMVs as of February 9, 2008. AMV are made by fans who edit together clips from one or more anime series to music, which comes from a different source such as professional music videos. Sometimes, AMVs also use cut-scene footage from video games. In the last few years, AMV makers also started to increasingly add visual effects available in software such as After Effects. But regardless of the particular sources used and their combination, in the majority of AMV all video and music comes from commercial media products. AMVs makers see themselves as editors who re-edit the original material, rather than as film-makers or animators who create from scratch.¹³

To help us analyse AMV culture, let's put to work the categories set up by Michel de Certeau in his 1980 book *The Practice of Everyday Life*.¹⁴ De Certeau makes a distinction between 'strategies' used by institutions and power structures and 'tactics' used by modern subjects in their everyday life. The tactics are the ways in which individuals negotiate strategies that were set for them. For instance, to take one example discussed by de Certeau, a city's layout, signage, driving and parking rules and official maps are strategies created by governmental and corporate interests. The ways an individual is moving through the city, taking shortcuts, wondering aimlessly, navigating through favourite routes and adopting others are tactics. In other words, an individual can't physically reorganize the city but she can adopt

12. YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com>

13. Conversation with Tim Park, <http://animemusicvideos.org>

14. Michel de Certeau, 'L'Invention du Quotidien', Vol. 1, *Arts de Faire*, Union générale d'éditions 10-18, 1980. Translated into English as *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press, 1984.

itself to her needs by choosing how she moves through it. A tactic 'expects to have to work on things in order to make them its own, or to make them 'habitable''.¹⁵

As De Certeau points out, in modern societies most of the objects which people use in their everyday life are mass produced goods; these goods are the expressions of the strategies of designers, producers, and marketers. People build their worlds and identities out of these readily available objects by using different tactics: bricolage, assembly, customization, and – to use the term which was not a part of De Certeau's vocabulary but which has become important today – remix. For instance, people rarely wear every piece from one designer as they appear in fashion shows: they usually mix and match different pieces from different sources. They also wear clothing pieces in different ways than they were intended, and they customise the clothes themselves through buttons, belts, and other accessories. The same goes for the ways in which people decorate their living spaces, prepare meals, and in general construct their lifestyles.

While the general ideas of *The Practice of Everyday Life* still provide an excellent intellectual paradigm available for thinking about the vernacular culture, since the book's publication in the 1980s many things have also changed in important ways. These changes are less drastic in the area of governance, although even there we see moves towards more transparency and visibility. But in the area of consumer economy, the changes have been quite substantial. Strategies and tactics are now often closely linked in an interactive relationship, and often their features are reversed. This is particularly true for 'born digital' industries and media such as software, computer games, web sites, and social networks. Their products are explicitly designed to be customized by the users. Think, for instance, of the original Graphical User Interface (popularized by Apple's Macintosh in 1984), which allows the user to customize the appearance and functions of the computer and the applications to her liking. The same applies to recent web interfaces – for instance, iGoogle which allows the user to set up a custom home page selecting from many applications and information sources. Facebook, Flickr, Google and other social media companies encourage others to write applications, which mash-up their data and add new services (as of early 2008, Facebook hosted over 15,000 applications written by outside developers.) The explicit design for customisation is not limited to the web: for instance, many computer games ship with an editor that allows the users to create their own levels.

Although the industries dealing with the physical world are moving at a much slower pace, they are on the same trajectory. In 2003 Toyota introduced Scion cars. Scion marketing was centred on the idea of extensive customization. Nike, Adidas, and Puma all experimented with allowing the consumers to design and order their own shoes by choosing from a broad range of shoe parts. (In the case of the Puma Mongolian Barbeque concept, a few thousand unique shoes can be constructed.)¹⁶ In early 2008 Bug Labs introduced what they called 'the Lego of gadgets': open-sourced consumer electronics platform consisting of a minicomputer

15. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Practice_of_Everyday_Life

16. Puma website, <https://www.puma.com/secure/mbbq>

and modules such as a digital camera or a LCD screen.¹⁷ The recent celebration of DIY practice in various consumer industries is another example of this growing trend.

In short: during the time since the publication *The Practice of Everyday Life*, companies have developed new kinds of strategies. These strategies mimic people's tactics of bricolage, re-assembly and remix. In other words: the logic of tactics has now become the logic of strategies.

The Web 2.0 paradigm represents the most dramatic reconfiguration of the strategies/tactics relationship to date. According to De Certeau's original analysis, tactics do not necessarily result in objects or anything stable or permanent; 'Unlike the strategy, it [the tactic] lacks the centralised structure and permanence that would enable it to set itself up as a competitor to some other entity... it renders its own activities an 'unmappable' form of subversion.'¹⁸ Since the 1980s, however, consumer and culture industries have started to systematically turn every subculture (particularly every youth subculture) into a product. In short, the cultural tactics evolved by people were turned into strategies now sold to them. If you want to 'oppose the mainstream', you now had plenty of lifestyles available – with every subcultural aspect, from music and visual styles to clothes and slang – available for purchase.

These adaptations, however, still focused on distinct subcultures: bohemians, hip-hop and rap, Lolita fashion, rock, punk, skin head, Goth, etc.¹⁹ However, in our decade, the transformation of people's tactics into business strategies went in a new direction. The developments of the previous decade – the Web platform, the dramatically decreased costs of the consumer electronics devices for media capture and playback, increased global travel, and the growing consumer economies of many countries which after 1990 joined the 'global world' – led to the explosion of user-generated 'content' available in digital form: Web sites, blogs, forum discussions, short messages, digital photo, video, music, maps, and so on. Responding to this explosion, Web 2.0 companies created powerful platforms designed to host this content. MySpace, Facebook, Livejournal, Blogger, Flickr, YouTube, h5 (Central America), Cyworld (Korea), Wretch (Taiwan), Orkut (Brazil), Baidu (China), and thousands of other social media sites make this content instantly available worldwide (except, of course, in countries which block or filter these sites). Thus, not just particular features of particular subcultures but the details of the everyday life of hundreds of millions of people who make and upload their media or write blog became public.

What before was ephemeral, transient, unmappable, and invisible become permanent, mappable, and viewable. Social media platforms give users unlimited space for storage and plenty of tools to organize, promote, and broadcast their thoughts, opinions, behaviour, and media to others. You can already directly stream video using your laptop or mobile phone, and it is only a matter of time before constant broadcasting of one's life becomes as common as email. If one follows the evolution from MyLifeBits project (2001-) to Slife software (2007-)

17. Buglabs, <http://buglabs.net>

18. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Practice_of_Everyday_Life

19. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_subcultures_in_the_20th_century

and Yahoo! Live personal broadcasting service (2008-), the trajectory towards constant capture and broadcasting of one's everyday life is clear.

According to De Certeau 1980 analysis, strategy 'is engaged in the work of systematizing, of imposing order... its ways are set. It cannot be expected to be capable of breaking up and regrouping easily, something which a tactical model does naturally.' The strategies used by social media companies today, however, are the exact opposite: they are focused on flexibility and constant chance. Of course, all businesses in the age of globalisation had to become adaptable, mobile, flexible, and ready to break up and regroup – but they rarely achieve the flexibility of web companies and developers.²⁰ According to Tim O'Reilly, who originally defined the term Web 2.0 in 2004, one important feature of Web 2.0 applications is 'design for 'hackability' and remixability.'²¹ Thus, most major Web 2.0 companies - Amazon, eBay, Flickr, Google, Microsoft, Yahoo and YouTube - make available their programming interfaces and some of their data to encourage others to create new applications using this data.²²

In summary, today strategies used by social media companies often look more like tactics in De Certeau's original formulation – while tactics look strategies. Since the companies which create social media platforms make money from having as many as users as possible visit them (they do so serving ads, by selling data about usage to other companies, to selling ad-on services, etc.), they have a direct interest in having users pour as much of their lives into these platforms as possible. Consequently, they give users unlimited storage space for their media, the ability to customize their 'online lives' (for instance, by controlling the information which may be viewed by others) and the capacity expand the functionality of the platforms themselves.

This, however, does not mean strategies and tactics have completely changed places. If we look at the actual media content produced by users, here strategies/tactics relationship is different. As I already mentioned, for many decades companies have been systematically turning the elements of various subcultures developed by people into commercial products. But these subcultures themselves, however, are rarely developed completely from scratch – rather, they are the result of cultural appropriation and/or remix of earlier commercial culture by

20. Here is a typical statement coming from the business community: 'Competition is changing overnight, and product lifecycles often last for just a few months. Permanence has been torn asunder. We are in a time that demands a new agility and flexibility: and everyone must have the skill and insight to prepare for a future that is rushing at them faster than ever before.' Jim Carroll, *The Masters of Business Imagination Manifesto aka The Masters of Business Innovation*, <http://www.jimcarroll.com/10s/10MBI.htm>

21. <http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html?page=4>, accessed February 8.

22. Wikipedia article 'Mashup', http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mashup_%28web_application_hybrid%29.

independent individuals and groups.²³ The AMV subculture is a case in point. On the other hand, it exemplifies new 'strategies as tactics' phenomenon: AMVs are hosted on mainstream social media sites such as YouTube, so they are not exactly 'transient' or 'unmappable' (since you can use a search engine to find them, see how others users rated them, and so on). On the other hand, at the level of content, it is a 'practice of everyday life', as the great majority of AMVs consist of segments lifted from commercial anime shows and commercial music. This does not mean that best AMVs are not creative or original – only that their creativity is different from the romantic/modernist model of 'making it new'. To use De Certeau's terms, we can describe it as *tactical creativity* which 'expects to have to work on things in order to make them its own, or to make them 'habitable'".

Media Conversations

So far I have discussed social media using the familiar old terms. However, the very terms, which I was evoking so far – content, a cultural object, cultural production and cultural consumption – are redefined by Web 2.0 practices.

We see new kinds of communication where content, opinion, and conversation often can't be clearly separated. Blogs are a good example of this: lots of blog entries are comments by a blog writer about an item that s/he copied from another source. Or, think about forums or comments below a web site entry where an original post may generate a long discussion which often goes in new and interesting directions, with the original item long forgotten.

Often 'content', 'news' or 'media' become tokens used to initiate or maintain a conversation. Their original meaning is less important than their function as such tokens. I am thinking here of people posting pictures on each other's pages on MySpace, or exchanging gifts on Facebook. What kind of gift you get is less important than the act of getting a gift, or posting a comment or a picture. Although it may appear that such conversation simply foreground Roman Jakobson's emotive and/or phatic communication functions²⁴ described already in 1960, it is also possible that a detailed analysis will show them as being a genuinely new phenomenon.

The beginnings of such analysis can be found in the work of Adrian Chan. As he points out, 'All cultures practice the exchange of tokens that bear and carry meanings, communicate interest and count as personal and social transactions.' Token gestures 'cue, signal, indicate users' interests in one another'. While the use of tokens is not unique to networked social media, some of the features indicated by Chan do appear to be new. For instance, as Chan notes, the use of tokens is often 'accompanied by ambiguity of intent and motive (the token's

23. A very interesting feature in Wired describes a creative relationship between commercial manga publishers and independent fans in Japan. The Wired story quotes Keiji Takeda, one of the main organizers of fan conventions in Japan as saying 'This [on the convention floor] is where we're finding the next generation of authors. The publishers understand the value of not destroying that.' Qtd. in Daniel H. Pink, 'Japan, Ink: Inside the Manga Industrial Complex', Wired 15.11 (October 2007), http://www.wired.com/techbiz/media/magazine/15-11/ff_manga?currentPage=3

24. Roman Jakobson, http://www.signosemio.com/jakobson/a_fonctions.asp

meaning may be codified while the user's motive for using it may not). This can double up the meaning of interaction and communication, allowing the recipients of tokens to respond to the token or to the user behind its use'.²⁵

Consider another very interesting new communication situation: a conversation around a piece of media – for instance comments added by users below somebody's Flickr photo or YouTube video which do not only respond to the media object but also to each other.²⁶ The same is often true to comments, reviews and discussions on the web in general – the object in question can be software, a film, a previous post, and so on. Of course, such conversation structures are also common in real life: think of a typical discussion in a graduate film studies class, for instance. However, web infrastructure and software allow such conversations to become distributed in space and time – people can respond to each other regardless of their location and the conversation can in theory go on indefinitely. The web is, in effect, millions of such conversations taking place at the same time. These conversations are quite common: according to the 2007 report by Pew internet & American Life Project, among U.S. teens who post photos online, 89 percent reported that people comment on these photos at least some of the time.²⁷

Equally interesting is *conversation which takes place through images or video* – for instance, responding to a video with a new video. This, in fact, is a standard feature of YouTube interface.²⁸ (Note that all examples of interfaces, features, and common uses of social media sites refer to early 2008; obviously details may change by the time you read this). While social media sites contain huge numbers of such conversations through media, for me the most interesting case so far is a five minute theoretical video *Web 2.0 ... The Machine is Us/ing Us* posted by a cultural anthropologist Michael Wesch on January 31, 2007.²⁹ A year later this video was watched 4,638,265 times.³⁰ It has also generated 28 video responses that range from short 30-second comments to long equally theoretical and carefully crafted long videos.

Just as it is the case with any other feature of contemporary digital culture, it is always possible to find some precedents for any of these communication situations. For instance, modern art can be understood as conversations between different artists or artistic schools. That is, one artist/movement is responding to the work of produced earlier by another artist/movement. Thus, modernists in general are reacting against classical nineteenth century culture; Jasper

25. Gravity7, http://www.gravity7.com/paradigm_shift_1.html

26. According to a survey conducted in 2007, 13 percent of internet users who watch video also post comments about the videos. This number, however, does not reveal how many of these comments are responses to other comments.

See the Pew/Internet & American Life Project, Technology and Media use Report, August 2007, http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/219/report_display.asp

27. Ibid.

28. The phenomenon of 'conversation through media' was first pointed to by Derek Lomas in 2006 in relation to comments on MySpace pages.

29. Michael Wesch, *Web 2.0: The Machine is Us/ing Us*, <http://youtube.com/watch?v=6gmP4nk0EOE>

30. Ibid.

Johns and other pop-artists react to abstract expressionism; Goddard reacts to Hollywood-style narrative cinema; and so on. To use the terms of YouTube, we can say that Goddard posts his video response to one huge clip called 'classical narrative cinema'. But the Hollywood studios do not respond – at least not for another 30 years.

As can be seen from these examples, typically these conversations between artists and artistic schools were not full conversations. One artist/school produced something, another artist/school later responded with their own productions, and this was all. The first artist/school usually did not respond. But beginning in the 1980s, professional media practices begin to respond to each other more quickly and the conversations are no longer one-way. Music videos affect the editing strategies of feature films and television; similarly, today the aesthetics of motion graphics is slipping into narrative features. Cinematography, which before only existed in films, is taken up in video games. But these conversations are different again from the *communication between individuals through media* in a networked environment. With the emergence of Web 2.0, we increasingly see individuals directly talking to each other using media – not just professional producers.

Is Art After Web 2.0 still possible?

Have professional artists (including video and media artists) benefited from the explosion of media content being produced online by regular users? Have they benefited from the easily availability of media publishing platforms? Does the fact that we now have platforms on which anybody can publish their videos and gain revenue from the downloads mean that artists have a new distribution channel for their works? Or is the world of social media – hundreds of millions of people daily uploading and downloading video, audio, and photographs; media objects produced by unknown authors being downloaded millions of times; media objects fluently and rapidly moving between users, devices, contexts, and networks – making professional art irrelevant? In short, while modern artists have so far successfully met the challenges of each generation of media technologies, can professional art survive extreme democratization of media production and access?

On one level, this question is meaningless. Surely, never in the history of modern art has it been doing so well commercially. No longer a pursuit for a few, contemporary art has become another form of mass culture. Its popularity is often equal to that of other mass media. Most importantly, contemporary art has become a legitimate investment category, and with the all the money invested in it, it is unlikely that this market will ever collapse (of course, history has repeatedly shown that the most stable political regimes do eventually collapse).

In a certain sense, since the beginnings of globalisation in the early 1990s, the number of participants in the institution called 'contemporary art' has experienced a growth, which parallels the rise of social media in this decade. Since the early 1990s, many new countries entered the 'global world' and adopted western values in their cultural politics. This includes supporting, collecting, and promoting 'contemporary art'. Thus, today Shanghai already has not just one but three museums of contemporary art plus more sizeable spaces that show contemporary art than New York or London. A number of architects such as Frank Gehry and Zaha Hadid are now building museums and cultural centres on Saadiyat Island in Abu

Dhabi. Rem Koolhaas is building new museum of contemporary art in Riga. I can continue this list but you get the idea.

In the case of social media, the unprecedented growth of numbers of people who upload and view each other's media led to lots of innovation. While the typical diary video or anime on YouTube may not be particularly special, enough are. In fact, in all media where the technologies of productions were democratized (video, music, animation, graphic design, etc.), I have come across many projects which not only rival those produced by most well-known commercial companies and most well-known artists but also often explore the new areas not yet touched by those who endowed with large amounts of symbolic capital.

Who is creating these projects? In my observations, while some of these projects do come from prototypical 'amateurs', 'prosumers' and 'pro-ams', most are done by young professionals, or professionals in training. The emergence of the Web as the new standard communication medium in the 1990s means that today in most cultural fields, every professional or company, regardless of its size and geographical location, has a web presence and posts new works online. Perhaps most importantly, young design students can now put their works before a global audience, see what others are doing, and together develop new tools (a good example being the processing.org community).

It should be noted that we are not talking about 'classical' social media or 'classical' user-generated content here, since, at least at present, many such portfolios, sample projects and demo reels are being uploaded on companies' own web sites and specialised aggregation sites known to people in the field. Here are some examples of such sites that I consult regularly: xplsv.tv (motion graphics, animation), coroflot.com (design portfolios from around the world), archinect.com (architecture students projects), infosthetics.com (information visualization). In my view, the significant percentage of works you find on these web sites represents the most innovative cultural production done today. Or at least, they make it clear that the world of professional art has no special license on creativity and innovation.

But perhaps the most conceptual innovation has been occurring in the development of the Web 2.0 medium itself. I am thinking about all the new creative software tools - web mash-ups, Firefox plug-ins, Facebook applications, etc. – coming out from both large companies such as Google and from individual developers. Therefore, the true challenge posed to art by social media may not be all the excellent cultural works produced by students and non-professionals which are now easily available online – although I do think these are also important. The real challenge may lie in the dynamics of Web 2.0 culture – its constant innovation, its energy, and its unpredictability.

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CODECS AND CAPABILITY**SEAN CUBITT**

What makes a YouTube video good? Maybe it is the political tenor, or perhaps you like the ethics. Perhaps it looks nice. Or it's funny. Perhaps a YouTube video is good when it reaches a lot of people. But the great thing about the internet is that it allows every minor interest, every academic specialism, every rare and refined hobby a place, so the numbers really don't matter in the same way as the old media. Everyone has had that lovely serendipitous moment when you find exactly the right piece of data, exactly the right image, on the site dedicated to collecting photos of old street lights or the history of dye-transfer techniques. Popularity isn't in question. Looking nice, being funny, politics, even ethics are pretty much personal opinion in the globally connected, rapid and fragmentary culture of the internet post-2002. It may be better to ask what makes a YouTube video bad. Then we have some answers. Slow download. Too much fuzz in the image or the soundtrack. Stutter. Technical qualities are what make a bad video. Things that go wrong, like using a pine green title on a black background.¹ There is always a workaround, an optimal way of using the tool that's available, but the tool has to be available, and a network tool has to be as nearly universally available as it can if it is to permit the serendipitous discovery of the lone like soul to yours among the billion pages.

As Adrian Mackenzie notes,² the way technical aspects of video formats operate 'pulls apart and reorganises moving images' in a way that 'goes further than simply transporting images... Like so much software it institutes a relational ordering that articulates realities together that previously lay further apart'. In what follows, I hope to demonstrate how this occurs on YouTube. YouTube video formats run on the .flv format, a proprietary web format owned by Adobe, who in 2005 amalgamated with the original owners, Macromedia. Although users can upload in most of the popular low-resolution formats (Windows Media Player, QuickTime and Real Player), files are automatically converted to the .flv format (and the file extension automatically stripped from the file name). Audio format is mp3 and mono (although manual conversion of downloaded files can release latent stereo). The .flv format is supported by the H.263 codec (short for coding-decoding or compression-decompression; protocols used to squeeze audiovisual data for transmission and unsqueeze them for playback). Though H.263 was developed by the Sorenson Media company, it is largely seen as a tweak of the H.264 standard codec developed conjointly by the ITU and ISO in the suite of tools devised around MPEG-4, and is presented by the ITU as a 2005 development from H.261.

The organisations involved are key to the functioning of the global telecommunications system. ITU is the International Telecommunications Union, established in 1865 as the Inter-

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1. For example, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=inc76pe4Yf8>
 2. Adrian Mackenzie, 'Codecs' in Matthew Fuller (ed.), *Software Studies: A Lexicon*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008, p. 48-55.

national Telegraph Union, and widely regarded as the oldest intergovernmental treaty body still functioning today. Among its tasks are ensuring the interoperability of telecom systems, pricing regimes for international calling, and infrastructures for audiovisual services, including moving image encoding, in this instance for low bit-rate communications. The ISO is the International Organisation for Standardisation, who have responsibility for ensuring, where possible, that the nomenclature and technical operation of engineering occurs in compatible ways across the world. ISO numbers are attached to products from screws to photographic emulsions. ISO is a partner with the IEC, the International Electrotechnical Organisation which has similar jurisdiction over electrical and electronic activities, through the Joint Technical Committee which covers the whole range of digital media, from hardware and software to networks and interfaces. Unlike the ITU, both IEC and ISO are non-governmental organisations. But in recent decades, the ITU has increasingly welcomed corporations as influential participants in discussions, especially as a realist reaction to the privatisation of national telecommunications systems under neo-liberal pressure since the 1980s.³ The NGOs, meanwhile, have a long history of cooperation with governments and, for similar reasons and in a similar timeframe to the ITU, with corporations as well. The Motion Picture Experts Group is a sub-committee of the IEC/ISO Joint Technical Committee, but publication of the H.263 codec specification is undertaken by the ITU.

There is no internet without the standardisation of internet protocols; and there is no exchange of moving pictures without standardisation of the codecs on which the various proprietary players can function. Optimising for low bitrate is in one perspective an entirely proper and democratising principle. It is all too easy to envisage codecs restricted to high bandwidth clients, excluding the majority of the world from access to content. The way in which such standards are arrived at should bring to mind the Internet Engineering Task Force slogan, 'We don't believe in presidents, kings, or voting; we believe in rough consensus and running code'. While undoubtedly commercial and political pressures are brought to bear, the central activity of these organisations is a rational debate among rational individuals, setting themselves goals, debating means in a shared language, and producing common norms.⁴ It is in this sense a model version of the Habermasian public sphere.⁵ I am less concerned here with the critique of this consensus as an exclusive and elite mode of operation which excludes the proper influence of civil society or elected representatives, and more with the resulting capabilities of the codec and the software it supports. In the Habermasian version, public sphere discussion should lead to an optimal result, in much the same way that post-Hayek economics asserts that the rationality of the market will always provide the best possible products. But the .flv format and the H.263 codec do not provide the best possible image. Like VHS, and so many other victors of previous format wars, they are only good-enough.

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3. Don MacLean, 'The Quest for Inclusive Governance of Global ICTs: Lessons from the ITU in the Limits of National Sovereignty', *Information Technologies and International Development*, 1.1 (2003): 1-18.
 4. Andrew L. Russell, 'Rough Consensus and Running Code and the Internet-OSI Standards War', *IEEE Annals of the History of Computing*, (July-September, 2006): 48-61.
 5. Michael A. Froomkin, 'Habermas@Discourse.net: Toward a Critical Theory of Cyberspace', *Harvard Law Review*, 116, (Jan, 2003): 751-873.

The H.263 codec combines a restricted colour palette with a vector-based predictive function to minimise the need to repeat information concerning pixels whose colour doesn't change. The colour space used is YCbCr, which codes for luminance (Y) and two chroma channels (C), blue and red, on the principle that the panchromatic Y channel captures the necessary detail, while the absence of green (as used in almost all colour film, television and high-end storage media like DVD and Blu-Ray) minimises redundancy because the green channel overlaps with both red and blue, especially in the yellow segment of the spectrum. This is a variant of 8-bit colour graphics, which allows a range of 256 colours (actually slightly reduced from that because some of the hues are indistinguishable to the human eye; it is unclear whether .flv has compensated for the old problem produced when 8-bit colour for web applications tried to install its own palette on the local desktop, giving rise to various colour conflicts). The layout of the image is compiled according to 'a hierarchical structure with four primary layers. From top to bottom the layers are: Picture; Group of Blocks, or slice, or video picture segment; Macroblock; Block'.⁶ In default mode, a block is a section of 4x4 pixels. Using the hierarchy of macroblock (16x16 lines of Y and 8x8 lines of Cr and Cb) allows the codec to treat pixels not only as units but as averaged areas of colour and luminance, and the group of blocks, comprising 16 lines, also allows for such commonly observed features as the positioning of sky or grass at top and bottom of images respectively (a slice is the same size as a Group of Blocks but its shape can be varied). The picture comprises 16x16 Groups of Blocks. These Groups of Blocks are also the units in which the vector predictions take place: 'Motion vectors are restricted such that all pixels referenced by them are within the coded picture area',⁷ (though virtual pixels off-screen are allowable in enhanced, more bandwidth-hungry versions than the format used on YouTube). Vectors predict movement based on sequence from an initial image. Encoding artefacts are increasingly likely in hand-held sequences when the prediction system is more likely to predict wrongly or as the Flash Video white paper has it, 'If your camera is not steady, most of the image moves, causing a high percentage of pixels in the video to change from frame to frame. A steady camera reduces the number of pixels that change from frame to frame, giving you better quality at higher compression rates (lower data rates)'.⁸ Other artefacts are likely as a result of mismatches between this codec and others feeding into it, such as the PAL 625-line television standard in use in most of the world and the 525-line NTSC standard used in the USA. Typical would be the mismatch of sound and image due to the different clock-cycles in incoming data streams and the use of the H.263 and mp3 codecs for video and audio respectively. The .flv format includes metadata for synchronising the two processes, but shifting between already lossy codecs invariably results in long-term degradation of the datastream.

Flash video (.flv) marks what the H.263 codec refers to as 'initial frames' by the animation term 'keyframes', uncompressed frames which are used as a reference for filling in

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6. ITU, ITU-T Recommendation H.263 Video coding for low bit rate communication, ITU-T: SERIES H: AUDIOVISUAL AND MULTIMEDIA SYSTEMS - Infrastructure of audiovisual services – Coding of moving video, International Telecommunication Union, Geneva, <http://www.itu.int/rec/T-REC-H.263/en>
 7. ITU 2005, 12.
 8. Macromedia Flash Video Primer, Adobe 2004, www.adobe.com/devnet/flash/articles/flash_flv.pdf

compressed frames that come between them. In Flash vector animation, a similar process is used to do the 'inbetweening', extrapolating from first and last frames the action needed to move from one to the other. This information is encoded not as full-frame animation but as an instruction set, which requires far fewer lines of code. As the Flash Video white paper notes, 'A lower keyframe rate (such as one keyframe every six seconds) will result in a softer or blurrier image but reduces the bandwidth demand'.⁹ The format uses progressive scanning of the image rather than interlacing, the process common to television and the 1080i High Definition television (HDTV) codecs which repeats each image in two separate fields, the first scanning odd, the second even lines, which removes the flicker perceived in bright cathode ray tube (CRT) monitors. Progressive scanning is native to most computer screens and digital light programming (DLP) projectors. Flash also permits manipulation of the frame rate, set at 25 frames per second for terrestrial TV transmission, as low as 10 fps. Bitrates can also be selected with an eye to the enduser, with options ranging from 56kbps to 2 Mbps, and can be encoded using a variable bit-rate which requires more time to encode but speeds decoding. Such tools lower the quality of the image in exchange for reductions in file size and processing power required to decompress them at the receiving end. Delivery is speeded up by streaming, in which the whole file is never delivered or cached by the end user, and only the viewed parts of the video arrive at the end-user screen. Remaining bandwidth can then be used for interaction, and for the additional services which streaming server software offers for traffic management and security.

In what sense is this better or worse than any other codec? The emerging standard for HDTV, Blu-Ray and high-definition DVD are 1080i and 1080p (interlaced and progressive variants of the 1080 line standard) with frame rates limited by bandwidth to between 24-30 fps, although 60 fps is available (for example on Apple's QuickTime HD Trailers site). They use full RGB colour rather than the restricted palette of YCbCr. As a result, they display at near-35mm film quality on screens which can be over a metre (measured on the diagonal) for domestic use, and 20 metres or more for external public projections and datascreens. Take up on HDTV has been slow due to pricing, worries over reliability and longevity of screens, and format wars, but is picking up rapidly in the late 2000s. According to research by Jeff Bird at the University of Melbourne, owners cite anxiety about street-crime and terrorism, the expense of cinema-going, and the increased control over time as important reasons for moving to HDTV. There is some evidence that owners gain status from their screens, but that factor is bound to diminish as prices drop to bring them in range of working-class consumers. At the same time, the popularity of YouTube and the rise of third-screen audiovisual consumption on iPods, mobiles, PDAs and handheld game consoles like PSP suggest that resolution, colour accuracy, refresh rates and size are not the sole drivers of demand in emergent video markets.

A vector is a contradictory creature. It is an algebraic statement of the curvature of a line, a static description of movement. In its use in H.263, it is a statistically normative description of the succession of frames, frames that are no longer composed of fields, as in the old CRT interlace, but which are constrained by the exclusion, in default mode, of any offscreen

9. Ibid.

determinant. The predictive vector, then, is analogous to both the political management of populations and the economic efficiency of distribution, at the expense of truth either to the illumination of the recorded scene or the impression of the perceiving eye. De-realising and disembodiment, the lowres predictive vector codec conforms vision (and such communication tools as Skype which also use it) to current social conditions, while at the same time enabling them. Relying on the human ability to extrapolate likelihood from what is given to sight, H.263 demands a labour of interpretation from its end-users, an active engagement working on the ripples and blocks. Here too it is contradictory: on the one hand undermining the supposed passivity of audiences, on the other increasing the unpaid labour of attention through which audiences provide the bases for the advertising economy, and now the unpaid production of content. In H.263, the unpredictable movement of the ideal vector as a trajectory towards the unknowable future¹⁰ is tamed, brought into line with the practice of actuarial risk-management and business and investment planning. Crucial to fast-delivery .flv files is the economical direction of action: the less change there is, the lower the bandwidth demands. YouTube's technical specification militates against change. To the extent that it limits us to the unchanging network of normal communication, and excludes us from what is beyond the frame and from change, it is an art without hope.

The March 2008 edition of *American Cinematographer* carries a report on Bill Viola's HD shoot of a video installation for the 2007 Venice Biennale.¹¹ Video art practice is no longer condemned to the U-matic reel-to-reel aesthetic of Wegman's *Selected Works*, nor bound to accommodate itself to the affordances of low-resolution kit. High-definition lends itself to the ritual mysticism of Viola's practice, and his reach back to Baroque roots for a language of spiritual experience. It is proper to the rare, the site-specific, what opposes itself to the ordinary running of the world. Viola opposes the normativity of low-resolution with the exceptionalism of highdefinition, which removes the image stream from the banality of the quotidian, at its best seeking to force open a chink in the familiar to let the light of something absolutely other flicker in the interstices. We might call it the sublime.

In a 1936 letter to Walter Benjamin, Adorno described high and low culture as 'the two torn halves of an integral freedom to which, however, they do not add up'.¹² We might today speak of the gap between high and low resolution in similar terms, with the startling exception that the high and low no longer have class correlates. In the monstrous reorganisation of society as population management and of knowledge as data flow, we face an impossible choice. We may succumb to slack-jawed immersion in spectacle, from Vegas to the Sydney Olympics, or accede to the fragmented and ephemeral world of connectivity. The oscillation between hi-res and lo-res paths is the impossible choice between the sublime and despair. Despair and the sublime are the two torn halves of a single oppression: the removal of the object of contemplation from the realm of what can be communicated. In the spectacle of

10. Sean Cubitt, *The Cinema Effect*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004.

11. Iain Stasukevich, 'Short Takes: Crossing Over in Bill Viola's Ocean Without a Shore', *American Cinematographer*, 89.3, (March 2008): 10-14.

12. Theodor W. Adorno, 'Letters to Walter Benjamin', 18 March 1936 in Ernst Bloch et al., *Aesthetics and Politics*, London: New Left Books, 1977.

the immersive sublime, what we gaze upon is other, wordless and worldless, beyond history or debate. In the connective despair, what we seek to communicate, the very content of cellular networks, is ourselves, but that is the one thing that cannot be communicated in a world of hyperindividuation. Choose, we seem to be told, between the cinematic spectacle of 9/11 or the connective mobile images from Abu Ghraib. Choose the unspeakable, sublime icon created by Islamists whose faith does not allow icons, or pick the degraded and degrading mobile images from Abu Ghraib, where connectivity becomes an extension of the humiliation which is the goal of torturers. The binarism of hi-res and lo-res takes us to the sick heart of the contemporary world.

Is this all there is? The challenge once posed by barred access to high-resolution video has migrated to the challenge of bandwidth management, and as with Wegman's talking torso, the new contenders are using low-end solutions to make high-concept works. And there are other opportunities, migrating between the two worlds. In a paper presented in Seoul in 2007, Ross Harley¹³ argues that YouTube is potentially a model for video art archives. Low-resolution versions online produce demand for high-resolution distribution copies, just as teaser trailers do for the latest Hollywood soaps and sitcoms. And although there are problems to overcome in copyrights, control and governance, the principle of distributed production and exhibition are in tune with the origins of video art. Several clips from Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* are available on YouTube. Otherwise, since their sporadic transmission in some European territories in the 1990s, and apart from some gallery and cinema showings, the only consumer format release was in the form of a CD set of the soundtrack, although recently Gaumont have managed to release a 4 DVD region 0 set of the programmes. The long delay arose because of the problems of rights clearances. Godard is an old man, and frankly uninterested in spending his remaining years chasing copyright owners. Thankfully Gaumont have done the work at last. In the interim, the memory of the series has been kept alive with lo-res transfers to .flv. The results are more than usually murky. Godard's palette is rich, his compositions densely layered, the soundtrack is complex enough to have been released as a free-standing CD set. The transfers often include edge coding and other artefacts, and the blocky pixellation is as far removed from high definition as one might expect. As Alexander Horwath observed, however, these works 'exist in diverse image, sound and text variants, but Godard's own way of working, in the *Histoire(s)* and elsewhere, is wholly contrary to totality and completeness. Thus it seems quite logical that the material results of his work on the history and histories of cinema can never really be completely 'boxed', distributed or owned - except in the rare, fleeting moment of projection (in which the constant sensuous overload makes it impossible to 'capture' the whole anyway)'.¹⁴ YouTube is just another efflorescence of a perpetual'y (and perceptually) incomplete project.

Yet something else does shine through the murk: a desire, a sentiment of what is missing, that is not available in the high density images of spectacular high definition. YouTube lives on the precarious labour of its contributors. It offers them the old lie – at least five years old – that you are never alone in the network, and the network is where you can express and be a self. But Harley is right in this: that it is exactly because of their failings that YouTube and other lo-res media are less frightening than the alternative. They lie, but they are permeable. The arguments of the generation of '68 return: the dominant cinema constantly produces films which, despite their ideological project, cannot help addressing the contradictions in the dominant.¹⁵ Today, that role is being undertaken by software. The despair of the networked soul is still capable of a grainy, lossy, lo-res vision of hope. What makes a YouTube video good is the same as what makes it bad.

13. Ross Harley, 'Totally Busted: Do We Need A YouTube For Video Art?', paper presented at the Video Art Archive Network Forum, Gallery Loop, Yonsei University, Seoul, 8-9 November 2007.

14. Alexander Horwath, 'The Man With The Magnétoscope - Jean-Luc Godard's. monumental*Histoire(s)* du cinéma as SoundImageTextBook', *Senses of Cinema*, 1998, trans Aileen Derieg, http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/15/godard_horwath.html

15. Jean-Louis Comolli and Pierre Narboni, 'Cinema/ Ideology/ Criticism' (1) and (2), trans. Susan Bennett, in John Ellis (ed.), *Screen Reader 1: Cinema/Ideology/Politics*, London: SEFT, 1977 pp. 2-11 and 36-46.

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THE CONCEPTUAL POWER OF ON-LINE VIDEO 5 EASY PIECES

MARSHA KINDER

Take Five: On the Pleasures of Modularity and Remix

Now that the internet has proven its ability to stream on-line video effectively and popular sites like YouTube have demonstrated their democratising power, both for original grass-roots works posted by their creators and remixed excerpts from broadcast television that anyone can archive, we are confronted with new questions. How do we avoid becoming *lost* within this growing profusion of video texts without merely replicating the popularity contests found on *American Idol*? How do we distinguish certain videos for their conceptual power, whether it depends on brilliant insights, activist goals, or innovative aesthetics? And how do we discover the distinctive pleasures provided by these videos – most of which are brief, modular and remixable?

This essay addresses these questions through 5 pieces (including this intro), which describe a conference, exhibition, precursor, and research initiative. Like the on-line videos whose distinctive pleasures they seek to define, these pieces are brief (each around 1,000 words) and modular and can be read in any sequence.

In *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (1984), literary theorist Peter Brooks claims all stories are obituaries that provide pleasure by forestalling a premature death. This theory helps explain why so many great narratives are long and why they create an expansive middle as a 'force-field of desire', a narrative field that resists death and other kinds of premature closure. Although this dynamic is best modeled in Scheherazade's use of storytelling to save her life in *The Arabian Nights* (which Brooks uses as metanarrative), it also explains the centrality of biography as a common narrative structure and the historic importance of long experimental novels like Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. Though Brooks never wrote about movies, television or digital media, his theory also helps explain the pleasures of serial fiction and electronic games, particularly those in which players struggle to gain new lives for their avatar and avoid premature death at the hands of enemies. In such game narratives – as well as in serial television and game-like films (like *The Matrix*, *Groundhog Day*, *Vantage Point* and *Run Lola Run*), there is a built-in drive to extend the period of engagement within the narrative field, even if it involves compulsive repetition. While Brooks's theory explains narrative addiction, it doesn't illuminate the pleasures of modular on-line video, particularly the brief forms now being seen on YouTube.

Where do we find a theory that explains the distinctive pleasures of short narrative forms that rely on visual and conceptual compression? The most obvious source is American poet and short-story writer Edgar Allen Poe, who claimed in *The Poetic Principle* (1848) 'a long poem does not exist' because it 'is simply a flat contradiction in terms.' Insisting that 'a poem

deserves its title only inasmuch as it excites', he concludes 'that degree of excitement... cannot be sustained throughout a composition of any great length. After the lapse of half an hour, at the very utmost, it flags – fails'. He assumes a short attention span and a desire for excitation, characteristics that many contemporary educators blame on television. For Poe, these demands are human not historical. But if all great poems must be read in a single sitting or else lose their emotional impact, how can he explain great epic works with staying power like Homer's *Odyssey*? Poe argues they should be read as a series of short poems that are combinable with non-poetic material. He sees poems as modules, whose compression enables them to move the listener. Their power relies not on a fear of death (as in Brooks' theory of the long narrative), but on the pursuit of beauty and emotional intensity, which both demand brevity.

Just as Brooks built on Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Poe builds on Aristotle's *Poetics*, which claims tragedy is superior to epic because it's 'a more complex, concentrated, and challenging form.' Although Aristotle acknowledges that epic has a special capacity for enlarging its narrative with several plots, he concludes it sacrifices intensity as a consequence. Given that emotional impact – the catharsis of pity and fear in the spectator – is the primary function of poetry, then tragedy reigns at the top of his hierarchy of genres. Both for Aristotle and Poe, it's compression that generates intensity. Although both acknowledge these poetic pieces can be combined with others to create longer forms, it's the modules themselves that are most powerful.

This assumption was challenged by several Russian modernists, who argued for the conceptual power of remix. For example, filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein claimed dialectic montage generates the greatest intensity – not only in long forms like Whitman's poetry and Dickens's novels, but also in concentrated forms like Noh drama and haiku poetry. Under the conceptual compression of dialectics, the new unity – the whole – becomes greater than the sum of its parts, which explains why Soviet montage is ideologically superior to Griffith's binary cross-cutting. Literary theorist M.M. Bakhtin offered a different ideological argument, claiming traditional mixed forms like satire, the epic and the novel contain a clash of languages and conventions that exposes the arbitrary limitations of all cultures. Like contemporary forms of database narrative, a remix of modules reveals the underlying processes of selection and combination, enabling us to perceive the ideological implications of all choices. Such revelations denaturalise those 'master narratives' that formerly housed these modules. While Eisenstein's dialectic montage can be used to explain the affective power of grassroots videos on YouTube, Bakhtin's dialogism helps us understand the value of remixed excerpts from broadcast television.

At The Labyrinth Project, a research initiative on database narrative I've been directing at USC for the past ten years, we have been experimenting with these pleasures of brevity, modularity and remix as we search for new ways to structure video – on-line and in other networked public spaces like museums. We believe these pleasures demand conceptual power and aesthetic rigor. To deny these demands in the name of democracy is to be condescending to grassroots creators, both amateurs and professionals.

The '24/7 DIY Video Summit': Eroding the Line between Amateurs & Professionals

On Feb. 8-10, 2008, the Institute for Multimedia Literacy at the University of Southern California hosted its first annual international summit on 'Do-It-Yourself' video as social practice. Creators, scholars, activists, policy-makers, technologists and entrepreneurs were invited to present their own videos or curate works by others (from YouTube, Revver, imeem, Stage 6, Eyespot, and other popular on-line sites) and to explore cultural issues raised by this key moment of media transition.

On the first panel, 'The State of Research', speakers David Buckingham (a British expert in qualitative audience research), Michael Wesch (a media ecologist doing a participatory ethnography of YouTube) and Eric Garland (a corporate researcher from BigChampagne Media Measurement) discussed the democratising power of viral distribution and its fast-paced movement across the cultural mediascape. They agreed one of its most important effects is the erosion of the line between grassroots creators and media professionals. Although similar erosions were anticipated in earlier eras (with the introduction of super 8 and 16mm cameras and portable video recorders), this boundary was subsequently reinstated by media professionals and the corporate worlds who backed them. Though industry journals predict this same pattern will occur with on-line video,¹ Buckingham, Wesch and Garland claimed there is no going back.

The one person on the panel who argued against this erosion of boundaries between grassroots creators and media professionals was respondent John Sealy Browne (former director of Xerox PARC), who claimed we should embrace amateurs and their 'good enuf' aesthetics and reject professional auteurs and their self-serving peripherals – proprietary authorship, elitist aesthetics, and copyright. This argument drew objections from media studies veterans and documentary activists like Alexandra Juhasz, who reminded us that independent artists waged similar battles in earlier eras by resisting commercial co-option and making powerful works that challenged mainstream values. Yet, they were still professionals. Others asked: if YouTube is merely going to celebrate the most popular amateur videos of the week – regardless of content or aesthetics, how will it enable us to move beyond the *American Idol* mentality and the current level of broadcast television? Isn't it condescending to assume that amateurs are incapable of aspiring to aesthetic rigor or conceptual innovation, particularly if we accept the premise that users always know best?

What remained clear at the Summit is that the assessment of DIY video can't ignore content because the same old power struggles get replayed and remixed on new media platforms – not only in terms of their means of production, but also their modes of distribution. This is a lesson we learned from Raymond Williams and Carolyn Marvin, who trained us to be wary of the claims made by utopian theorists like Marshall McLuhan and his exaggerated technological determinism.

1. See Catherine Holhan 'Web Video: Move Over, Amateurs,' *Business Week* (November, 2007).

Yet, the Summit's keynote address by MIT media guru Henry Jenkins showed that we still need to be mindful of their warning. The main ideas for his talk came from Jenkins' newest books (*Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide and Fans, Bloggers and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*), which build on his earlier work on television fandom (in particular, 1992's *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*). Jenkins' speech showed how participatory culture's erosion of the line between creators and users has been greatly accelerated by new media practices. Although his description of participatory culture and convergence was fairly straightforward and certainly sound, his choice of examples was problematic. For, despite Jenkins' earlier ground-breaking work on gender and technology with Justine Cassell (*From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games*, published in 1998), his talk re-inscribed the same old gender stereotypes: active males and passive females.

As his chosen embodiment of participatory culture, Jenkins chose to depict Jessica, a young teenage girl in her bedroom downloading videos from YouTube as she simultaneously did her homework and listened to music on the same computer. Yet, according to Jenkins, the really significant intervention, the one that had real impact on the culture, was performed by a young African American male whose self-produced video taught the music industry a lesson about new modes of distribution and fans like Jessica how to do a new dance. In all fairness, later in his talk Jenkins did describe a female media producer, but this example hardly challenged gender stereotypes, for, consistent with Laura Mulvey's classic 1975 feminist essay on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' this young creator displayed her own body in provocative poses as visual spectacle. Although one might defend Jenkins' choice of examples by arguing that they are what you are liable to find on YouTube, Mary Kearney's book *Girls Make Media* (2006) tells a very different story about the activist bedroom culture that exists around girls like Jessica.

How do we account for this blind spot in a sophisticated media scholar like Jenkins, a writer who has been sensitive to issues of gender and race in the past? Perhaps it's because he was too exclusively focused on changes in media technology and thus ignored this continuity on issues of gender (though not of race). It's those other missed continuities that have also antagonised activist video-makers like Juhazs, who witnessed this new generation of ethnographers ignoring decades of work that has been produced in media studies by scholars and creators who were grappling with similar issues. The indifference to continuities was not shared by all Summit participants, certainly not by Anne Bray, the Director of LA Freewaves, the independent media arts festival that has been screening cutting-edge work (video, film and new media) by grassroots activists and professional independents for the past 18 years. Although Summit organizers, Mimi Ito, Steve Anderson, and Holly Willis, went out of their way to include a broad spectrum of independent creators and media scholars across several generations and media, and purposely created a timely, provocative dialogue across disciplinary divides, the utopian hype about on-line video still prevailed. Technological determinism dies hard.

The Getty's California Video Show: Medium Specificity and Historical Context

On March 15, 2008, a major exhibition on 'California Video' opened at the Getty Center in Los Angeles. Curated by Glenn Phillips, the show features 62 works made in California from 1968 to the present. While the bulk of the works came from the video archive of the Long

Beach Museum of Art (which the Getty acquired in 2006), several more recent pieces were added. These helped make the show look forward rather than backward. Instead of providing historical contextualisation for the activist era of the 1970s (during which over half of these works were originally made and exhibited), the show emphasizes what that early video work helped spawn. It highlights 'the Getty's major commitment to the preservation and exhibition of a young but vital artistic medium'.

'California Video' seems designed to appeal to the YouTube generation. It invites comparison between its own large body of works and the grassroots videos currently being displayed on popular on-line sites. Both settings provide a tube of plenty, a diverse array of videos that can be read in various ways. In the spirit of YouTube, the Getty seems reluctant to impose any 'official' curatorial reading, as if that might be seen as elitist or passé.

Although most of the videos in the show are non-digital, 'California Video' emphasises the cultural shift that occurred in 1967 with the introduction of a then-novel technology: Sony's Portapak, the first portable video-recorder. What links the diverse range of texts this new mobile medium helped generate is the desire to create a personal alternative both to commercial media production and traditional 'high' art, one that could be created by lone artists in their own space, a desire still shared by those using YouTube.

This idea is blatant in the first piece visitors encounter, John Baldesari's *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* (1971), made with the Portapak, which explores the novel conceptual pleasures promised by this new video medium. Yet, by showing his own arm writing this motto, Baldesari also evokes French critic Alexandre Astruc's famous phrase *caméra-stylo*, which called for an independent cinema whose 'means of expression' would be 'as supple and subtle as that of written language.' Though Astruc's remark became a rallying cry for the French new wave cinema of the late 1950s and 60s, it could just as readily be applied to video. Thus, from the beginning of the exhibition, those with an historical sensitivity are bound to see cinema as the show's structuring absence.

If the exhibition had historically contextualised its starting year of 1968, this date would have demanded engagement with cinema and the role it played in the Paris uprisings that politicized media studies worldwide. Instead, the show uses 1967 as its historical anchor, the year that the Portapak was introduced, which implicitly privileges media specificity over socio-political events. This emphasis on medium specificity helps explain why the show omits independent West Coast filmmakers (like Pat O'Neill and Chick Strand), who stuck with celluloid, even though their works engaged with some of the same conceptual issues, often with greater artistic impact, than the videos here at the Getty. If the show had included such filmmakers, then perhaps the curator would have had to go even further back to modernist movements in film and photography to trace this activist drive toward independence.

Instead, the show explores what happens when a new low-cost mobile medium is made accessible to independent grassroots creators. Despite occasional references to the Kennedy assassination, Vietnam War, and other well-known political events within the individual pieces, the exhibition provides little help in explaining the original social political background.

Unfortunately, without this contextualisation, many of the pieces lose their original conceptual power. Not surprisingly, many of the exceptions date from a later period, and some of them explicitly address medium specificity by being presented as installations rather than as single-channel videos on a small screen. For example, Bill Viola's 1992 work 'The Sleepers' consists of a series of buckets containing video monitors with facial close-ups of sleeping persons. The piece makes us rethink our relationship to images: whether images are contained in our minds or we reside in the images, a thematic central to his big LACMA show in the 1990s (which included this piece). Another exception is Jennifer Steinkamp's 2008 piece 'Oculus Sinister', which the Getty commissioned for the show. Interwoven streams of coloured lights are projected into the skylight of an alcove, making us wonder whether this is a phenomenological vision of mental interiority or an exterior sinister heaven, or the material medium itself – which combines the eye and the light.

In contrast to the creators of DIY videos exhibited on YouTube, most of the video-makers in this show see themselves as artists, not amateurs – yet many were engaged with parodying popular culture. The show omits the cultural debate in the 1970s and 80s over video's relationship to television. While some video artists in the show – like the Kipper Kids, the Yonemoto brothers and Patty Podesta – made pieces that reinscribed movies and parodied broadcast television for their own activist ends, others like Viola and Steincamp created a serious dialogue with painting and sculpture.

Given the show's turn toward the future, perhaps we should fast-forward to see where some of these video artists now stand on this issue. While Norman Yonemoto continued his parodic dialogue with movies and television and personalised the notion of interactivity by looking at medical technologies used on his own body, Podesta has moved into cinema, as a successful art director both for mainstream films like *Jurassic Park* and *Bobby* and for activist indies by Gregg Araki. Even Viola, whom the Getty featured in a 2003 solo exhibit called *The Passions* (which explored connections between Renaissance devotional painting and slow motion video), has recently moved into the popular realm with a visionary electronic game called *Night Journey*. Even during the *The Passions*, I remember Viola's delight when he heard a radio DJ describe LA traffic as moving at the speed of a Viola video. What better proof that his videos had become mainstream?

La jetée: Database Narrative and Precursors

Whenever I teach Chris Marker's classic short film, *La jetée* (1962), I tell my students that all of you have the material means to make this film – and with YouTube, the means to distribute it. All you need is Marker's conceptual power! Comprised almost entirely of still photographs with accompanying voice-overs and music, this little black and white short arouses a combination of emotional and intellectual pleasures that are far more intense than those generated by the expensive feature films it later helped inspire – *Twelve Monkeys* and *The Terminator* series. The intensity of these pleasures are based on the film's reliance on brief modules – a series of still photographs, with accompanying narrative voice-overs – to create a moving database narrative.

Database narrative is an empowering form that reveals the process by which characters, actions, settings, objects are chosen from an underlying database and recombined to make

stories. By calling attention to these processes of selection and combination (in which both authors and users are involved), it provides access both to a series of rival narratives (whether truth or fiction) and to the underlying archive of materials out of which they are spun. By combining database (a dominant form in contemporary digital discourse whose politics tend to be disavowed) with narrative (the traditional form it supposedly displaces whose ideological baggage is well known), the database narrative exposes the ideological workings of both. For, every database or archive is designed for a particular kind of knowledge production with specific goals, and the decision of what items to include or exclude, and what categories to use as structuring principles, and what metadata to collect for later retrieval – all of these decisions serve master narratives with ideological implications.

Although this concept of database narrative has emerged in the information age (when computers, the internet, on-line archives, search engines, navigation systems, wikis, blogs and YouTube reign supreme), one can find many precursors in earlier non-digital narrative forms, whose structures also called attention to the ideological function of archives. While this concept of database narrative enables us to see new dimensions in these earlier works, the precursors enable us to envision more powerful conceptual uses of digital archives and on-line video for the future.

In Marker's *La jetée*, human survival depends on an individual's storehouse of images from the past, and his ability to retrieve one powerful image from his childhood: a violent scene that occurred on the jetty of the Paris airport. The emotional intensity of the scene is registered on the face of a young woman, which is stored in his memory. Once this image from the past is embedded within a story, it is refigured as a premonition of the future – the vision of his own premature death which the rest of the film helps delay.

La jetée presents not only personal memories but also film history and museums as our most valuable cultural repositories, for the story is driven by a search engine that dramatises the productive interplay between these private and public archives. The story is set in Paris after World War 3 – specifically in the basement of the *Cinéma-thèque française*, one of the world's greatest film archives which became central in the Paris uprisings of 1968, when students, workers and activist filmmakers tried to bring down the government of Charles de Gaulle.

Marker's film also refigures the science fiction genre, which in Hollywood is usually expensive and high-tech and where human survival similarly depends on expensive cutting-edge hardware (think of Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* from 1968). But in Marker's modest little short, survival (like the film itself) depends entirely on conceptual power and on the rich interplay between image and narrative. It shows the power of narrative to re-contextualise the meaning of images, and the power of images to generate multiple stories.

In *La jetée* the archive (which doubles as prison-house) is no neutral repository but is leveraged for ideological ends – to save the world, to retrieve information from the past that will enable us to reshape the future. The victors appropriate the private memory banks of the losers, and use selected images to serve their own ideological goals, which are quite different from those of the men whose archival memories are being mined.

My favourite scene is the one where the man and the woman from the past go to the natural museum of history where they look at displays of 'timeless animals' – an archival exhibition of stuffed animals and fossils. On the one hand, these displays are indexical signs of dead animals from the past, yet they simultaneously function as symbols of evolution, growth, and transformation – the future. This same temporal doubleness also applies to the man and woman, who portray living subjects in this scene, but who (like the stuffed animals and all movie and video performances) are merely dead images from the past. This is the kind of time image liberated from movement and action that calls attention, not to 'timelessness' but to cinema's and video's complexities of layered time – what Deleuze calls 'the time-image'. This dimension helps us use this film as a way of envisioning the future.

My main point is this: in the 1960s Marker and his colleagues from the French new wave (Resnais, Varda, Godard, Rivette) were grappling with the ideological implications of archives and exhibitions (of movies, television, museums and other networked public spaces), revealing the kinds of knowledge production they embodied and denying they were merely neutral repositories of information. Instead, they were sites of on-going struggles over master narratives – between public collections and private memories, between history and subjectivity, between political action and emotional immersion. These ideas did not have to wait for the introduction of portable video as a medium of activist production or for the internet as a democratising mode of distribution; they were already being expressed via independent cinema with great conceptual power.

Labyrinth's Database Narratives: Stochastic Systems and Archival Cultural History

All of Labyrinth's works are 'database narratives' that reveal the process by which story fragments – images, sounds, texts – are chosen from archives and recombined to make a series of rival narratives. To expose this process of knowledge production, we frequently make this database structure visible. These works combine contributions by artists and amateurs, creators and users, professional historians and ordinary people telling their own life stories. As archival cultural histories, they involve a series of re-orchestrations in which on-line users and museum-goers participate. Labyrinth's database narratives all feature brief video modules that can be combined in a variety of ways. The mix is presented as a stochastic system – a term Gregory Bateson used to describe evolution: a combination of design, choice and chance. The brevity of the individual modules works toward emotional intensity, yet we include narrative lures to prolong the users' engagement within this force field of desire, where closure and other forms of premature death can be resisted. This combination (of brevity and prolongation) enhances the conceptual power of the pieces, both from amateurs and professionals. Here are three recent examples.

The Danube Exodus: The Rippling Currents of the River is an immersive installation based on a 1997 video by Hungarian artist Peter Forgács (known for remixing vintage home-movies with archival footage). This particular video remixed amateur footage shot by Captain Andrásovits, who in 1939 transported Jews fleeing Hitler along the Danube to the Black Sea where they boarded a ship to Palestine, and the following year carried Bessarabian German farmers back to Germany after their lands were reannexed by the Soviets. Using Forgács' 60-minute video as 'found footage', Labyrinth collaborated on 're-orchestrating'

it into a large-scale installation (with forty hours of footage), which was later remixed by museum-goers as they moved from room to room – a chain of appropriations that raises questions of agency and authorship.

To emphasise this chain of re-orchestrations, we divided the installation into five spaces, each presenting a different remix of the story. An antechamber with material objects (charts, maps, books) provided an overview, showing how the stories of the Captain and refugees are interwoven within a larger cultural history. A website (by C3 in Budapest) enabled visitors to add their own stories. Two interior side spaces – one devoted to the Jews, the other to the German farmers – had touch-screen monitors that enabled visitors to explore backstories of the voyages and interviews with survivors. A central 'poetic' space with five large screens and immersive sound, spatialised the rivalry among the three stories, enabling visitors to choose brief modules featuring either the Captain, the Bessarabians, or the Jews. This was the structure for the 2002 premiere exhibition at the Getty Center in Los Angeles, but was reconfigured for each subsequent venue: in Karlsruhe, Barcelona Helsinki, Ulm, Budapest, Berlin, Berkeley, the Hague, and New York (where it opens in March 2009).

The immersive poetic space always arouses the greatest emotional intensity, yet has few words and minimal interactivity. On a touchscreen monitor, eighteen icons (with moving video imagery) periodically emerge out of the river. As soon as one is selected, a brief (5 to 7 minute) narrative 'orchestration' takes over all five screens and cannot be interrupted. We deliberately chose intensity over agency because we realized the emotional power of Forgács's films depends on their rhythms. The large scale presentation also heightened the intensity. For, instead of being displayed within a modest domestic space, these home movies of ordinary people in crisis were projected in the kind of multi-screen public venue that is traditionally reserved for epic heroes or villains like Napoleon and Hitler. By moving them from the margins into the historical spotlight, we were insisting that 'amateur' footage of ordinary people deserves public attention.

Russian Modernism is on-line constructivist courseware that enables users to learn by helping to build it. Designed as free open-source software and scheduled to be launched in September 2008, this courseware provides a collaborative setting and creative tools for anyone to use. Demonstrating how successive media enrich rather than replace each other, this site shows how many aesthetic principles now being used to expand digital culture (remix, intertextuality, constructivism, synaesthesia) have historic roots in Russian modernism.

The courseware features three components: a multimedia archive based primarily on the holdings of USC's Institute for Modern Russian Culture; a series of interactive lectures (on Nothingness, Velocity, Petersburg, Vertov, The Bomb, The 1905 Revolution) by noted scholars in the field (including Yuri Tsivian of The University of Chicago, Olga Matich of UC Berkeley, Jon Bowlit of the University of Southern California and Lev Manovich of UCSD); and a role-playing game called 'Montage: A Russian History Game for the Masses', set at the 1896 All Great Russian Expo at Nizhny Novgorod, where cinema was first exhibited in

Russia and where artists, scientists and activists were presenting new visions of the 20th century. The game shows how the unique combination of artistic experimentation, radical politics and new technologies, defined the cultural specificity of modernism in Russia.

Like YouTube, our site features two kinds of on-line video: historical footage from the archive that is accessible to any user, and original contributions. My favourite example is a music video called *Autumn* made by former USC student Timur Bekbosunov and his Peruvian partner Sandra Powers, based on a song written by Russian-Gypsy cabaret singer Vadim Kozin. They created two versions – one in English, the other in Russian, each with a different visual remix. This video has also been uploaded on YouTube and Myspace, yet our site provides a framework that highlights *Autumn's* full conceptual power. For it embodies the primary point of our project – finding roots in Russian modernism for aesthetic concepts needed to expand contemporary digital culture.

Jewish Home-Grown History: Immigration, Identity and Intermarriage is an on-line exhibition and travelling installation (in production) that generates a dialogue between personal memories and official history. Dramatising Homi Bhaba's ideas of the interplay between a fixed pedagogic history and a performative rewriting from the margins, this project enables ordinary people to engage with questions of historiography as they tell immigration stories about their own family. Weakening the boundary between private and public history, it enables users to see how their own contributions enrich, complicate or challenge what is supposedly known, and how they merge with and transform the official record.

The first year will be devoted to a California pilot called *Jews in the Golden State*, which will premiere at the Judah Magnes Museum in Berkeley (where it will become part of their permanent collection) and at another venue in Los Angeles. The full national version (partly funded by a grant from NEH) will travel to Philadelphia, New York and Chicago.

Both the on-line archive and museum installation feature a software tool, which can easily be adapted to other themes and communities. Users can choose either to browse through the archive or contribute their own data. As soon as a user enters the dates and origins of her family's emigration to America, trajectory lines instantly appear on a map. As she answers other questions and uploads images with captions or home videos, these contributions immediately call up other materials that contextualise this input – video excerpts from newsreels, interviews or documentaries; clippings from newspapers and journals; quotations from history and literature; commentaries by historians on our advisory board. These materials generate a database narrative on the fly, which, in the installation, will be projected on a large screen and watched by other museum-goers, literally positioning the user as a performer of history.

PROCHRONIST MANIFESTATION

DOMINICK CHEN

A work that presents not only the final outcome but simultaneously also the process leading to it. It would be performed together with notes written on dispersed scraps of paper and diagrams and equations projected onto the walls. Why should process be distinguished from outcome? – Buffalo, New York, 4/2/1968

Collective creation can only be the integration, based on a concrete model, of the three different functions of composer, performer and audience. It should no longer rely on the privileged moment of temporary coexistence, but instead it should be understood as historical process. All works become works in progress. – Tokyo, 5/6/1965

The application of an individual's intuitions without an established methodology: this is fatal. It is a process that is unrepeatable, difficult to apply to different situations, complicated, clumsy, unreliable, arbitrary and on top of all this, highly time-consuming. It can never be detached from the 'genius' that has mastery over it. It is mystical. The operation becomes increasingly isolated, inactive, and dies off in the deepest angst. – Kamakura, 11/6/1975¹

Introduction: The discreteness of the completed and the continuity of process

We are not a completed form of existence. Our bodies constantly undergo metabolic regeneration and our thinking constantly acquires new information. However, in order to formulate one's intentions or directives, it is inevitable to express them in a limited time and space. What one in fact does is to dissect an aspect of his thinking that constantly and fluidly undergoes altered formation, and to solidify it so as to enclose it as something that belongs to his own domain and subsequently release it to the other. Even the individuality of the 'individual' who enacts this enclosure itself cannot easily be discerned.

For a specialist of a certain field his singularity is unproblematically generated by the rarity of his research. For example, if one's research field is only engaging 100 people in the whole world, there would be no effort required in identifying his own singularity within that community. If however, one attempts to work on a subject that more than a billion people in the world may be preoccupied with, his singularity is instantly diluted. Moreover, there is the issue which could be named the 'inertia of materialized expression'. When deciphering an abstract thesis or a logical connection, it is difficult to sense the originality of the writer as much as when looking at a drawing by a child. Umberto Eco said that a work would never come to resemble a dictionary. According to him, whereas the dictionary is inherently 'open' to

1. Yuji Takahashi, 'Getting Around the Knotted Loop of Time-Space', in *Collection – 1970's*, Heibonsha Library 2004.

redefinition, the work requires a 'minimum level of closure'. What then, can guarantee this 'minimum level of closure'?

Generally speaking, in our society the recognition that a certain representational object, whether it be a text or a piece of music, was produced by an individual does not arise autonomously from the object itself. We accept a work as produced by a certain personage after certain attestations as to the domain he belongs to, his ability in that domain and the context. We project diverse ideas to the context itself and therefore supplement the object in a different sphere from that of the object itself or attribute excessive (or insufficient) value to it. There is an undeniable inaccuracy in this. The author has to communicate the essence of his self-hood without the temporal process that led him from production to result being itself known. In fact, we can only know each other in a way that eliminates most of the process, or in other words the path that one took that demonstrates the 'minimum level of closure'.

This is an inevitable phenomenon that originates, to put it succinctly, in the increasingly complex social structure and the limit of human awareness. Even within an everyday conversation, we supplement each other's incomplete information to assess each other and repeatedly associate and dissociate contexts at extraordinary speed. This is especially true for urban life and its ever faster flow of time. This is because we are not capable of focusing on the process. Despite the fact that even in every action of a child when he is drawing we can observe a rich accumulation and layering, we have developed neither culture nor technology that concentrates upon the accumulation over time of the information that we daily exchange. Instead, by eliminating process we have, at an extraordinary rate, classified the world in a grid-like manner and acquired technology to associate similar elements within this system of classification. But what was all this for? Was it for worshipping those things that refuse classification under the name of genius or the mystical? By dichotomising the world into the understandable and non-understandable, one could never attain a fundamental understanding.

This is exactly why we now have to construct a method for collectively sharing not only the result but also the gradual process that leads from generation to the present. This entails the shifting of our frame of reference from form to time. It also points to the necessary experimentation towards a critical practice through which human beings can dynamically record and share the processes of all the activities that affect interpersonal structure, from conscious self-expression to unconscious bodily gestures in the everyday. Philosophy was constructed as philo-sophia or 'love of wisdom', but what we today should begin to consider is 'love of process' of information.

This series will explore the epistemological inversion to which a viewpoint based on the 'process of information' would be conducive. This opening text will be employed to prepare the ground for more concrete observations in subsequent work.

Bateson's prochronism and homology

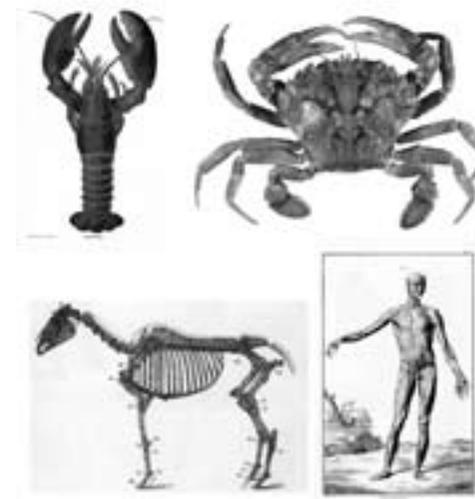


Figure 1: Homologies of Lobster and Crab, Horse and Human. Lobster: *Homarus americanus*.² Crab: *Liocarcinus vernalis*.³ Horse: Bones of a horse (*Equus caballus*).⁴ Human: Anatomie.⁵

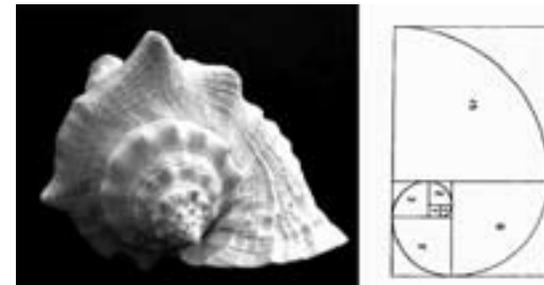


Figure 2: Conch shell and the Fibonacci number.⁶

Biologist and cybernetician Gregory Bateson asked the fundamental question 'what is the pattern that connects all living organisms?' in his book *Mind and Nature*, he considered this questioning of the relationship between himself and a newly found entity, of the pattern that

2. Extracted from 'The New Student's Reference Work for Teachers, Students and Families', Chandler B. Beach ed., 1914, Wikimedia Commons.
3. Photograph by Hans Hillewaert from the Belgian coastal waters, 2005, Wikimedia Commons.
4. Extracted from 'Nordisk familjebok' (1904-1926). Wikimedia Commons.
5. Extracted from 'Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers', Diderot et d'Alembert, 1751-1766, Wikimedia Commons.
6. Conch shell: Photograph by windflower43, webshots.com. Fibonacci number: Golden-Section.png, Wikimedia Commons.

connects him with this entity as an 'aesthetic problem'. The following story about him, from when he worked as a lecturer at the San Francisco Art Institute, is emblematic of this.

One day as Bateson came in to the class, he abruptly placed a boiled crab that he had bought at the Fisherman's Wharf in front of the students. He then asked the students to assume that they did not know about an entity known as a 'crab' and to prove that the object in front of them was the 'remains of a living organism'. The bewildered students took some time to handle the crab to observe it, until one of them proposed an answer: 'This object is symmetrical. As all living organisms are symmetrical this object too is a living organism'. To this Bateson replied that 'it [was] a good answer, but there [was] something more fundamental', prompting a different answer from another student: 'the sizes of the right and left claws are different and therefore its morphology isn't symmetrical', however 'the two claws are made of the same pattern'.

Bateson appraised this answer as touching on the most fundamental point that can be: the evidence of the crab being connected with other living organisms. In other words, he encouraged the students to draw their attention to the crab's embryological origin. By observing the morphology of each part of the crab and by speculating about the temporal transition that it underwent during its growth, it is possible to 'understand' that the crab is a living organism just like the observer. In this case, the serial homology between the parts in the object's internal morphology forms first-order connections, the phylogenetic homology between the crab and other similar living organism (e.g. the lobster) forms second-order connections and the homology between crabs and lobsters on one hand and human beings and other living organism (e.g. mammals) on the other form third-order connections. This shows that the homological pattern is, unlike a simplistic analogy, a hierarchical connection.

Bateson asked the students to carry out the same task with a conch shell. In this case the students could no longer rely either on the similarities between different parts nor on the symmetrical property of the object. What Bateson was here pointing to, was a law of a higher order: symmetry and segmentation are only the supervening outcome of the phenomenon of growth, and growth itself follows a morphological law. He described this as both the crab and the conch shell retaining the 'prochronism' that presents the temporal transition that it underwent in its growth. In other words, all living organisms mark their own ecological process in their own body and exhibit this to the external world. It is because of this that living organisms can, through the observation of each other's morphological layout, 'be homologous' to each other.

Bateson emphasizes that this hierarchical thinking owes itself to embryology. This means that the time that the living organism underwent from being an embryo to the present can be read 'at once', thus supplementing temporal observation on how the organism mutually interacts with the surrounding environment. This concept of prochronism is reminiscent of the concept of the invariant, a group of elements which persists as invariable for a significant amount of time to the observing subject, coined by James Gibson in his theory of affordance. By perceiving the layout of invariants within an environment, living organisms understand what actions are possible within that environment (affordance). Similarly, by manifesting the

trajectory of their lives through their own morphology, living organisms obtain a foothold for understanding the mutual association between each other. Moreover, an environment (a natural space that presents a certain amount of characteristics or an artificially enclosed architectural space) can be conceived of as a living structure that also discloses a prochronism peculiar to itself when encountering another living organism. In this sense, we constantly afford each other our prochronisms in order to establish a mutual relationship. The manner of this affordance, as we shall see later, appears as 'monstration' at the unconscious level and as 'demonstration' at the conscious level, and we act and mutually interact on the basis of these different layers of information.

This is to directly read the subtle associations between an object that exists before our eyes and the surrounding environment including the observing self, not by compartmentalising the world according to typological codes but by observing the internality of that object. The activities that a living organism has constantly carried out through its life are, in terms of a Uexküllian *umwelt* or 'environment-world', identified differently according to the observer's mode of perception. We human beings have historically expanded our mode of perception by way of innovating and developing media technologies. What we should be drawing our attention to today however, is the prochronism of the information that we daily produce, exchange, share and inherit through diverse media technologies. This will lead to the understanding of information as a 'living process' and to the recognition of its embryology (Figure 1 and 2).

Observation technology and its epistemological consequences

Today we live surrounded by digital information. This domain, which has its foundation in the Internet, forms for us a second nature (it could also be called 'surrounding environment' or 'environment-world'). Before the permeation of the Internet, our world-view was dominated by most information which was simply physically difficult to access. The mass of information that an individual can access today however, exists 'there' in a rawer form than ever before. After the diffusion of the terms 'Web 2.0' and 'Web-wares' (a general term indicating software that function within the web browser or an operating system that functions within the server) the number of people actively transmitting information is steadily growing. Moreover, the rapid progress in information transmission and information sampling technology that is epitomised by the ever-propagating weblogs and lifelogs, is now causing an exponential increase in the quantity of information around the world.

These social as well as technological conditions are exerting a considerable influence on our cognitive awareness of the world. For example, when one wants to know, learn or remember something, the amount of information that can be literally accessed 'instantly' is beginning to surpass our cognitive threshold for construing the totality of information as a reliable resource. The digital data that constantly undergoes altered formation on the network, from software to content, literally and not metaphorically forms the environment in which our daily activities are performed. How do we interact with this environment?

In his book *Mori no Baroque (Baroque of the Forest)*, theologian Shinichi Nakazawa makes persistent reference to the epistemological inversion that occurred in the Western natural sciences of the 19th century, basing his analysis on Foucault's *Les Mots et Les Choses (The Order of Things)*. Nakazawa draws our attention to the fact that the invention of the com-

pound microscope at the beginning of the 19th century, caused the focus in the natural sciences to shift from phanerogamia to cryptogamia. Phanerogamia present clear external characteristics that enabled, among other things, the development of Linnaean phylogenetic taxonomy. However, the dramatic improvement in resolution brought about by the compound microscope enabled the observer to deal with cryptogamia that were until then invisible. Cryptogamia are a life form that function in a sphere that is imperceptible to the naked human eye (hence the name, crypt: something that exists as hidden) and it was the combined microscope that allowed scientists to 'discover' them. Foucault states that the reason plant taxonomy flourished in the 17th and 18th centuries, was not because of an increased interest in plants, but simply because scientists only possessed a taxonomic space for the visible (*espace taxonomique de visibilité*) which was more adapted to plants than animals. The technological turning point caused by the combined microscope has, according to Foucault, led to the successes of Cuvier's anatomy and Bernard's physiology which gave birth to a certain 'vitalism'.

This vitalism that focused on the invisible processes that internally drive living organisms, was later to be inherited by Darwin's theory of evolution and Mendel's genetics. Nakazawa asserts that 'although taxonomy may be one of the methods to approach the essential nature of life, it can never be the aim itself', illustrating the limitations of taxonomy by referring to Kumagusu Minakata's research on mycetozoa which, because of their fluid alternation between animal-like and plant-like conditions and the fact that each individual organism presents itself as a variant species, shook the very foundation of taxonomical natural sciences.

This 19th century vitalism later led to the observation of DNA at the molecular level due to the developments in scientific technology. Our society today is, at the most advanced level, able to observe up to the elementary particle level and is simultaneously beginning to equip the real world environment with nano-scale engineering technology such as M/NEMS (Micro/Nano Electro Mechanical System). This kind of technology however, is still out of reach for the general public to manipulate and in this sense the flexibility for its expansion only currently exists in limited form.

As mentioned above, however, our surrounding world is now replete with an enormous amount of information. In a paper entitled *Life (Vitalism)*, Scott Lash elegantly unravels the genealogy of *Lebensphilosophies* (philosophical speculation regarding life). He distinguishes between the vitalists that focused on 'perception' such as Jean-Gabriel Tarde, Bergson and later Deleuze, and those who focused on 'power' such as Nietzsche, Georg Simmel and Foucault, and links these currents of thought to the contemporary endeavors of scholars such as Katherine Hayles and Donna Haraway to reconfigure our understanding of life within the totality of information (biomedica) in this information society:

If classical vitalism conceives of life as a flow and in opposition to the structure that would contain and stop it, then neo-vitalism would seem to have its roots in something like a media or information heuristic. Thus, there is talk today that 'information is alive'... The currency of vitalism has re-emerged in the context of (a) changes in the sciences, with the rise of ideas of uncertainty and complexity and (b) the rise of the

global information society. This is because the notion of life has always favoured an idea of becoming over one of being, of movement over stasis, of action over structure, of flow and flux.⁷

Surveying Lash's and Nakazawa/Foucault's thoughts, one is left with the tangible impression that a vitalist thought process is a phenomenon that recursively emerges in the contemporary world. This is because of the correlation between the total amount of information that can be observed and manipulated and the limit of human cognitive ability. Let us now explore the hypothesis that, just as in the 19th century the combined microscope increased the observational resolution of scientists allowing them to access a sphere that was until then invisible, a similar change is occurring to us now at the beginning of the 21st century.

The vitalist interpretation of information

Let us now look at current conditions in the domain of media art. Here we will employ a broad definition for media art: all forms of representation that self-referentially utilise technology which is in each period advanced, encompassing the medieval visual apparatuses; the birth of reproduction technology such as the gramophone; the advent of electronic media such as the radio, television and video; and finally the dramatic developments in computing technology and the diffusion of the Internet. Thus the historical view that is adopted is one which sees the contents of the concept of media art being revised and redefined according to the alterations in media technology and society itself.

The institutional space of media art, which is beginning to lose its radical quality within the context of art history after the year 2000 due to the popularisation of media technology as exemplified by the 'cheap revolution', is currently facing problems such as the multiplication of authorship, difficulties to establish a universally shared language, and a certain loss and recurrence of historicity. Despite these new developments the dominant methodology in media art research continues to be a taxonomical one. Moreover, we are increasingly unable to critically discuss individual media art projects from the perspective of a sharable value system common to all. It is impossible to contribute to the construction of an evolutionary history by way of deducting the essence from an outcome. Archivists of media art are struggling in the confusion caused by its post-modern rationale. It is in this kind of environment that we individually strive to connect philosophical thought, sociology, information sciences, aesthetics and poetics.

Would it not be possible for us to begin to construct, just as the baroque and romantic periods prepared the ground for modernism, a new temporal axis which will succeed modernism and post-modernism? This is the other objective of this present article. As a foothold for this, we have so far discussed the focus on process, the fact that such focus can be placed within the genealogy of vitalism, which then leads to the proposal of a value system based on the prochronism and flexibility of information. Thus the present discussion will not take the position affirmed by biomedica where life processes are reduced to the terms of information

7. Scott Lash, 'Life(Vitalism)', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23.2-3 (2006).

science. Rather, it understands information in a vitalist manner. What, then, is the equivalent for the paradigm shift from phanerogamia to cryptogamia in the current mediascape that surrounds us? In order to answer this question, we must observe the formation and alteration of different currents in software and content development over networks together with individual groups of creators. Here, the environment formed by F/LOSS (Free and Libre Open Source Software) will be a crucial starting point.

Black-box-like proprietary software can be regarded as phanerogamic software. What is now a synonym for proprietary software, namely the Windows OS of Microsoft, can only be assessed at its surface or functional level precisely because its source code is hidden. By contrast, the change that the birth of free software brought about was that anyone could access the internal algorithms that drive the operations at the surface level because the code was now open-source. We may regard this as the rise of cryptogamic software. Open source software and open contents are, due to the legal flexibility conferred upon them by digital copy-right licensing such as GNU GPL or Creative Commons, constantly open to the possibility of redefinition by individuals in different fields, or of inheritance and propagation to different aims and functions. Not only can we daily experience the manner in which information produced in different fields is automatically mashed-up by several different algorithms to give birth to new information, but we can also observe such processes by utilising log analysis technology.

Considering the fact that open source software has now established itself as the operating principle that guides the internet as an information infrastructure, we can consider the 'resolution' for observing 'under what kind of logic' information is produced and circulated (generally called media literacy) as ever-increasing for everyone, including the general user. In *The Wealth of Networks* legal scholar Yochai Benkler focuses, from a point of view of social justice, on the increased possibility for individuals in the 21st century network information society to know how the world functions, in comparison to the 20th century industrial information society. Insofar as it is not only providing opportunities for wide-ranging communication between individuals but also the possibility to establish a deeper relationship with the 'information' which we produce and share, the internet can be understood as a gigantic microscope. We are unconsciously acquiring the ability to break down information that surrounds us at an ever higher level of resolution. This viewpoint will aid in the reconstructive understanding of media art as an avant-garde form of representation in the contemporary world.

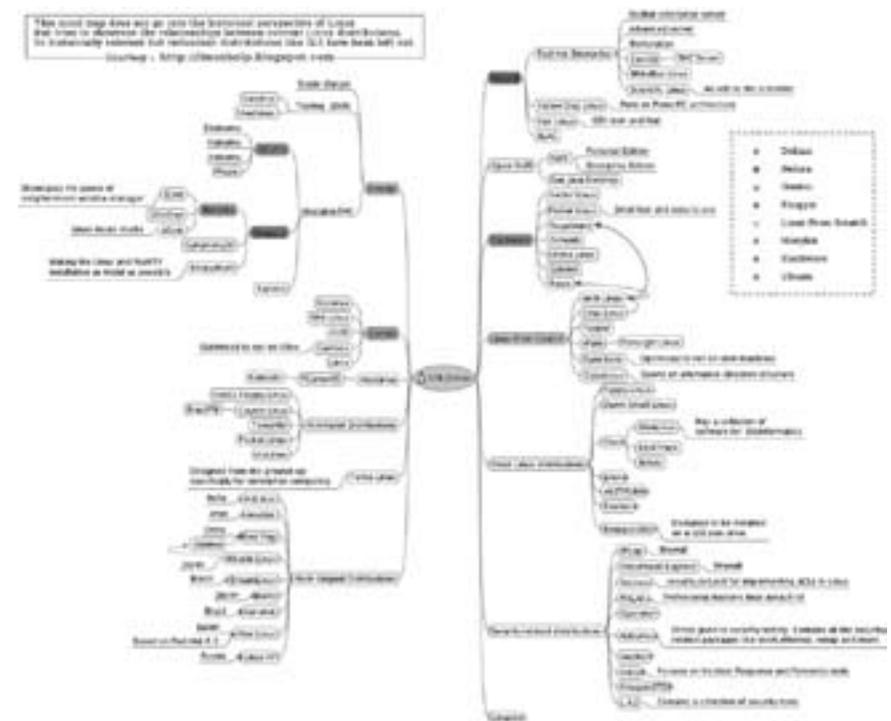


Figure 3: GNU/Linux mindmap.⁸

8. Courtesy: <http://linuxhelp.blogspot.com>

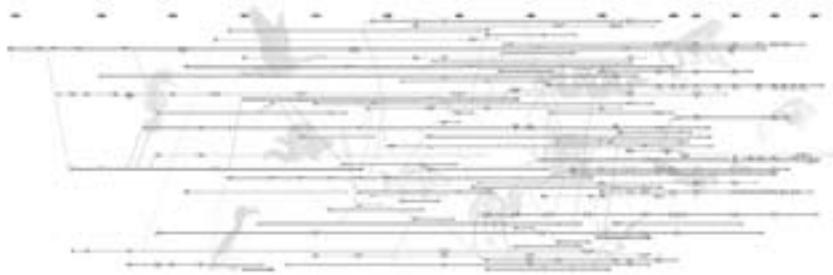


Figure 4: The History of Programming Languages, O'Reilly Media.⁹

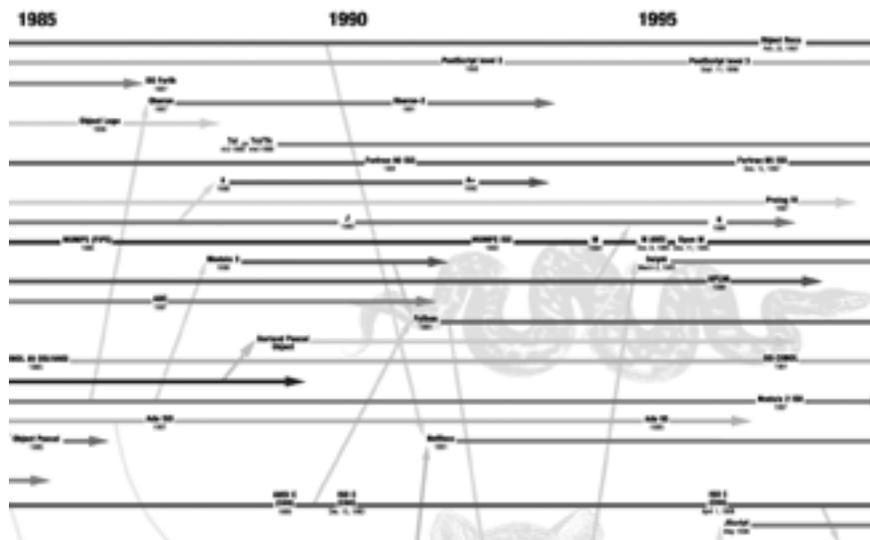


Figure 5: Ibid. (detail)

Transitions in the modality of cultural production

It goes without saying that the current conditions of the network are engendering countless opportunities for creative expression that effortlessly surpass the boundaries created by the privileged institutional space of art history. It is because of this however, that it is crucial to continue to strive to define art history, or more precisely the relationship between art and society. It is necessary to avoid relying on the term 'art' as an easy excuse or to fall into a rose-coloured appraisal of the network, and instead strive to establish an evolutionary viewpoint that encompasses culture as a whole.

For example, avant-garde art is always born as a negation of the existing institutionalised art. In this sense the mode of information production in the network can per se be understood as assuming the function of dismantling the current art institution. Let us now refer to the table proposed by art historian Peter Bürger in his discussion on the institution of art and the avant-garde entitled *Theorie der Avantgarde* (Figure 6).

This macroscopic classification does not only correspond with political history where the authority for the production of artistic culture gradually shifted from religion to nation and then subsequently to the people, but also applies to the cultural conditions of today where the dominant ideology still tries to identify creativity solely with the individual. This does not take away the fact that in the current proliferation of diverse styles and theories in the aftermath of post-modernism, it is problematic to adopt such summarised categorisations as 'bourgeois art' (the table was produced in 1974). In the contemporary art world for example, art critic Nicolas Bourriaud's series of projects since the late 90s related to the concept of 'Relational Aesthetics' (RA) are well known for inducing a redefinition of open works and a re-evaluation of the active involvement of the observing spectators. This 'movement' can be characterised by the several talented artists' focus on 'experience', renouncing formal aesthetics and their direct collaboration in some projects of collective artistic creation.

However, several art historians, including Hal Foster and Claire Bishop, have posed a fundamental question to Bourriaud's projects, pointing out that they are merely play-games enjoyed within the privileged institutional space of museums and art centers. The core of the criticism shared by both Foster and Bishop is that Bourriaud's model invalidates the evaluation of the work itself by over-emphasising the openness of the work to the intervention of the spectator. Bishop indicates the vacuity of the concept of 'conviviality' proposed by artists who are sympathetic to RA such as Liam Gillick and Rirkrit Tiravanija who present works that only function on the premise of the spectators' intervention to and action within the space they prepare – for example, an office space or a workshop. She proposes that works by Santiago Sierra, who creates spaces where the spectator is faced with a condition to which he cannot be assimilated (a project where low-income workers are forced into meaningless labour) or by Thomas Hirschhorn (a project where a work is detached from its privileged exhibition space and inserted to a heterogeneous urban context) that give tangible reality to the 'antagonism' between the content of the message of the work and the spectators, can offer opportunities to critically overcome Bourriaud's concept (Figure 7 and 8). Similarly, Foster describes the situation to which RA inevitably leads to as 'post-critical culture, post-theoretical art, architecture, film and literature'.

9. http://www.oreilly.com/news/graphics/prog_lang_poster.pdf

By renaming the work as 'platform', RA's position posits a collective group of several individuals as the intended audience of their art. Strictly in this sense, the discussion regarding RA is representative of the characteristic trend in radical forms of expression in the contemporary world, whether it be contemporary art or media art. If we go back for a moment to Bürger's table, we can verify the fact that both Bourriaud and his critics base their view on the notion of the individual artist designing the experience of a collective audience (Bourriaud in fact later included Hirschhorn in the list of his exhibitions). Foster's speculation that 'the reason why discursivity and sociality are at the foreground in today's art is because such elements are rare in other fields', is an awareness that can readily be shared by both the methodology which advocates 'relationality' and the position which strives to expose 'antagonism'. Let us name this situation 'relational art' and add it to Bürger's table (Figure 9). In doing so, let us assume for now that the function of artistic style leads to the manifestation of sociality and that the mode of reception has become collective.

It is apparent however, that an asymmetry between producer and receiver continues to persist. The question of 'how' the audience as a 'collective group' and the small number of producers are 'connected' is only explained in terms of isolated concepts, namely 'conviviality' on one hand and 'antagonism' on the other. This very retroactive formulation of the aim/function uncovers the limitation that is inherent to the privileged institution of art. To borrow from Bateson's phraseology, the phylogenetic homology between producer and receiver has to be defined within its relationship and developmentally inherited. Moreover, as long as there exists an asymmetry (or distance) between producer and receiver, the modality of cultural production would inevitably lead back to a religious power structure. In other words, as long as there exists a clear demarcation between producer and receiver, we would never liberate ourselves from the mode of perception we have made repetitive reference to since the beginning of this paper where the 'result' inevitably leads to an 'individual'. Only as this demarcation is slowly dismantled can a modality of cultural production between symmetrical peers of equal status and the understanding of mutual action as a living process be possible.

Let us for now name this yet unknown mode of art that we will seek as 'X'. There is no doubt that a situation will come about where, due to the dismantlement of the demarcation between them, producer and receiver will face each other in the sphere of 'collective creation (in contrast to 'production' which entails a shared aim)' while both retaining a 'minimum level of closure'. Moreover, let us tentatively set the aim/function of 'X' as the exchange of (phylogenetic) homology that peers derive from each others' prochronism (Figure 10). From here, we will need to discuss in greater depth how to design the prochronism of information as the necessary condition for securing the 'minimum level of closure' in terms of the middle ground between the two polarities of demonstration and of the relationship between learning and structure of perception from a radical constructivist view-point, in order to, amongst other things, reach a greater level of analysis of the last raw data in the table.

	SACRAL ART	COURTLY ART	BOURGEOIS ART
PURPOSE OR FUNCTION	CULT	REPRESENTATIONAL OBJECT	PORTRAYAL OF BOURGEOIS SELF-UNDERSTANDING
PRODUCTION	COLLECTIVE CRAFT	INDIVIDUAL	INDIVIDUAL
RECEPTION	COLLECTIVE (SACRAL)	COLLECTIVE (SOCIAL)	INDIVIDUAL

Figure 6: Transition of art forms by Peter Bürger, recreated by author after 'Theorie der Avantgarde'.



Figure 7: Rirkrit Tiravanija, Untitled, 1996 (Tomorrow Is Another Day), Kolnischer Kunstverein, Cologne, Germany, 1996. Courtesy GavinBrown's Enterprise, New York.¹⁰



Figure 8: Santiago Sierra, 133 Persons Paid to Have Their Hair Dyed Blond, Arsenale, Venice, Italy. June 2001.

10. Figure 7 & 8: Claire Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', *October Magazine* 110, Fall 2004.

	SACRAL ART	COURTLY ART	BOURGEOIS ART	RA
PURPOSE OR FUNCTION	CULT	REPRESENTATIONAL OBJECT	PORTRAYAL OF BOURGEOIS SELF-UNDERSTANDING	ART DISCOURSE, SOCIABILITY (PARTICIPATION, ANTAGONISM)
PRODUCTION	COLLECTIVE CRAFT	INDIVIDUAL	INDIVIDUAL	INDIVIDUAL
RECEPTION	COLLECTIVE (SACRAL)	COLLECTIVE (SOCIABLE)	INDIVIDUAL	COLLECTIVE

Figure 9: Transition of art forms by Peter Bürger with the RA added, recreated by author after 'Theorie der Avantgarde'.

	SACRAL ART	COURTLY ART	BOURGEOIS ART	RA	X
PURPOSE OR FUNCTION	CULT	REPRESENTATIONAL OBJECT	PORTRAYAL OF BOURGEOIS SELF-UNDERSTANDING	ART DISCOURSE, SOCIABILITY (PARTICIPATION, ANTAGONISM)	ECONOMY OF PROCHRONISM AND HOMOLOGU (MUTUAL RECOGNITION)
PRODUCTION	COLLECTIVE CRAFT	INDIVIDUAL	INDIVIDUAL	INDIVIDUAL	COLLECTIVE CREATION
RECEPTION	COLLECTIVE (SACRAL)	COLLECTIVE (SOCIABLE)	INDIVIDUAL	COLLECTIVE	COLLECTIVE CREATION

Figure 10: Same table with the art form X added.

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ON GIG FLIX

A STEREOSCOPIC VIEW ON THE MULTI-CAMERA FILMING OF LIVE MUSIC IN 'U23D' (2008) AND ITS FAN MOVIE COUNTERPARTS ON THE INTERNET

SARAH KÉSENNE

What a thrill to see the videos that Latin-American U2 fans have uploaded on the web. They show the same concerts of the U2 Vertigo tour as in the concert film 'U23D' I saw the evening before in the IMAX cinema in Brussels. It is said to be the first 3D multi-camera recording of a live event ever. This 85 minute immersive experience of tangible high definition, spectacular spidercam shots and graphic overlays contrasts highly with the ephemeral qualities of the short, handheld mobile phone 'flix' of Argentinian and Mexican teenagers. They both are signs of our times.

In one of these amateur videos we find our 15-year old cameraman laughing at the lens in extreme close-up, meanwhile joking to his friends. They're all waiting for the kick-off of the long expected Vertigo tour concert of U2. Night has fallen, and he sweeps his phone 360 grades around: a generic camera movement to express exposition. We vaguely get an idea of the enormous mass of people gathered in the football stadium, an average of 100 000 people according to the 'U23D' website. We seem miles away from the stage. Now the blaring lights of this sports arena are turned off, and for a long time the Quicktime player shows nothing more but a black screen, if not for the dispersed glowing mobile screens, like dirty pixels. The start of the concert is pure ecstasy, and abstract: a distant light explosion and video walls popping up in the dark. The phone returns to his pocket, while much closer to the action the 'U23D' crew gets its multi-camera set rolling. To achieve the 3-D stereoscopic effect the concert is filmed simultaneously by a double camera apparatus, an apt metaphor for the multiple video practices I want to discuss here.

I think I'm in your extended network

This article tells something about online fan movies, but it is about big screen concert films too. It's also about the way the music industry needs images. I don't take up the challenge to talk in a formal way about the relation between sound and image, but focus on how contemporary, simultaneous recording practices interact, in a flow that goes 'on' and 'off' the Internet. I was tempted to use the popular craft of multi-camera style, to reflect on new forms of multiplicity in visual language. It seemed that in my way of thinking, techniques render ideas.

How is the popular visual recording code of multi-camera transformed by a network? This article talks inevitably about an *open* network. Open in the sense of reconnecting online with offline images. Open in the sense of an 'extended' network. Which other is the 'hors-champ' of the online, if not 'the offline'?

Imagine all the uploaded fan videos of the Vertigo U2 tour together and you get a transformed multi-camera experience. But zoom out and you see there are a lot more cameras in the arena: television reporters, the set-up of 'U23D', and the live images on the video walls. We live in a time when the cameras are always on. We worry about surveillance cameras and state control. This very contemporary experience of 'being filmed from different angles' is often described in terms of the scary panopticon architecture: a circular prison with cells arranged around a central well, from which prisoners could at all times be observed. But is there a way out of the panopticon? In his video 'Capsular', Belgian artist Herman Asselberghs shoots this 'all-seeing Eye' of security cameras in Ceuta, the extreme border of Europe in Morocco, Africa. In a later video, Asselberghs shifts to a multi-camera shooting of a darkened room where a noise band is playing. This is to what I want to do: to bring recording out of the paranoia atmosphere into the concert hall of beer, sweat and pulsing pop music, in order to reflect on formal aspects. It is true that network theory needs a language of both aesthetic and political elements, like Lev Manovich stated. But let's not limit the debate to a solely moral context.

When people say web videos are ugly and banal, it makes me think we still need a sea change to understand networks. In the process of viewing and clicking, these vague, low-resolution online images are progressively layered, overwritten, refined, 'amplified'. The network seems here to function by rules of addition and counterbalance.

And let's not get lost in maps. That modernist idea of networks ignores the complexity of code, like Geert Lovink notes in his book 'Zero Comments'.¹ Where networks force us to dive into deep data streams, away from 'screen culture', video is problematic because it brings back visuality. It makes us forget about the real nature of Internet media.

So how to think multiplicity, while keeping central the image *in* the network, not the image of the network? When I teach my students at the arts and design department of the PHL University college about seventies' Mail Art, I tell them the pictures of sloppy envelopes and blurred stamps don't reveal the subversive essence of this art movement. They have to imagine the free distributed movement that opposed itself against commercial art circuits. This means also to understand of the institutionalization of the art world at that time.

Filming the concert: let's celebrate

The broader context of this story is a memorable 'dance macabre' between the music industry and the Internet. Peer-to-peer file trading is causing the collapse of the record economy as we know it, and offers a horror movie script for the future of visual entertainment industry. While provider, server and software companies are cashing in on these shifts, big part of the money is also finding its way to a booming concert business. This makes these ephemeral 'gig flix' almost icons of a restructuring industry. They represent the dangerous fan masses that threaten to download the major labels to death. At the same time, they also celebrate the comeback of the live music event, unseen in western societies since music became recorded. This double billing representation counterbalances strongly the so-called banality of these fan movies.

Musicians and their marketeers know well of 'the importance of being YouTubed'. There's this trend of 'trottoir concerts': a very contemporary way to gain some street credibility. Short after celeb junkie Pete Doherty sang a few songs on the sidewalk after a Brussels concert, Frank 'Pixies' Black played his guitar in the hip Rue Dansaert. Róisín Murphy appeared a short time after in the streets of London (and on YouTube), spontaneously bringing an entire vocal backing group with her. It's amazing how fast a crowd of passing cellphones creates a semi-automatic multi-camera recording and transmission of this sort of mini-events. Filming and being filmed have become mainstream and daily-life things. People hardly look in the lens, no matter if they are filming or not. Internet gave sense to recording, and recording became a way of celebrating the Internet.

It is clear that music needs images to reach its fans, or vice versa. Pop music became heavily commodified and rock 'n' roll clichés a grateful instrument to mobilize masses of adolescent rebels. Anton Corbijn's melancholy, grainy, black and white pictures of Ian Curtis, the deceased cult lead singer of punk band Joy Division, are still a milestone for rock iconography today. The body snatching of the corpses of dead rock singers, could be the commodification of the death wish of growing up in a capitalist world. At first sight concert recordings escape this manufactured image of rock music more than promotional music videos and monumental photo portraits do. Does this have something to do with their formal and technological character? You see cables, microphones, amplifiers, tripods, electrical guitars, keyboards and other instruments. The stage looks like a film set or recording studio. There's an intense focus on the spots where the musicians touch their instruments. It makes me think of porn movies: what you see is what you get. It's a mechanic and formulaic filming of a machine. The images have to synchronize the music, by the rules of high ethical documentary. Manipulation seems hard, referential meaning almost absent. But the example of old school ethnographic film practice shows images of live music images can be loaded with ideological meaning. Music-making Africans became a stereotype of primitive oral culture and lack of written heritage: a pretext to look down on African culture. But they are also symbol of the richness of African culture and the global reach of African music. It's a negotiation.

Live music imagery gets a lot of meaning out of its context. In rockumentaries, the concert and studio scenes play a central part, alternating the (often boring) talking head interviews. But as neutral inserts, they are easily integrated in the 'hagiographic' narratives of the rest of the movie. So what does the online network do to these web images of live music? They consist mostly of bits and pieces of one song. The video I described at the beginning of this article, shows only the minutes before the kick-off of the concert.

In 'U23D', and the wave of concert films to be expected, we see a move towards these images of pure music, autonomous but also highly illustrative concerning the sound. This is something you could link to the research on interactive web video. They mirror a pop song: emotional, intense, simple, short and easily distributed. Sound is always pioneering. Images of music-making show in this sense a generating machine, not only of sound, but also of images. Because maybe the fan movies on the net, or even all amateur movies on the net, will soon be called 'pop video', like in this Deleuzian definition of pop music:

1. Geert Lovink, *Zero Comments: Blogging and Critical Internet Culture*, London: Routledge, 2007.

The regime of music production that is tied neither to the European composer/concert tradition and its strict division of labor, nor to any of the various historical traditions of indigenous music making around the world, but rather to the bricolage of modern recording technology (electric /electronic instruments, studios, overdubbing, mixing, etc.) and its media of distribution.²

Multi-camera and 'U23D': 'With or without You'

Live music is usually recorded with a multi-camera set-up, a camera style that could be called a popular cultural craft. It is used for audiovisual productions of both commercial and live character, like television sitcoms or sport games. Unmanned and manned cameras shoot simultaneously from different angles, in routine sequences of frontal shots, zooms and angle shots. Modest variation is provided by alternation between close-ups, medium shots and long shots. In this sense the often seen cranshots or fast diagonal camera movements offer a clumsy attempt to render the image more dynamic. Essentially multi-camera images are not recorded on tape, but put in real-time in sequence by a vision controller in a camera control unit or CCU. A friend teaching at a Brussels' film school described this fast form of editing as a form of picking apricots: while you're putting one fruit with your left hand in the basket, you're at the same time grabbing another one from the tree with your right hand. Recording and editing are happening in the same flux. Although this requires skill, multi-camera is often looked upon as a cheap production technique with great technical and artistic limitations. In reality these are less restrictive than the constraints defined by the recorded events themselves. It might be a restricting camera style, but one that leaves room for the viewer to insert subjective images.

Producer National Geographic proudly presents 'U23D' concert film as the first big screen multi-camera recording of a live event with 3-D technology. Director Catherine Owens worked in close collaboration with the 3Ality Digital company for the 3-D effects and on the other hand Marc Pellington, an expert of recording live events. The opulent multi-camera setup consisted of 36 HD cameras, operated by 18 CCUs with two technocranes, two jibarms and a spidercam for sweeping movements through space. The masses of footage resulting were processed with unique 3-D post-production software. The production had only one aim: creating an immersive experience. 'Digital 3-D is a new cinema medium that truly allows moviegoers to immerse themselves in the experience, energy and emotion of being in a prime seat at a U2 concert. The 3-D elements are there to immerse you, not distract you', stated 3Ality chief Steve Schklair.³ The tangible qualities of the movie did make some journalists want to reach out and slap Bono 'did you come here to play Jesus' in the face. Maybe big screen documentary is taking over the continuity model of Hollywood cinema. 3-D post-production special effects serves to immerse the viewer in oblivion. But 'U23D' is not a real multi-camera style because the recording isn't falling together with the edit. The stiff alternating multi-camera shots are transformed into an immersive hyperrealist experience, which

2. T.S. Murphy, Smith, D.W., 'What I hear is thinking too: Deleuze and Guattari go pop', *Echo: A Music-centered Journal*, 3 (1): para. 2, (January, 2002), <http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/echo>

3. Deborah Kaufman, 'Shooting a concert film like no other', *Studio Daily*, (May 2008), <http://www.studiodaily.com/filmandvideo/currentissue/8968.html>

makes you forget not only the filming, but maybe also that you are being filmed. The fans in 'U23D' are only extras: their images are not allowed in the movie. They are the bisons of 'Dances with Wolves'. They're the shady 'title safe', a black border of the image which could be cut off by the size of your television screen. On the list of human rights recited by Bono during the concert, there's one line missing: the right to record.

The filming network

'U23D' director Catherine Owens stated they wanted 'to use technology to make viewers feel like they were actually at the concert, to capture the intimacy between band and audience in a unique, visceral way', while Steve Schklair calls their movie 'intuitive and immediate'. These words describe exactly how I feel about these web videos of South-American fans. The compliance of 'U23D' and all the web video of the Vertigo tour mirrors a 3-D stereoscopic image: an illusory image in our brains, created by two separately recorded images. Cinema viewers, concert fans and Internet surfers are overlapping, the multi-camera setup extended to an experience of multiplicity where performing, filming, editing, transmission and viewing get mixed up.

This leaves traces in both HD and handheld video practices. In 'U23D' you see fans in the front rows stretching out their arms to get a glimpse on their mobile phones. A beautiful moment in the movie is when Bono calls out to the public to show some light, 'lighters or candles, electronic or digital'. The cameras are turning and you see an endless starry sky of mobile screens in the night. The 'U23D' producers were at the same time anxious to get one of their own 18 stereo-camera rigs into sight and organized complex shooting plans to avoid this. Also the band didn't wanted close-ups during the concert, 'out of respect for their fans'. Prominent cameras on stage could have disturbed the performance.

In the fan videos on the web it's the other way around. It's hard to find one where you don't see one of the 'U23D' crew cameras on the stage. In one on Google video, a fan zooms in on the stage from the back of the arena. You see vaguely three cameras active on stage: a crane, a camera moving behind the drum and another one in the front. In another one on the Mexico City concert, a zoom on a part of the video wall shows half of the live image barred by a crane passing by, probably one of the 'U23D' setup. The cameras became part of the performance. Also the other way around the performance is influenced heavily by the recording activity. Catherine Owens said shooting 'U23D' was an 'inside' job: there was a constant communication with the band, about where they should be at which moment. In a lot of net videos, the stage and band performance have totally disappeared, even with the help of the huge video walls and dramatic stage act of Bono. The band is erased, like they were cut out of a blue screen background. What's left over is cameras filming cameras, lens against lens, while they forget about the performance. We end up with this gathered mass of people listening to music and taking shots of a light show and each other.

When musicians are filming on stage, it's like they take revenge for this. In a video of a Coldplay concert, Chris Martin grabs the cellphone of an Italian fan in the front and starts dancing with it on stage. It's heartbreaking to hear the teenager girls shout hysterically to each other after he hands them back their phone. During a concert of the superb avant-hop band Anti-

Pop Consortium, one of the MCs rhymed looking into the lens of a handheld camera he was holding, while ignoring the public. The recording of a classic multi-camera setup is usually adjusted to the performance, in contrast to the single-cam style. So also in this sense the multi-camera setup has transformed.

Which role does the network play here? It's clear the network sublimates multi-camera by offering all possible angles. It *includes* all other recording. Like in an inversed panopticon, the concert crowds that messed up the record industry with their downloading, are like the criminals filming back the guard in the middle of the panopticon pit.

It is an automated, hybrid, remote, distributed multi-camera video practice. The online network operates all the cameras present on the Vertigo concerts. What else is this new trend of blockbuster concert films than a direct reaction to download networks and low-res video footage on the net? The filming network functions like a camera control unit. The semi-automatic recording and transmission of video to the web, follows the rules of 'apricot picking'. The CCU operator does not to control all aspects of the image. His task is to survey composition, framing and shutter speed, while cameramen control other technical details. The CCU operator has no time for that, since he has to keep his eyes glued to the monitor bank to anticipate on the performance and the following images. It's how we think networks, anticipating and remembering images, imagining an illusory 'hors champ'.

In some ways multi-camera direction is a verbal art form. The director literally 'talks' the show into existence, while different cameramen, listening via headsets, execute these commands. The filming network mirrors this semi-remote operation. The 'U23D' producers hired 140 porters to bring the gear in stage. Fan crowds are the remote cameramen of the network. I read all the 'U23D' cameras had to be waterproofed after a security guard by accident flushed water over one of their cameras, when he tried to cool down the heated public in the front rows. It's the energy of the crowd that fuels the network.

Surfing on the Internet is 'cameraless' filming, just like found-footage filmmakers made films with images they didn't shoot themselves. The distracted, bored, lingering way we look at videos on the Internet, parallels the nonchalant way music fans sweep their cell phones in the air. This way filming becomes a passive act.

Unsteadicams

Distraction leaves room for cracks, something an immersive experience tries to avoid by any means. There's room for 'mental images', another way of thinking about these hyper-subjective vernacular videos. But on the web, these holes are filled with commercial noise. Maybe amateur videos will be hard to find in the future. You discover a lot more television reports, promotional footage and trailers when you search webplatforms on video footage of the Vertigo tour. Which is the real trash? Found footage filmmakers also integrate commercials and corporate movies in their art works. Video networks do contain spoofs and parodies too. But when web video will evolve into smaller, more mobile and interactive units, this will surely increase as well the amount of commercial junk inserted into networks. Maybe it's the impossibility of inserting commercials in songs, which makes pop music that subversive.

Pop and rock iconography goes along with the turbulent character of the Internet. When Tiziana Terranova writes about the instability of the web, she goes against the neo-liberal imagination of the Internet as a place of smooth, friction-free and undisturbed transit.⁴ Spam, worms and other viruses cause unpredictable events of destruction and entropy. And the blogosphere of 'pending friends' and 'empty inboxes' shows up to be a sinister brakeland of nihilism, narcotism and loneliness.⁵

The shaky images from handheld cameras fit well here. They scan the space, uncertain where to focus, like unstable steadicams. According to Wikipedia, a steadicam is a 'stabilizing mount for a motion-picture camera, which mechanically isolates the operator's movement from the camera, allowing a very smooth shot even when the operator is moving quickly over an uneven surface'. Mobile phone cams share these prosthetic qualities, but are today still lacking lens-stabilizing systems. The hi-tech of aerial or spider cameras owes a lot to these. Gyrostabilizers consist of compensating for the unfirm movements your body makes, by moving the lens in the other direction. 'You shake one way, it shakes the other way', briefly said. Maybe the network can be like an anti-shake apparatus. A movement in an opposite direction, which compensates for the commodification of manufactured music imagery. Networks leave traces on web videos, in a gesture that makes them vivid and free. I've lately added a video to my YouTube favorites of such a pure beauty. Amy Winehouse, sitting in a room singing, accompanied by an off-screen acoustic guitar. It's an image that needs nothing more than a network.



4. Tiziana Terranova, *Network culture: politics for the information age*, London: Pluto Press, 2004.
5. Geert Lovink, *Zero Comments: Blogging and Critical Internet Culture*, London: Routledge, 2007.

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(MIS)CONCEPTIONS ABOUT YOUTUBE**PATRICIA G. LANGE**

YouTube is a video sharing site that has entered the cultural *zeitgeist* around the world. It has generated a reputation as a source of funny, disturbing, social, amateur, and professional content. Like the tale about the blind people feeling different parts of the elephant, it can appear to be a very different site depending upon one's entry and exit points. During my ethnographic studies on YouTube, I have heard people talk about 'YouTube' in ways that efface its diversities of 'use'. Indeed, talking about 'users' of YouTube risks missing that for a very visible sub-group on YouTube, the site brings more than ephemeral entertainment. Many people feel that the site already is, or at least has the potential to become, a community of participants with an appreciation and affinity for exchanging videos and communicating with other people who share similar interests or social connections.

This essay will explore five (mis)conceptions about YouTube. I use the perhaps awkward construction of the term '(mis)conception' because from certain points of view these assumptions are all true. But what I hope to show is that from other points of view, they do not bear out empirically. If other dimensions of YouTube participation are missed, then ingrained assumptions may complicate an appreciation of important theoretical understandings not only of YouTube and video sharing practices, but of concepts important to humanistic and social science inquiry. These concepts include ideas about use of interactive media to communicate, assumptions about what count as worthy loci of study in a changing media landscape, and theoretical understanding of anonymity, which has received little attention in scholarly research. Exploring other dimensions of these (mis)conceptions is important for understanding communicative interaction among dispersed social groups.

The observations below are drawn from a participant-observation, ethnographic study conducted under the auspices of the MacArthur Foundation. The study, called 'Kids' Informal Learning with Digital Media: An Ethnographic Investigation of Innovative Knowledge Cultures', explored and analyzed the everyday, mediated, and offline practices of children and youth in the United States. My study, which took place between July 2006 and August 2008, analyzed video bloggers on and off of YouTube. Video blogs include everything from 'shows' for entertainment purposes to more spontaneous, diary-centric, and informal communicative forms of video making. In addition to analyzing interaction on YouTube, I also studied members of the video blogging community outside of YouTube. Many video bloggers who hosted their own sites chose not to participate on YouTube during the time of the research study.

As part of my study, I observed interactions several times a week on and off of YouTube. In addition, I interviewed over 100 video makers, analyzed over 150 videos, and attended more than 20 video-themed events in person, such as Pixelodeon, the first independent video festival, and YouTube meet-ups in New York, Georgia, Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego,

Minnesota, and Philadelphia. I also maintained several video blogging sites, including an experimental research channel on YouTube, called AnthroVlog (short for 'anthropology video blog'). I posted one video per week for over a year. The remarks below are drawn from a subset of video blogging participants on YouTube. Results may vary for other groups who engage with the site more or less intensely, or who may emphasise other genres of participation¹ such as political mash-up, music videos, remix, and other forms. A genre of participation is a 'mode or convention for engaging with technology, media, and the imagination'.² Video blogging is an important genre on YouTube with many video bloggers receiving high numbers of views and organising high-profile meet-ups. Many of the people I interviewed identified with the site, calling themselves and others 'Tubers or YouTubers. Hopefully, future empirical studies will provide comparative material on levels of participatory intensity across other social groups and video genres.

(Mis)Conception #1: YouTube is a Video Sharing Site

Obviously, people post and watch videos on a Web 'site that is called 'YouTube'. But YouTube is more than a 'site'. Place-based metaphors are useful, but they can also obscure certain online realities. In the field of anthropology, the locus of study has traditionally been on a 'field site' even though the earliest anthropologists reported local complications stemming from persons and forces that existed outside places immediately visible to anthropologists.³ Choosing to characterize an interactional space as a conveniently demarcated 'site' risks effacing the reach of forces that influence the site as well as ignoring how the site' is not socially self-contained. For a subset of participants, YouTube is an imagined community⁴ of people who share an interest in video making or communicating through interactive video. By interactive, I mean video spaces that provide the tools to respond to people and messages in videos through text comments or by posting video responses. YouTubers may never meet specific others on the site, but they may recognise aspects of YouTube's distinctive characteristics and social parameters.

Social interaction may take place 'on the site' through public comments or in private messages exchanged through YouTube's message system. However, many other interactions occur outside of YouTube through email, instant messaging, YouTube forums, in video-based chat rooms such as Stickam, and through in-person contact such as informal get-togethers and formal, YouTube meet-ups. Clearly, much interaction is not taking place on 'the site', but rather only loosely stems from social connections made with other creators and viewers on YouTube.

In addition, YouTube's embedding feature enables people to post YouTube videos on other

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1. See for example Mimi Ito, 'Mobilizing the Imagination in Everyday Play: The Case of Japanese Media Mixes', Forthcoming in Sonia Livingstone and Kirsten Drotner (eds.), *International Handbook of Children, Media, and Culture*, <http://www.itofisher.com/mito/ito.imagination.pdf>
 2. Ibid.
 3. See Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
 4. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London and New York: Verso, 1983.

Web sites. YouTube did not originally display a video's links to other sites. When a link to one's video is not displayed, a video maker may not know where and in what contexts her videos are being posted. Through the embedding feature, people may watch YouTube videos on other sites, without going to YouTube. A YouTube video retains its logo when it is directly linked to and played on other sites, thus widening YouTube's conceptual reach.

More than 250 sites reportedly offered online video in early 2007.⁵ Despite the proliferation of online video sites, many non-specialists and media professionals refer to online videos as 'YouTube' videos because of its traffic and reputation. A specific brand name has been successfully marketed and linked to a much more generalised and diverse set of online videos and video sharing practices. This vexes many video makers who avoid YouTube for distribution and who resent having their carefully crafted videos equated with a wildly diverse collection of videos on a single 'site'. Many video bloggers resisted posting their work on YouTube for a variety of reasons including copyright issues, lack of revenue sharing (although YouTube is trying to widen its revenue sharing partnership plan), and concerns about hostile reception to their work by people outside of particular interest-driven communities. Such a generalisation masks crucial video making and communicative realities. Assuming that all video sharers have the same needs and requirements as do participants on YouTube may also foreclose opportunities to design systems more amenable to certain groups. When media professionals speak of YouTube video, but actually mean a larger set of video practices, they may complicate an ability to recognise key differences between certain sub-groups on YouTube and other video sharing sites that do not depend for success on short comedic videos or those with high shock value. Nor do all video makers – whether on or off of YouTube – accept the same type of content or levels of technical quality in distribution. Totalising statements about YouTube, or equating YouTube videos to all other online video is thus obfuscating.

(Mis)Conception #2: Researchers Should Study 'Ordinary' Users

A number of researchers who are beginning to study YouTube carefully point out that their project is focused only on 'ordinary' users. They seem to suggest that the focus on 'ordinary' users is more theoretically robust than studying people they do not consider 'ordinary'. For me, such a statement prompts three questions. The first is, what do they mean by 'ordinary'? The definition is often left mysterious although surely the researcher has something specific in mind. The second question is, how do they know that the particular video makers who they assume are ordinary are indeed 'ordinary'? And finally, I wish to know, why do they feel that their research project is not valid if it includes 'non-ordinary' people in its study population?

I suspect that for many researchers, an 'ordinary user' is someone who is not a paid media professional. However, even this definition requires further explanation and nuance. Does the researcher intend to avoid media professionals in general, or simply media professionals who were paid by a corporation or politician to make a particular video? The term can also connote a person who is 'not famous'. This is a specific case that may or may not be categorically

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5. Catherine Holahan. 'Video Sharing: Thinning the Pack,' *BusinessWeek.com*, February 1, 2007, http://www.businessweek.com/technology/content/feb2007/tc20070201_344549.htm?campaign_id=rss_tech

equivalent to paid professionals such as actresses or writers. In other words, some media professionals are not famous and some non-professionals on YouTube are quite famous on the site and beyond.

For many YouTube researchers, an important goal seems to be to study video makers who are 'ordinary' in that they have no formal training or professional ties to media. Yet it is unclear *at this juncture* how easy it is to find ordinary users on a *video sharing site*. While this will surely change in the future as more people make more videos, at the present time, many people that I have interviewed do have some important connections to professional or at least advanced-amateur media making. This important experience includes related media such as photography. This information may not be apparent from reading their channel page, analyzing single videos, or even viewing a collection of videos.

People who do not participate on video sharing sites may avoid such a visible exchange as posting a video. They may be wary of making investments in time and equipment to make videos, or post them publicly on YouTube, with its current reputation. When a colleague of mine saw my experimental research channel on YouTube she deferred establishing her own research page on the site saying that she was not ready to be so visible. Ironically, I am a private person who initially began posting as part of a participant-observation project. I rarely show my face in my videos and I do not include colleagues, family members, or close friends interacting with me in private situations. I only record behavior that is public or, with their permission, interviews with media experts. Yet, I am perceived as being 'out there' by conservative colleagues, and thus not ordinary by certain definitions.

Arguably, YouTube is weighted towards the non-ordinary, at least in the current, diverse Internet environment. Although many people watch videos and some even comment, a much smaller sub-population actually posts videos. Therefore, if you are posting videos on YouTube, you are arguably no longer ordinary, if by ordinary we mean a person who has no special interest in or connections to intensive media-making. Despite the fervent do-it-yourself rhetoric (which I admire and support), it still takes a personal infrastructure of equipment and time to learn how to use a camera, work with editing software, understand compression techniques, and be willing and able to post videos for global distribution using a decently fast Internet connection. Participants on YouTube often express gratitude for having a site in which they can connect with others in ways that are not possible with local friends and family. People close to a video maker do not always understand their need to make videos. Arguably, as it is currently used, YouTube already contains a group who is not at all 'ordinary' in the sense of having an interest in and willingness to put themselves 'out there' through technically-oriented video exchange.

The drive to seek 'ordinary' participants also does not accommodate the changing abilities of video makers. It is a synchronically-laden categorisation to seek a person who posts videos on YouTube, and assume that they were, are, and always will be 'ordinary'. Yet, many participants on YouTube intensely desire to improve their work. They may not have started off as very skilled, but interacting with other YouTubers and video makers helps them develop important technical and participatory knowledge. Interviewees say that they can see improve-

ment in a video maker over time. Some people I have interviewed had no intention of going into media professionally. But something happened along the way on YouTube. Their videos became wildly successful and garnered a huge fan base that made them rethink educational and career plans. In these cases they may have had no formal filmmaking classes, but they have garnered attention for their abilities. On the other hand, some people who are famous on YouTube say they have no intention of becoming professionals, but will make videos as long as it is 'fun'.

Is the non-professional who aspires to be professional 'ordinary'? Is the advanced amateur who is wildly successful but has no plans to be professional 'ordinary'? Ongoing improvement in video making often results from participating in a community of interest such as YouTube. Quoting the Korean Broadcasting Company, researchers categorise certain creators as 'pro-teurs' or 'people who have gained recognition as professionals for their hobbies even if they don't have relevant professional certificates or degrees'.⁶ As people move from being inexperienced to being proteurs, it may be harder to understand from casual observation who is or is not an 'ordinary' user.

Many interviewees, including 'proteurs' and amateurs, actually have serious connections to traditional and other forms of media. For example, several people have family members who at one time had their own cable access television show. Some people may not choose to advertise their connections to traditional or other forms of media in any of their videos or on their YouTube channel page. Yet these personal media histories may nevertheless provide them with crucial knowledge and experience to draw on that might not be available to other participants. The lonelygirl15 incident, in which many YouTube participants assumed they were watching an 'ordinary' girl in her room (but were viewing an act written by a team of writers and performed by an actress) shows how difficult it may be for the casual observer to know whether someone is operating completely outside of traditional media channels. An oft-used benchmark is that of video 'quality'. Poor videos are assumed to be generated by ordinary people. But I have seen videos that cleverly parody the 'ordinary' in ways that may make it difficult to judge, without further ethnographic investigation, whether the video is meant to be consumed seriously or in jest. Carving out research populations that exclude videos that strive to not look 'too professional' seems an odd population to study on YouTube, which is comprised of many video makers who wish to improve. Such a population would hardly constitute a group of typical or 'ordinary' users on that or many other video-sharing sites.

In addition, the arrival of so-called 'viral marketers' makes distinguishing between the paid and unpaid supporter of specific products or ideas difficult to determine. Viral marketers are individual users who are paid to casually discuss products and seed web pages with opinions from supposed 'ordinary' consumers and voters. As one corporate white paper stated, 'Marketers can compel users to pass along a message in exchange for compensation ranging from

6. Susan Faulkner and Jay Melican, 'Getting Noticed, Showing-Off, Being Overheard: Amateurs, Authors and Artists Inventing and Reinventing Themselves in Online Communities,' *EPIC Proceedings*, (2007): 53.

points, special offers and in some cases cash'.⁷ In these cases it may be increasingly difficult to distinguish the ordinary from the non-ordinary promoter of a video, product, or idea.

Assume, for the moment, that a considered definition of 'ordinary' is desirable and possible. Let us also assume that it has been determined that certain people can accurately and consistently be classified correctly according to casual observation of specific videos (or from surveys, long-term ethnographic observation, or other methods). The next question is: why is it important for a research study to carve out and consider a population of 'ordinary' YouTube participants? To take a popular current example, let us say that the research question involves understanding YouTube's potential for encouraging civic engagement. It is arguably true that it may be helpful to know which videos discussing political issues are being posted by professionals who are paid to do so. But studying YouTube *videos* or even comments by themselves invoke a small group of potential research targets, many of whom have some type of media experience.

Excluding larger groups of certain media professionals or 'proteurs' from such a study risks ignoring the fact that such individuals vote and help shape the public sphere. I have talked to video bloggers who are editors, former television producers, and professional script writers who may not advertise these connections on their video blogs. But they may also have deep commitments to political action and shape political discourse in key ways. It may be useful to distinguish between paid political ads, for instance, and people who are not paid to produce such media. Nevertheless, studying a range of video makers with different levels of ability does not preclude obtaining a rich set of data on how the public discourse may be shaped and influenced by people who also happen to like to video blog.

(Mis)Conception #3: YouTube is Not a Community

At a meeting of media experts, one participant described how 'people' use YouTube. Based on his own experience, he said that most people are sent a link from a coworker or friend. The person watches the video and moves on, without spending much time on the site. While I am sure many people use the site this way (including a few of the people I interviewed), it is also true that many people do not use the site in this way. Many people relate that they can easily spend 'hours' watching YouTube videos. YouTube has many mechanisms for drawing people in to the 'video vortex' of watching (and commenting on) videos. Some people claim that YouTube has replaced television for them (a claim that would need ethnographic verification *in situ* since it conflicts with many ethnographic reports of continued television watching among YouTube participants). Youth in dorm rooms reported watching videos on YouTube because they did not have a television and it was easier to access videos on the site. Some people report using the site as an archive to search for something from their past – such as old cartoons or shows – for entertainment or for nostalgic reasons. Teachers may see YouTube as a useful repository for locating and showing specific videos to illustrate important points in class. These uses reach far beyond the two minute video experience based solely on prior recommendations.

7. Mindcomet, 'Viral Marketing: Understanding the Concepts and Benefits of Viral Marketing', 2006, http://www.mindcomet.com/_assets/assets/pdf/viral_marketing.pdf

Some people enjoy connecting with others and commenting on videos in social ways. Many of these participants spend time with other YouTube participants in video-based, live chat rooms such as Stickam and blogTV. They also expend considerable time, effort, and funds to attend formal and informal meet-ups. I have attended several of these meet-ups, including one known as 'SouthTube' which was held at a resort and public park near Marietta, Georgia from September 22-23, 2007. The event attracted a number of people from the southeastern portion of the United States as well as other participants from across the United States and overseas. These participants spend vacation time and funds to meet with other YouTubers whom, they say, 'get it'. The people they have connected with online understand why they like to make videos, learn more about making them, improve skills, and make social connections on the site. Many YouTubers also report a wish to meet people whose work they have enjoyed. What they describe is a kind of 'art world'⁸ or group of networks of people whose joint efforts produce art, or in this case media. In the media world of YouTube, video makers socialise and collaborate with others, even promoting others' videos by mentioning them or featuring them on their channel page.

Surveying the picnic tables, cameras, barbequed food, and lively conversation at SouthTube, I was reminded of similar rituals involving extended family gatherings. At this event, I noticed that people often described YouTube as a community, and I subsequently asked a number of participants if they agreed with this assertion. I realise this term is fraught with theoretical complications. Many definitions have been proposed and they often privilege geographic proximity.⁹ Yet many online groups characterise themselves as having certain community attributes. The YouTube participants that I interviewed often moved beyond watery notions of 'feel good togetherness' and would actually cite specific examples of social linkages and related attributes. These included: intensity of shared interests; a willingness to engage in reciprocal acts of kindness both emotionally and financially; and even the inevitable friction and drama that results from community participation. Acts of kindness include assistance that may relate directly to video making as well as activities that focus on helping ill people or people who need financial assistance to attend meet-ups. There is a palpable tension that can be observed when YouTubers are torn between giving fans and viewers attention at meet-ups while also wanting to connect with the specific people *they came to the meet-up to see*. One very popular YouTuber likened YouTube's social variety to the kind one would observe in daily life. Speaking in the context of the SouthTube meet-up he said during our interview:

I know these people, better than I know my own neighbours I know these people. I know what they're about and what they do and...it was like going to a family reunion, that's what it was about... [YouTube] is a community in every way that your city is a community. [There are] kids that are running around with skateboards jumping on park benches. It's at YouTube. There is uh, political people, at YouTube. There are the Paris Hiltons and the Jamie Kennedys that entertainment is their business and they're there

8. See Howard Becker, *Art Worlds*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.

9. Lynn Cherny, *Conversation and Community: Chat in a Virtual World*, Stanford: Center for the Study of Language and Information Publications, 1999.

and none of it hurts YouTube. It all helps YouTube because it is a community, just like the city that you live in... [And] there are little circles. Like in your community you have your group of friends and somebody else has their group of their friends and you have a friend that goes between. That happens at YouTube. There are little circles. I don't belong to any one of those circles but I'm one who travels between those circles, and that's what community is all about.

YouTube event organisers have told me that YouTube is not involved in planning these events. YouTube participants often spend considerable time and investment organizing meet-ups involving several hundred attendees from all over the world. The suggestion here is not that all people on YouTube feel part of a community or even part of a specific community or group of friends. The contention is rather that not all people who watch videos on YouTube are casual two-minute viewers of specific videos. Future studies could compare how different social and cultural groups engage with the site and what levels of commitment and emotional investment they require.

(Mis)Conception #4: YouTube has Exceptional Difficulty with Anonymous Haters

In videos, text comments, and interview feedback, many video makers on YouTube express distress over the amount of hurtful messages they receive. People make videos that mock such commenters and they exchange tips on how to deal with them. Creators are advised to ignore inane responses, delete hurtful remarks, block aggressive participants, and when all else fails, contact YouTube staff or even law enforcement agencies. That so many artifacts and comments are devoted to this topic shows their very real and painful effects. I too have received such comments and they can sometimes be frightening to read, as when they are filled with images of violence and death. The most disturbing comments I received appeared on a video called 'What Defines a Community?' that was featured on the YouTube main page. Very few of my other videos, which are watched by a smaller sub-community of video bloggers, have the same intensity of hurtful comments.

Some interviewees said that such commentary drove them away from YouTube. For some YouTubers who have left, it remains uncertain whether they will ever return. Others returned only at the urging of YouTube fans and friends. Sometimes their absences were brief and they returned with greater support from viewers who appreciated them more for returning. It is interesting to observe that although such urgings do not index a community *per se*, they nevertheless indicate a set of social relationships that are mediated through video sharing practices.

A 'hater' is generally defined as a person who leaves unnecessarily harsh criticism on a video, often using stereotypical phrases containing images of homophobia, racism, sexism, and violence or death, as in the stock phrase, 'go die'.¹⁰ Used by people on YouTube, 'hater' is a 'native' term. Using 'native' terms has advantages and disadvantages in theoretically-

10. See Patricia G. Lange, 'Searching for the 'You' in 'YouTube': An analysis of online response ability,' *National Association of Practicing Anthropology Proceedings of the Ethnographic Praxis in Industry Conference*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007, pp. 31-45.

driven research. For instance, using the term facilitates ethnographic discussion of a topic that is important to people on YouTube. On the other hand, interviews and observations of interactions on the site also reveal that the meaning of the term is not agreed upon among all YouTube participants. Nor do all YouTubers agree on how to deal with them, or if they should be dealt with at all.¹¹ Some people reserve the term 'haters' for low-level, and unimaginative stock phrases of criticism. Others use the term to include 'stalking' behavior that requires more serious intervention from YouTube personnel, whom they sometimes accuse of providing insufficient attention to these concerns. Several young people I spoke with on YouTube refuse to be deterred by low-level hater remarks and they expressed a sense of pride in leaving them on their video pages as a way of demonstrating their support for free speech. Others acknowledged that such commentary may be difficult for others, but is not really a problem for them, if a problem is defined as something that discourages them from making videos.

YouTube has a reputation for an abundance of 'haters', more so than other video sharing sites. Yet, any such conclusion would need to be verified in an empirical, systematic way. I have spoken to video bloggers with their own sites, who are not on YouTube and have reported death threats and other serious problems.¹² Some of the YouTubers I spoke with characterised MySpace as far more dangerous than YouTube because of their perception that MySpace contains more sexually-oriented themes and modes of social interaction.

A long history of research exists on computer-mediated-communication in which hostile remarks have been shown to be common on the Internet as well as in the technical communities that preceded and seeded Internet-based groups. Hostile remarks are also quite common in certain social groups, such as among technical circles and in academe. Linguists have also demonstrated that much *in-person* communication is filled with moral accusations and positionings that can manifest in hostile remarks. These observations often become effaced amid concerns that Internet communication is derivative and inauthentic in comparison to all offline communication. Any claims that YouTube represents an especially bad environment would need to be empirically investigated in a way that does not ignore the realities of hostility and problems in other sites, and offline.

It is also assumed that it is anonymity that drives hostility on YouTube. Vague urgings of 'getting to know one another' are offered as logical solutions. However, a number of hostile conversations and arguments occur among known interlocutors on YouTube. Interviewees speak of 'DramaTube' and other cliquish, hostile arguments that can take ugly turns between people who know some amount of identity information. Further, there is no guarantee that knowing arbitrary identity information such as names and face will resolve the issues driving the hostility. For example, it is not clear that simply 'getting to know' someone who leaves

11. See Patricia G. Lange, 'Commenting on Comments: Investigating Responses to Antagonism on YouTube,' Paper presented at the Society for Applied Anthropology Conference, 2007, <http://sfaapodcasts.files.wordpress.com/2007/04/update-apr-17-lange-sfaa-paper-2007.pdf>

12. See Patricia G. Lange, 'The Vulnerable Video Blogger: Promoting Social Change Through Intimacy' *The Scholar & Feminist Online*, 2007. Available online at: http://www.barnard.edu/sfonline/blogs/lange_01.htm

headless images of death on his channel page would reduce his hostility and racism. The experience of bitterly divorcing couples, hostile neighbors, school bullies, and many other in-person groups who have had plenty of time to interact demonstrate that it is possible to 'get to know' someone and just never like what you see. It has been suggested that issues of perceived transgressions of morality, rather than anonymity, can be the drivers of hostility in certain encounters.¹³

Anonymity is vastly under-theorised and is often treated as binary, when in fact, it is multi-dimensional and complex. To arrive at more precise insights, it is important for researchers to determine what specific types of identity information are likely to reduce hostile interaction online.¹⁴ Once it is admitted that other factors, such as racism or sexism, may be fuelling hostility, it is harder to argue that it is anonymity and not these other factors that prompt unfortunate remarks. Being sexist requires knowing something about the other person. The usual response to this argument is that although other factors may be playing the major role, 'anonymity' still exacerbates these tendencies. The problem with this assumption is that it is based on a social calculus in which the 'hater' is assumed to have more difficulty maintaining hostility in the face of 'known' interlocutors. By this logic, videos containing faces of actual commenters and creators should show a reduction of hateful remarks. Yet, in many cases, this has not happened on YouTube.¹⁵ Some interviews argue that having young women show their faces (thus reducing levels of anonymity in comparison to text) actually drives more hostility due to issues of sexism. When I researched text-based online worlds, I often heard the argument that it was 'anonymous' text (which linguists have shown to be not so anonymous) that fuelled hostility because people could somehow forget that a real person wrote the text. It was argued that more personal types of communication that included video would reduce hostility.¹⁶ Yet, showing faces in videos does not guarantee smooth interaction, as examples of 'DramaTube' show. Instead of assuming that anonymity is the culprit on YouTube (or on the Internet in general), it may perhaps be more instructive from a theoretical and policy perspective to understand the often varied root causes of the hostility and find ways to address them and provide customization tools that allow creators to decide which comments will be posted and which will not. For example, YouTube enables video makers to block certain accounts from being able to post videos. Alternatively, they also allow video makers to enable only pre-approved friends to post comments or videos to their pages. Although finding root causes of hostility (such as racism or sexism) may include 'getting to know people', this certainly may not be the whole story, or even the most critical part.

13. See Lange, 'Searching for the 'You' in 'YouTube'.

14. See Patricia G. Lange, 'Getting to Know You: Using Hostility to Reduce Anonymity in Online Communication', *Proceedings of the Thirteenth Annual Symposium about Language and Society-Austin, Texas Linguistic Forum*, 49 (2006): 95-107.

Also available at: <http://studentorgs.utexas.edu/salsa/proceedings/2005/LangeSALSA13.pdf>

15. See Lange, 'The Vulnerable Video Blogger'.

16. K. S. Choi, 'Imposing computer-mediated communication theories on virtual reality,' *International Conference on Information Technology, Research and Education, Proceedings*, (August, 2003), 207-209.

(Mis)Conception #5: Cheaters Abound on YouTube

Even some prominent and popular YouTubers have admitted to increasing their view counts using automatic page refreshers to boost the perception of their videos' popularity. Such manipulations are offensive to many video makers who are aware that these metrics are used to rate and showcase the work of certain creators over others. Practices that inflate these metrics are rightly perceived as unfair and not reflective of a video's popularity among a large viewer base.

In addition to view counts, another metric that is used to gauge viewer support is the subscription rate. To subscribe to a participant means that the viewer will be alerted when the video maker posts a new video. Sometimes a video maker sends people messages exhorting them to subscribe to the video maker. A common practice on YouTube is for some participants to subscribe to vast numbers of others in the hopes that the favor will be returned. Subscribing to thousands of others can increase one's own subscription rate, I am told, by hundreds of subscribers. Interestingly, this practice arguably works because clearly many (although certainly not all) YouTubers feel a sense of video reciprocity, or urge to return views and subscriptions. Reciprocity is one of the factors that anthropologists use to understand social relationships and ideas about community in different social groups.

In order to demonstrate an alternative way of thinking about 'manipulation' of view counts, I will relate a personal anecdote from my own participation on YouTube. As a participant, I am sometimes disappointed when videos I have carefully crafted perform more poorly than a hastily constructed, simple video I post in order to meet a socially-driven but self-imposed weekly quota. I once complained to a friend that a video I made was not performing well. My friend offered to watch my video throughout the day and thus increase its view count. I asked my friend not to do this, as I did not want to manipulate the system in this way. I did not want to 'cheat' on YouTube.

The encounter made me reconsider what a view count might actually reflect in various social circumstances. Perhaps it is possible to think about it as a metric that measures different things. Problems occur when people use it to symbolise one thing, but others interpret it in a different way. It can measure how many times persons unknown or known to the viewer view a video. It can also measure expressions of friendship, as when fans or friends watch a video several times to support a fellow video maker, and thus boost their confidence or visibility on the site. Seeing the metric as defined only in one way potentially misses important social relationships that are indexed by its 'manipulation.'

Cursory reflection of the view count shows that by itself, it is a poor metric for understanding viewing practices, even assuming that YouTube's inconsistency problems are addressed. For instance, a video may show one view count on my channel page, but when I search for the video using the search function, the video as listed will show a different count. Assuming these problems can be addressed, the view count by itself lacks important information such as the time it takes to accumulate the view count and the social distance a particular viewer has to the video maker. For instance, a video that has been viewed one hundred times in five minutes is performing differently than a video that receives the same view count over the

course of a year. One can certainly deduce this information by examining the date that the video is posted, but a numerical view count itself does not provide this information.

Current YouTube view counts do not reflect the social distance a viewer has to the video maker. Some people may wish to know if their work is finding a broad audience across different groups of people. On the other hand, some creators may not at all be concerned with seeing their work take off across different groups and may instead appreciate encouragement from a small circle of friends. Research shows that many text bloggers are not particularly interested in having their work read by wide audiences, even though they post their work publicly, sometimes for materially practical reasons (such as having an easy platform for circulating high bandwidth media).¹⁷ Similarly, some video makers may appreciate having the acceptance, support, and feedback from a few friends.

It is tempting to propose another metric that I will call the 'viewing vector' which would take into account time and social distance to the viewer for each view. However, there are some challenges to developing such a metric. First of all, not everyone wishes to share information about their viewing practices. Many people may wish to watch and rate videos anonymously. Conversely, it would be wrong to assume everyone would reject sharing information about themselves to video creators. YouTube instituted a feature called 'active sharing' in which a person can choose to show others what they are watching. They can also display their own recent ratings of videos on their channel pages. Clearly some people are already demonstrating a willingness to share information about their viewing practices. I personally feel encouraged when I see someone I know on YouTube display their five-star rating of my video on their channel page. It would be interesting to explore options such as view counts that tally the percentage of views that come from people who have agreed to mutually share their ratings. A viewing vector would then return information that revealed a break down between the percentage of viewers that were mutually known and the percentage of viewers who remained anonymous.

However, such detailed statistics can create a kind of obsessiveness that turns people into numbers-driven media makers who constantly reflect on view counts in a way that is potentially antithetical to the do-it-yourself video making spirit that drives many socially-oriented video bloggers. Paying overly close attention to specific viewing numbers may detract from more important social relationships between video makers and viewer/participants who are encouraged to comment. In that sense it is perhaps more advantageous for some video makers to think more broadly about 'viewership', defined not in the traditional sense as number of views, but rather about the social dimensions of video sharing. A more nuanced notion of viewership could be refashioned to be less concerned with statistics and more interested in promoting respectful social and feedback linkages between video makers and viewers, whose roles as viewers and creators are constantly in flux.

17. Bonnie A. Nardi, Diane J. Schiano, and Michelle Gumbrecht, 'Blogging as Social Activity, or, Would You Let 900 Million People Read Your Diary?' Paper presented at the CSCW'04, Chicago, Illinois, USA, 2004.

Conclusion

YouTube can look very different depending upon one's perspective and mode of 'use', or more precisely, participation. It is deceptively easy to generalise dynamics of YouTube as a whole based on personal experience. The hope in unpacking and providing some ethnographic exploration of some problematic conceptions is that scholars will consider how certain methodological and theoretical assumptions may influence their research design and execution. Although in some ways all of these conceptions are true, in very important theoretical ways and social contexts they are not true. It is thus important to investigate how these dynamics play out across different 'genres of participation'¹⁸ on YouTube. In this sense, the art world, or 'media world' of advanced amateur or 'proteur' video maker makers may use YouTube to engage in a different genre of participation than would be found in other artistic genres and mediated social networks. It is only by studying a number of these genres, which may interact in important ways, that we may get a clearer picture of the dynamics of the media ecologies of YouTube and other video-sharing sites that facilitate communication.

18. Ito, forthcoming.

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'ALL YOUR CHOCOLATE RAIN ARE BELONG TO US?'

VIRAL VIDEO, YOUTUBE AND THE DYNAMICS OF PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

JEAN BURGESS

Marketers and media producers for the past several years have been racing to capture the marketing potential of both online social networks and user-created content. 'Viral marketing', for example, is the attempt to exploit the network effects of word-of-mouth and Internet communication in order to induce a massive number of users to pass on marketing 'messages' and brand information 'voluntarily'. The related term 'viral video', which is the subject of this essay, has emerged to describe the phenomenon in which video clips become highly popular through rapid, user-led distribution via the Internet. How, or whether, the 'bottom-up' dynamics of viral video can be mobilised for instrumental purposes – from marketing to political advertising – remains an open question. But 'viral video' could be much more than a banal marketing buzzword – in fact, interrogating it a bit more closely in the specific context of YouTube can help us to cut through the hype, and to better understand some of the more complex characteristics of participatory popular culture online.

In popular usage, the term 'viral' (and the related Internet 'meme') are of course very loosely applied biological metaphors, appropriated from the various attempts to develop a science of cultural transmission based on evolutionary theory that have been unfolding for decades. The contested field of 'memetics' is the best-known, but by no means only, strand of this kind of thinking, which began with Richard Dawkins' proposal in *The Selfish Gene* of the 'meme' as the corresponding cultural unit to the biological gene.¹ Similar to the scientific usage in meaning if not analytical precision, in contemporary popular usage an internet 'meme' is a faddish joke or practice (like a humorous way of captioning cat pictures) that becomes widely imitated. In this popular understanding, internet 'memes' do appear to spread and replicate 'virally' – that is, they appear to spread and mutate via distributed networks in ways that the original producers cannot determine and control.

But, in a step backward from the more participatory idea of the Internet 'meme', very often the term 'viral video' is used to refer simply to those videos which are viewed by a large number of people, generally as a result of knowledge about the video being spread rapidly through the internet population via word-of-mouth. For example, Dan Ackerman Greenberg runs an 'astroturfing' company, employing covert strategies to turn apparently authentic (but actually commercial) videos 'viral'. In his now-notorious post on the technology busi-

1. See, for example Angela Dobeles, David Toleman, and Michael Beverland, 'Controlled infection! Spreading the brand message through viral marketing', *Business Horizons*, 48.2 (2005).

ness weblog Techcrunch, Greenberg defines viral videos as ‘videos that have travelled all around the internet and been posted on YouTube, MySpace, Google Video, Facebook, Digg, blogs, etc. – videos with millions and millions of views’.² This focus on networked distribution resulting in ‘millions and millions of views’, while it makes sense to advertisers, is an oversimplification of the dynamics of online popular culture. In this essay I propose an alternative view, one that emphasises the central role of cultural *participation* in the creation of cultural, social and economic value in participatory culture.

Viewed from the perspective of cultural participation rather than marketing, videos are not ‘messages’, and neither are they ‘products’ that are distributed via social networks. Rather, they are the mediating mechanisms via which cultural *practices* are originated, adopted and (sometimes) retained *within* social networks. Indeed, scholars at the forefront of YouTube research argue that for those participants who actively contribute content and engage in cultural conversation around online video, YouTube is in itself a social network site;³ one in which videos (rather than ‘friending’) are the primary medium of social connection between participants. In considering what these new social dynamics of engagement with media might mean for thinking about cultural production and consumption, Henry Jenkins argues that value is primarily generated via ‘spreadability’. Through reuse, reworking and redistribution, spreadable media content ‘gains greater resonance in the culture, taking on new meanings, finding new audiences, attracting new markets, and generating new values.’⁴ By this logic any particular video produces cultural value to the extent that it acts as a hub for further creative activity by a wide range of participants in this social network – that is, the extent to which it contributes to what Jonathan Zittrain might call YouTube’s ‘generative’ qualities.⁵

There are many different kinds of videos on YouTube – over 80 million of them, in fact.⁶ But it is the relatively small number of these videos that sit at the ‘fat head’ of the ‘long tail’ – the ‘winners’ in the ‘winner take all’ attention economy – that are most useful in an attempt to rethink the dynamics of ‘viral’ video. Some of these videos do become extremely popular as one-offs, via word-of-mouth combined with media hype, on the basis of their novelty. Ostensibly user-created videos like Judson Laipply’s ‘Evolution of Dance’ (viewed 85 million times as at May 2008) and Chris Crocker’s ‘Leave Britney Alone!’ (viewed 20 million times)

2. Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976; and developed more fully by others e.g. in Susan Blackmore, *The Meme Machine*, 1999.
3. Dan Ackerman Greenberg, ‘The Secret Strategies Behind Many ‘Viral’ Videos’, Techcrunch, (November 2007), <http://www.techcrunch.com/2007/11/22/the-secret-strategies-behind-many-viral-videos>
4. See especially Patricia G. Lange, ‘Publicly Private and Privately Public: Social Networking on YouTube’, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13.1 (2007), <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol13/issue1/lange.html>; and John C. Paolillo, ‘Structure and Network in the YouTube Core’, 41st *Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*, 2008.
5. Henry Jenkins, ‘Slash Me, Mash Me, Spread Me...’, *Confessions of an Aca/Fan*, April 24 2007, http://www.henryjenkins.org/2007/04/slash_me_mash_me_but_please_sp.html
6. Jonathan Zittrain, *The Future of the Internet—And How to Stop It*, Yale: Yale University Press, 2008.

are good examples. There are also many highly popular YouTube videos that were originally contributed by ‘traditional media’ companies like television networks and major music labels (especially Top 40 music videos – indeed, many of the most viewed and most favoured videos of all time are ‘official’ music videos).⁷ For my purposes, the more interesting examples of ‘viral video’, while being quantitatively popular in this way, also attract active, participatory and creative engagement from other participants. Among YouTube’s ‘greatest hits’ are several good examples of how this works.

Burgess and Green’s recent content survey of YouTube drew on a sample of 4,300 highly popular videos to compare user-created and traditional media content across four measures of popularity.⁸ From this data it is possible to distil a ‘super popular top ten’⁹ – videos with all-time views in the millions (even the tens of millions), and comments and video responses in the thousands. For the remainder of this essay I concentrate on two of these highly popular videos, both of which illustrate the idea of viral video as participation in social networks particularly well. The first is the music video ‘Chocolate Rain’. The second – another music video – is simply entitled ‘Guitar’.¹⁰

The first thing to note is that neither of these videos is what we might understand to be ‘traditional’ media content – they were both coded in the study as ‘user-created content’¹¹ and they each draw on particular forms of vernacular creativity. Notably, like many of the most popular YouTube videos of all time¹² they are both performance-based and music-related, rather than narrative or information-based. But it isn’t evident on the basis of a textual reading why – or, more importantly, in what ways – these videos were so popular during the period in which the study was conducted. It is only by looking at the creative activity that occurred *around* these videos that we can begin to understand just how important participation is to popularity.

Amateur singer-songwriter Tay Zonday’s music video ‘Chocolate Rain’ had received more than twenty million views by April 2008.¹³ The video featured an apparently earnest Zonday (a University of Minnesota grad student whose real name is Adam Bahner) singing his self-penned pop song into a vocal microphone against the backdrop of what appears to be a white sheet, with occasional cuts away to his hands on the keyboard. The video shows

7. On the 9th April 2008, a wildcard search returned 83.4 million videos.
8. The most favoured YouTube videos are listed at <http://youtube.com/browse?s=mf>
9. This study was supported by the Convergence Culture Consortium and the Comparative Media Studies Program at MIT, and by the Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation at Queensland University of Technology. See Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, *YouTube: Online Video and the Politics of Participatory Culture*, Cambridge: Polity Press, forthcoming, 2008.
10. Measured by the total number of views the videos had received at the time of data capture.
11. ‘Guitar’ was the video with the most views overall in the entire sample for the period, and it appeared in the Most Discussed and Most Responded lists, not only the ‘most viewed’ list.
12. Videos that appeared to have been produced outside of the media industries and related professions.
13. A quick scan of the most viewed videos of all time at <http://www.youtube.com> shows that the page is dominated by music videos.

Zonday moving strangely to one side between lines – the on-screen titles explain: ‘I move away from the mic to breathe in’.

The song has an extremely simple and repetitive melody and keyboard riff, drawing even more attention to Zonday's idiosyncratic vocal delivery: the low pitch of his voice, which has been compared to Paul Robeson and Barry White, is at odds with his boyish looks. The equally repetitive lyrics deal with themes of racial prejudice:

Chocolate Rain
 Raised your neighborhood insurance rates
 Chocolate Rain
 Makes us happy livin' in a gate

Chocolate Rain
 Made me cross the street the other day
 Chocolate Rain
 Made you turn your head the other way

(Chorus)
 Chocolate Rain
 History quickly crashing through your veins
 Chocolate Rain
 Using you to fall back down again
 [Repeat]

It is arguably the combination of oddness and earnest amateurism that made ‘Chocolate Rain’ such a massive YouTube hit. According to Zonday himself, the initial spike of attention for the video (which occurred several months after it was first uploaded) originated ‘as a joke at 4chan.org’,¹⁴ a very popular image board and a significant source of Internet ‘memes’. It seems that 4chan members ‘swarmed’ YouTube to push ‘Chocolate Rain’ up the rankings initially, motivated by the specific ethics of this internet subculture, oriented around absurdist and sometimes cruel frathouse humour. Calling to mind the Anonymous mantra ‘REPRODUCE. REPRODUCE. REPRODUCE’,¹⁵ it is easy to see how the ‘viral’ metaphor might apply to this piece of mischief-making. And perhaps the joke was on the mischief-makers in the end, because all of this activity created a celebrity out of Zonday. At the height of Chocolate Rain’s popularity in the northern summer of 2007, he appeared on a number of talk shows and was interviewed by the press, and eventually a self-parodying version of the song was produced for a faux-MTV film clip which was used as part of a promotional campaign for Cherry Chocolate Diet Dr Pepper.¹⁶

But the *uses* of ‘Chocolate Rain’ as part of participatory culture ended up far exceeding the intentions of either the original producer or the original disseminators. There was a relatively

14. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EwTZ2xpQwpA>

15. Wikipedia article ‘Chocolate Rain’, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chocolate_Rain

16. <http://www.wikichan.org/index.php/Anonymous>

brief but highly creative flurry of parodies, mashups and remixes as Chocolate Rain’s popularity spiked. These derivative works reference ‘Chocolate Rain’ by imitating or re-using parts of it, and frequently combining them with many ideas from other sources, building on layers of knowledge built up in previous internet ‘phenomena’ as well as broadcast media fandom (like *Star Wars*).

One of the most popular parodies was a performance of the song by the lead character from the web sitcom ‘Chad Vader, Dayshift Manager’ (Darth Vader’s ‘less-talented, less-charismatic younger brother’ and grocery store manager), which relies on YouTube for much of its audience.¹⁷ In a direct parody of the video, ‘Chad Vader’ uses the same *mise-en-scene*, melody and piano riff, and repeats the ‘I move away from the microphone to breathe in’ on-screen text, but substitutes lyrics that reference his own show, and audibly breathes through his Darth Vader mask in between lines, creating an additional layer of humour out of the ‘breathing’ joke.¹⁸ Another parody entitled ‘Vanilla Snow’ also emulates the visual and aural elements of the video (the sheet as backdrop, the overly contrastive lighting and yellow tones, the performer’s pose in front of the microphone wearing headphones, the strangely deep voice and the backing track) but parodies the race politics of the song by substituting new lyrics that play on the metaphorical equation of ‘chocolate’ with racial blackness, riffing off ‘vanilla’ (whiteness) instead.¹⁹ Many of the YouTube spoofs and remixes are firmly embedded in online geek culture – examples include the ‘8bit remix’,²⁰ and especially the mash-up of the song’s melody with the ‘lyrics’ from the ‘All Your Base Are Belong To Us’ meme, giving us the meme-upon-meme: ‘All Your Chocolate Rain Are Belong To Us’²¹.

As this example shows, there is much more going on in viral video than ‘information’ about a video being communicated throughout a population. Successful ‘viral’ videos have textual ‘hooks’ or key signifiers, which cannot be identified in advance (even, or especially, by their authors) but only after the fact, when they have been become prominent via being selected a number of times for repetition. After becoming recognisable via this process of repetition, these key signifiers are then available for ‘plugging into’ other forms, texts and intertexts – they become part of the available cultural repertoire of vernacular video. Because they produce new possibilities, even apparently pointless, nihilistic and playful forms of creativity are contributions to knowledge. This is true even if (as in the case of the ‘Chocolate Rain’ example) they work mostly to make a joke out of someone.

The video ‘guitar’ is a more ordinary example, but one with far greater reach and staying power than the ‘Chocolate Rain’ phenomenon. ‘Guitar’ is a technically demanding neoclassical metal cover of Pachelbel’s Canon in D, performed on electric guitar, in a bedroom. The performer in the video – seated on his bed, backlit by the sunlight streaming in from the window,

17. ‘Cherry Chocolate Rain’ at <http://youtube.com/watch?v=2x2W12A8Qow>

18. Chad Vader, which focuses on Star Wars parody and other geek humour, is a creation of Blame Society Productions (Aaron Yonda and Matt Sloan). See: <http://www.blamesociety.net/>

19. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P6dUCOS1bM0>

20. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nTQOpibv_OA

21. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=caIBKQztlAo>

his face obscured by a baseball cap – is a South Korean guitarist named Jeong-Hyun Lim.²² With over 40 million views to date, his video is among the most popular YouTube videos of all time, and continues to attract new viewers, comments, and video responses.

But this video is not in any way ‘original’. Iteration and incremental innovation are historically fundamental to the evolution of musical technique and style; and the canon as musical form (in which layers of repetition are laid one above the other to create counterpoint) fundamentally invites imitation. Imitation is certainly the order of the day in this case: the piece that ‘funtwo’ (Lim) is performing, Canon Rock, is in turn a ‘cover’ of one of the most popular pieces of classical music ever written, and arranged for electric guitar and backing track by the Taiwanese musician and composer Jerry Chang (JerryC). The ‘Canon Rock’ arrangement became popular on the Internet after a video of JerryC playing the piece was posted online. The backing track and guitar tabs were also made available, making it easy for other musicians to attempt to execute the arrangement, and to record their attempts as performances. The funtwo ‘Guitar’ video is one of these covers of Chang’s arrangement, apparently originally uploaded to the Korean musicians’ website <http://mule.co.kr>. It was later uploaded to YouTube by a fan of Lim’s, who posted it under the name ‘funtwo’.²³ Once it became popular on YouTube, the cycle of imitation, adaptation and innovation continued, and so on it went, *ad infinitum*.

Most of the response videos are either direct emulations (in which other bedroom guitarists test and prove their skills) or variations on the genre that the original Guitar video distilled if not originated. In addition to the approximately 900 direct video responses to the ‘Guitar’ video, a keyword search for ‘canon rock’ in YouTube returns more than 13,000 videos, the majority of which appear to be versions of the original ‘Canon Rock’ track, performed not only on guitars but also on pianos, violins, and even a toy keyboard.²⁴ These video responses frequently emulate the original *mise-en-scene* – with the performer seated on a bed, backlit by light from a window, and looking down rather than at the camera. But there are a number of user-led innovations as well: most notably, a proliferation of other arrangements of the original Canon by Pachelbel, performed on a staggering array of instruments, often using extended techniques and technologies like delay pedals. There is even a version of JerryC’s original ‘Canon Rock’ available for the ‘Frets on Fire’ game (a free, open source clone of the popular title Guitar Hero, with a built in song importer/editor), enabling non-guitarists to emulate the virtuosity of the bedroom guitarists.

Perhaps the most interesting example is the montage video ‘Ultimate Canon Rock’, a remix of forty versions of the rock guitar arrangement, all performed by bedroom guitarists, and

22. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUyxurJWTSQ>

23. After several impostors came forward claiming to be funtwo, Lim was revealed to be the ‘real’ performer in the ‘Guitar’ video in a *New York Times* article: Virginia Heffernand, ‘Web Guitar Wizard Revealed at Last’, *New York Times* (27 August, 2006), also available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/27/arts/television/27heff.html>

24. See Lim’s Wikipedia entry: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeong-Hyun_Lim

painstakingly edited together by YouTuber ‘impeto’²⁵ to make a complete new version of the performance. This video has received views in excess of 3 million, so that its popularity is beginning to approach that of the ‘original’ funtwo version. In itself, ‘Ultimate Canon Rock’ is an act of iterative vernacular creativity that has emerged out of the conversational dynamics of YouTube as a social network as much as out of any desire for self-expression. The video captures the ways in which small contributions from a large number of participants collectively add up to much more than the sum of their parts; the value of the video as an element in participatory culture cannot be attributed back to an original producer (because, for one thing, there isn’t one).

The video is also a particularly good example of an existing performance genre, and one that is arguably paradigmatic of user-created content on YouTube – the virtuosic bedroom musical performance, straight to camera, vlog-style. The everydayness of the genre is all the more evident because of its situatedness *in* the bedroom – it draws on the long traditions of vernacular creativity articulated to ‘privatised’ media use. Productive ‘play’, media consumption and cultural performance have always been part of the repertoire of these ‘privatised’ spaces of cultural participation,²⁶ but increasingly, they have become ‘publicised’ via webcams, SNS profiles and YouTube itself.

The personal musical performance as a YouTube genre operates as a site of both play and learning. It involves ‘showing off’ – the showcasing of skill and the setting of standards for other players in the game to attain or beat; and it also operates as a site of peer learning and teaching – many of the descriptions and comments on covers of ‘Canon Rock’ ask for or offer critiques, tips and tricks, but in a generally supportive and often humorous manner. The bedroom music genre demonstrates how relatively simple uses of video technology (recording straight to camera and uploading without much editing) and highly constrained genres (the musical cover), while not necessarily contributing to the aesthetic ‘advancement’ of the medium, can invite further participation by establishing clear ‘rules’. The longevity of the video’s popularity, I would argue, is a function of the extent to which the culture surrounding the neoclassical cover music video invites participation and rewards repetition and ongoing engagement. In contrast, internet ‘meme’-based viral videos rely on inside jokes that are ‘spoiled’ by going mainstream, and therefore quickly reach a tipping point and tend to have relatively short shelf lives.²⁷

25. YouTube, http://youtube.com/watch?v=6Xvd_62Oec8

26. Impeto, <http://youtube-impeto.blogspot.com>

27. Sarah Louise Baker, ‘Pop in(to) the Bedroom: Popular Music in Pre-Teen Girls’ Bedroom Culture’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 7.1, 2004, pp. 75-93.

'Chocolate Rain' and 'Guitar' operate according to different temporal logics – or 'frequencies of public writing'²⁸ – and they are structured by contrasting ethics of participation. But both examples show that in order to endow the metaphors implied by terms like 'memes', 'viruses' and 'spreadability' with any explanatory power, it is necessary to see videos as carriers for ideas that are taken up in practice within social networks, not as discrete 'texts' that are 'consumed' by isolated individuals or unwitting masses – a 'copy the instructions', rather than 'copy the product' model of replication and variation. These ideas are propagated by being taken up and used in new works, in new ways, and therefore are transformed on each iteration; and this process takes place within and with reference to particular social networks or subcultures. Further, and contra much of the hype about 'new media', many of the performative and communicative practices that spread via viral video 'crazes' are not at all new, but are deeply situated in everyday, even mundane creative traditions.

Without stretching an overstretched metaphor too far then, the dynamics of viral video could be understood as involving the spread of replicable ideas (expressed in performances and practices), via the processes of vernacular creativity, among communities connected through social networks. Rethinking 'viral video' in this way may contribute to a better understanding of how the cultures emerging around user-created video – imitative, playful and often ordinary – are shaping the dynamics of contemporary popular culture.

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28. A good example of the latter is the 'Rickrolling' phenomenon. Rickrolling – posting a misleading link that leads to Rick Astley's 1988 hit music video 'Never Gonna Give You Up', 'forcing' the unsuspecting viewer to set through yet another viewing of the irritating one-hit wonder – gained particular prominence online and in the popular press throughout 2008. It was widely reported by those 'in the know' that once the Rickrolling meme had made the pages of the mainstream press, it was over. See: 'The Biggest Little Internet Hoax on Wheels Hits Mainstream', *Fox News*, 22 April, 2008, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,352010,00.html>

GOVERNMENT YOUTUBE BUREAUCRACY, SURVEILLANCE, AND LEGALISM IN STATE-SANCTIONED ONLINE VIDEO CHANNELS

ELIZABETH LOSH

Distributed networks for disseminating audio, video, image, and text files have generally become associated with a fragmented politics of personal liberty and rhizomatic modes of resistance to the hegemonic powers of the monolithic corporate state. As Siva Vaidhyanathan has argued in *The Anarchist and the Library*, decentralised mechanisms for distributing content through peer-to-peer modes of exchange tend to be opposed to oligarchic interests that govern through and for authorities that use 'moral panics' to retain control over the populace.¹ Yet, as Vaidhyanathan also points out, entrenched interests shape the operational constraints of computer systems and may use proprietary software to prohibit decentralised lateral transactions. Moreover, the consequences, effects, and residues of seemingly improvisational and amorphous informational networks frequently coalesce into the form of what Ned Rossiter has referred to as the 'specter' that continues to haunt the age of informational-ity: state sovereignty.²

In many ways, YouTube functions as a 'network' only to the extent that it emulates the quest for market share associated with traditional media monopolies, such as the Fox network controlled by Rupert Murdoch. Despite the fact that it seems to battle entertainment conglomerates nobly in American courtrooms on the side of liberalising copyright regulations, YouTube cannot be called a distributed network, based on its highly centralised business plan, structure of ownership, and corporate branding of product.

The information architecture of YouTube is one that foregrounds celebrity and spectacle by design, even as it deploys a rhetoric of 'response', 'comment', and 'community'. Typically, it offers its audience little more than what Guy Debord once called 'figmentary interlocutors' who distract attention from the unidirectional characteristics of the discourse, which is ultimately based on a politics of commodities.³ There may be real human beings populating the audience constellations of YouTube, but they satisfy stock roles, such as griever, self-promoter, parodist, pundit, and seconder of motions. In other words, YouTube is often

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1. Siva Vaidhyanathan, *The Anarchist in the Library: How the Clash Between Freedom and Control Is Hacking the Real World and Crashing the System*, New York: Basic Books, 2004.
 2. Ned Rossiter, 'Organized Networks and Nonrepresentative Democracy', *Reformatting Politics: Information Technology and Global Civil Society*, New York: Routledge, 2006, 19.
 3. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, New York: Zone Books, 2006.

a cultural engine of popularity⁴ instead of populism, in which the power laws by which it functions largely protect the status quo rather than challenge it. As the etymology of the word 'statistics' indicates, far from causing the state to wither away, YouTube's multiple schemes for numerical ranking of data ultimately legitimise the logic of Achenwall's *Staatswissenschaft* from which the discipline of modern statistics and its emphasis on metrics derives.⁵

The use of YouTube by official agencies pursuing e-government agendas for the United States and the United Kingdom demonstrates how state authority is represented in distributed digital video in modes that may mimic one-to-one communication and yet reinforce the one-to-many structure by which liberal representative democracies have traditionally functioned in the mass media era. The U.S. Department of Defense, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of State, the British Foreign & Commonwealth Office, and even the British royal family use their YouTube channels in ways that both appropriate and reify existing YouTube genres and display how YouTube's seemingly emergent and informally derived conventions frequently also borrow from the visual and indexical culture of the state. In the course of the so-called War on Terror, state-produced online video from these two nations is clearly intended to sharpen some messages and soften others about 'unpopular' international policies, but this tendency to use YouTube for institutional propaganda about security, sovereignty, and subjectivity could just as easily be replicated in other national contexts. Furthermore, many government-funded YouTube videos now serve as substitutes for numerically coded instructional booklets that were traditionally produced in print formats by official agencies on topics ranging from tax preparation to drivers' education. Thus, state-sanctioned YouTube potentially represents a multimedia extension of what is now a vast archive of online forms, which Jane Fountain has described as a key part of the Weberian bureaucracy of the 'virtual state'.⁶

It could be argued that government-produced YouTube videos are a special case that can not be taken as representative of the site's seemingly anti-authoritarian norms. But close examination of the cultures of production and reception surrounding government YouTube videos shows that user practices exhibit many of the same trends and features that are manifested on the amateur channels of individual members. In short, what Paul Virilio has described as the 'democratisation of voyeurism' in the post-September 11th environment⁷ can just as easily be applied to the ethos of YouTube 'prosumer' as the ethos of the state.

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4. See Alexandra Juhasz on popularity in *TOUR #3: POPULARITY! Who doesn't want to be prom queen?*, 2008. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-XuCR01Ecw>, and Henry Jenkins' admission that "participatory culture is not always progressive" in 'Nine Propositions Toward a Cultural Theory of YouTube', *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*. http://www.henryjenkins.org/2007/05/9_propositions_towards_a_cultu.html
 5. See also Ian Hacking, 'How Should We Do the History of Statistics?', *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.
 6. Jane Fountain, *Building the Virtual State: Information Technology and Institutional Change*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001.
 7. Paul Virilio, *The Visual Crash*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002.

Surveillance and Sousveillance

Not all citizens are satisfied with how the state manages its authority over its inhabitants' mobility and how it envisions its supervisory role. In the United States, popular mainstream blogs frequently share traveller's horror stories about passengers being humiliated for attempting to transport innocuous carry-on items such as breast milk, snack pudding, geological samples, and sex aids. Blogs like Federated Media's Boing Boing have shared their writers' own negative experiences at airports and have also directed readers to other blogs that catalogue Transportation Security Administration abuses.⁸ CNET's Surveillance State is actually written by longtime TSA-protestor and civil libertarian Chris Soghoian, who was once formally investigated by the Department of Homeland Security for creating an online Northwest Airlines boarding pass generator to draw attention to a large security loophole in airport check-in procedures.

To provide a forum for official public retorts to such negative user-generated content about mistreatment and incompetence involving individual screeners, as well as to counter arguments about flaws in the organisation's general procedures for handling passengers and baggage at airports, the frequently maligned agency created its own YouTube channel. Before the debut of the actual channel, the TSA began the process of video public diplomacy by opening a website called 'Myth Busters', which was intended to debunk what the TSA claimed to be 'urban legends', such as a tale of an eight-year-old child on the 'no-fly' watch list.⁹

TSA officials also used the Myth Busters site to refute critical passenger accounts, sometimes with video from TSA security cameras,¹⁰ most famously in the case of a female passenger who was struggling to manage a stroller containing a toddler who had been holding a prohibited cup of liquid. Surveillance video showed camera views of the incident that ambiguously displayed the passenger's interactions with security staff during her attempts to pass through the checkpoint. Although the footage was intended to exonerate federal authorities, many noted that the supposedly exculpatory video showed the woman in a humiliating position down on her knees and that TSA personnel were unprofessionally milling about and socialising on the job. When subsequently published the TSA's official YouTube channel, viewers posted over six hundred mostly critical comments. Some of these comments generated a flurry of replies of their own, such as the posting from a passenger who described having a personal diary read by voyeuristic TSA personnel to which many sympathetic readers responded in outrage.¹¹

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8. Kathleen Schafer, 'TSAin't - Keeping America Safe from Photographers: So what's your story?', TSAin't: Keeping America Safe from Photographers weblog, 22 April, 2006, <http://tsaintgood.blogspot.com/2006/04/so-whats-your-story.html>
 9. The 'Myth Busters' title of the website came from the popular *MythBusters* show on American cable television in which the hosts perform science experiments to test the truth of lore from popular culture and thus affirm or deny both commonsense and counterintuitive propositions about physics, chemistry, and biology.
 10. Transportation Security Administration, 'TSA: Myth Busters Archive', <http://www.tsa.gov/approach/mythbusters/index.shtm>
 11. Transportation Security Administration, 'TSA Officers Hassle Female Passenger over Sippy Cup?', http://www.youtube.com/comment_serverlet?all_comments&v=BkPevfpWDso&fromurl=/watch%3Fv%3DBkPevfpWDso

In contrast to the text comments, all four YouTube video responses to the surveillance footage of the mother with the stroller did not engage in the substantive debate about TSA conduct. Instead, they piggybacked on the number of views to further commercial agendas of promotion for both product and self. Response videos from ExpoTVKidsandBabies show a range of white, middle-class mothers providing reviews of sippy cups, booster seats, and other children's specialty products, an issue that only tangentially related to the TSA case through the logic of keywords and consumerism. However, response videos to other TSA YouTube videos generally avoid participating in such branding strategies, and – as they did with critical text comments – YouTube members use the 'vlog' editorial format to challenge the authority of the federal agency. For example, 'Happy Thanksgiving TSA Turkeys', which was posted in response to the 'TSA SimpliFLY Video', shows an enraged male respondent, 'crimefile,' calling these enforcers of state authority 'little Nazis'.¹²

Soon comments and video responses were disabled for these and the other official TSA videos on YouTube. But the agency continued to post new content, often to complement the text of their public relations blog, Evolution of Security, which still presented reader feedback on its pages. Unlike the 'zero comments' state of most bloggers and videographers who are private citizens,¹³ U.S. government blogs and YouTube channels tend to receive extremely large numbers of responses to posted content. The authors of the Evolution blog, who present themselves as rank-and-file TSA employees rather than image-management professionals, have been known to express surprise and exasperation with the volume of their negative reader comments, as they do in the following justification for refusing to respond to some types of protest or complaint:

The simple truth is that we're just about the only government agency engaging in this type of dialogue on security issues and policies and we're sincerely interested in rational debate and conversation...but we have neither the time nor the desire to respond to random, vitriol filled diatribes that don't serve passengers or other bloggers in any way.¹⁴

This declaration attests to both the site's exceptionalism, as it presents itself as a federal agency unusually willing to engage in 'dialogue on security issues and policies', and its conventionality, since the authors make clear that they will only play by the rules of Habermasian 'rational debate and conversation' and will refuse to engage with outliers who produce 'vitriol' that is irrelevant to the discourses of the assumed mainstream.

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12. Crimefile, 'Happy Thanksgiving TSA Turkeys', http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xDnLAPaxE0&watch_response
 13. See Susan C. Herring, Lois Ann Scheidt, Sabrina Bonus, and Elijah Wright, 'Bridging the Gap: A Genre Analysis of Weblogs', *Proceedings 37th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences* (Big Island, HI, Jan. 5–8, 2004), and Geert Lovink, *Zero Comments: Blogging and Critical Internet Culture*, New York: Routledge, 2008.
 14. Christopher, EOS Blogteam, Transportation Security Administration, 'ID Update and a Word on the Blog', Evolution of Security weblog, 27 June, 2008, <http://www.tsa.gov/blog/2008/06/id-update-and-word-on-blog.html>

Furthermore, the statement acknowledges that TSA social media outlets actually have two distinct audiences: consumers of transportation services ('passengers') and media producers ('other bloggers') who may compete or collaborate with TSA content-creators. To provide visual material for both these audiences, TSA YouTube videos also present a number of examples of seemingly impromptu oratory in which costumed security agents serve as spokespersons for the architectures of control deployed at airports. Techniques of the security profession praised in official YouTube videos include ambient sound played to calm passengers, signage in which the information design primarily serves to manage foot traffic, official uniforms made more similar to clothing worn by law enforcement personnel, and routinised behaviours and gestures developed through role-playing training completed behind the scenes. Unlike professionally-produced Video News Releases or VNRs, TSA videos mimic the amateur filmmaking practices of other YouTube users. Since VNRs have been the subject of congressional hearings and defensive statements by the Public Relations Society of America because media activists argue that VNRs manipulate traditional television news coverage by taking advantage of the opportunism of individual broadcast stations that constantly search for inexpensive and easily accessible B-roll, this studied casualness and use of low-tech authoring and broadcast tools serves as a way to diffuse possible accusations about state-supported propaganda.

The concept of 'sousveillance', popularised by Steve Mann, holds that citizens can disrupt the surveilling powers of the authorities by using wearable cameras to document their daily interactions as political subjects.¹⁵ Yet TSA videos deploy both the Foucauldian surveillance perspective of the panopticon,¹⁶ and the view from below that would be seen by subject citizens. Although Mann argues that sousveillance reasserts citizens' rights to the commons by 'uncovering the panopticon and undercutting its primacy and privilege',¹⁷ the individual's point of view shot from a wearable camera can also be appropriated by state authority to inculcate self-management techniques and to formalise what Foucault calls the 'ritualisation of the problem of personal conduct' in his work on 'governmentality'.¹⁸ For example, 'TSA Diamond Self Select', which is shot in the Salt Lake City airport, is a ski-themed disquisition on self-selection processes, literacies of mobility, and the professionalisation of travel. The video encourages travellers to group themselves into one of the following three categories to maximise efficiency: 'black diamond' 'expert travelers', 'blue square' 'frequent flyers', and 'green circle' families or others needing additional time or special assistance.¹⁹ The camera begins at passenger level in security lanes but slowly floats up to the overhead view and

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15. Steve Mann, Jason Nolan, and Barry Wellman, 'Sousveillance: Inventing and Using Wearable Computing Devices for Data Collection in Surveillance Environments', *Surveillance & Society* 1.3 (2003): 331-355, <http://wearcam.org/sousveillance.pdf>.
 16. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: Vintage, 1979.
 17. Steve Mann, Jason Nolan, and Barry Wellman, 'Sousveillance: Inventing and Using Wearable Computing Devices for Data Collection in Surveillance Environments'.
 18. Michel Foucault, 'Governmentality', trans. Colin Gordon, *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.
 19. Transportation Security Administration 'TSA Diamond Lane Self-Select', <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PfkSzVRVt3o>

adopts the surveilling gaze of a superior authority, thus underscoring the identification of the surveilled with their surveillers. The subsequently posted 'Walkthrough Checkpoint Evolution at BWI' maintains the amateurish shaky-lens view of a passenger being herded through lanes throughout the entire video, and the footage even includes the audible footsteps of the camera-bearer in its soundtrack to establish its authenticity as a representation of the physical presence of the obedient witness in airport lines.²⁰

Unlike the security webcams featured in the work of artist Natalie Bookchin that convey an atmosphere of detachment and alienation, videos on the TSA YouTube channel have a pedagogical function intended to foster acceptance of the principles and practices associated with the security procedures adopted by the cultures of airport travel, whether seen from the above the checkpoint in the position identified with the enforcer or at floor-level from the viewpoint of those who could potentially find themselves hailed by the law. Of course, these strategies also provoke tactical responses,²¹ and YouTube content on citizen channels includes passenger-produced videos that are created by ubiquitous recording devices where the rhetorical emphasis is on bearing witness, whistleblowing, and exploiting workarounds in videos such as 'TSA Agent inspects my bag', 'TSA Screening at LAX', 'What You Don't Want to See at Airport Security', and 'toddlers vs. tsa'.

In other words, government YouTube frequently takes on the form of social media rather than its function. Despite seeming to promote an ideology of openness and transparency, the TSA's multimedia portals often underscore the value of secrecy by justifying a rhetoric of obstruction. In 'Blogger Bob Screens the Apple MacBook Air', one of the writers of the TSA's *Evolution of Security* blog responds to other 'blog posts' that allege that Apple's new ultra-thin laptop technology is particularly likely to raise unjustified alarms at airport screening stations.²² Despite the device's lack of bulk capable of hiding explosives, Bob explains that Apple's mechanical contents are 'very different to what we are accustomed to seeing'. However, Bob the TSA screener also refuses to show the YouTube audience exactly how the MacBook Air's 'inner workings are laid out differently' in discourse that conflates corporate trade secrets with national security in its references to 'sensitive security information'.

Although the computer screen display assumes a central position in the rational decision-making process of TSA agents manning contraband detectors, shots of such screens, which both display information and screen out prohibited goods, never appear in the official TSA videos.²³ An ability to see the screen display for oneself would be particularly meaningful to

20. Transportation Security Administration, 'Walk Through Checkpoint Evolution and BWI' http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPujbxF_2mw&feature=user

21. For more about the opposition of 'strategies' and 'tactics', see Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

22. Transportation Security Administration, 'Blogger Bob Screens the Apple MacBook Air', <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-3qZcmXFkQ0>

23. For more on the logic of the screen, see Lev Manovich, 'The Interface', *The Language of New Media*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001, 96, where Manovich argues that the screen is not a 'neutral medium of presenting information' because it 'functions to filter, to screen out' and therefore serves an 'aggressive' purpose.

stakeholders in the case of controversial whole-body scanning technologies, in which private body morphologies under clothing could be viewed by screeners in remote airport locations. However, the YouTube video about this technology shows an operator whose head is blocking the screen, as a spokesperson assures viewers that the image will be 'deleted forever' after viewing and that 'the system has no way to save, transmit, or print the image'.²⁴ In posted TSA videos, the viewer is constantly reminded of cinematic rather than computational conventions about vision and the gaze, and the possibility that technology mediates rather than reflects reality is never seriously acknowledged in the logic of their footage.

Testimony and Evidence

Of course, online digital video has become a prominent medium for exposing wrongdoing committed by the agents of the nation-state. However, such video shot by government personnel often serves as evidence rather than whistle-blowing testimony, because it is not created as a means of intentional communication with the public. Rather than diffuse or discourage victimisation, scandals, or disasters in the making, such video is often manufactured to document the content-creator's active participation in systems that capitalise on the authority of the state. For example, human rights advocate Sam Gregory points out that 'the most salient 'human rights' videos that have generated action recently have been shot by perpetrators'.²⁵ As evidence, Gregory lists 'torture videos by Egyptian police or the Malaysian Squatgate footage – or for that matter Abu Ghraib or the Saddam execution videos'. These videos were private communications to be disseminated only among brutalisers as trophy shots, but they may be later featured in news stories or subpoenaed as evidence, much as largely one-to-one electronic mail messages were only destined for those within the inner circles of incompetence, impotence, image maintenance, or conspiracy involved in scandals in the U.S. federal government.

After digital video and still images showing human rights abuses were accidentally shared with the public by guards at the Abu Ghraib prison, officials at the Department of Defense became concerned about how compromising combat and patrol footage shot by personnel in the U.S. armed forces could be widely disseminated on popular online video sites such as YouTube.²⁶ Even after the Abu Ghraib scandal, incriminating video posted on commercial video-sharing sites included shots that seemed to show American soldiers taunting Iraqi children with the promise of water bottles, laughing after the destruction of a mosque, and sadistically lobbing a live puppy off a cliff. Faced with a continuous series of public relations crises, the U.S. military's new OPSEC manual radically limited soldiers' access to social media sites. In a document that asserted that '80 percent of the adversary's intelligence needs' could be

24. Transportation Security Administration, 'Millimeter Wave Portals: TSA Checkpoint Evolution', http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_lz819-77zY

25. Sam Gregory, 'DIY Video and Human Rights', The Hub: See It : Upload It : Share It : Take Action weblog, 13 February, 2008, <http://humanrightsvideo.wordpress.com/2008/02/13/diy-video-and-human-rights>

26. For an example of the use of soldiers' videos in Internet art and essayistic documentary work, see Jennifer Terry, 'Killer Entertainments', *Vectors Journal* 3.1 (Fall, 2007), <http://www.vectorsjournal.org/index.php?page=7&projectId=86>

satisfied by the contents of 'libraries or the Internet', military planners insisted that 'personal websites of individual soldiers (to include web logs or 'blogs') are 'a potentially significant vulnerability'.²⁷ Although some official sources insisted that the subsequent move to block YouTube and MySpace to soldiers on active duty was merely intended to preserve network resources by limiting high-bandwidth applications,²⁸ commanders also admitted that such 'recreational' computer use had unspecified security risks.²⁹

But military planners did not limit themselves to prohibiting the vernacular content-creation of troops on the ground; they also founded a state-sanctioned YouTube channel sponsored by 'Operation Iraqi Freedom' at which they promised to provide 'Combat action', 'Interesting, eye-catching footage', 'Interaction between Coalition troops and the Iraqi populace', and 'Teamwork between Coalition and Iraqi troops in the fight against terror'.³⁰ In addition, the channel offered its visitors guarantees about the authenticity of the material it presented and asserted that 'clips document action as it appeared to personnel on the ground and in the air as it was shot'. As the site claims, 'We will only edit video clips for time, security reasons, and/or overly disturbing or offensive images'. Yet the channel's managers also concede that content is vetted and that material that would be inappropriate would not be posted at all. Such excluded footage includes video with 'Profanity', 'Sexual content', 'Overly graphic, disturbing or offensive material', and 'Footage that mocks Coalition Forces, Iraqi Security Forces or the citizens of Iraq' – precisely the kinds of unflattering portrayals of U.S. soldiers that had seemed to be so damaging to the reputation of troops in Iraq.

Although there are no subtitles to explain the dialogue in Iraqi Arabic, translators often play a supporting role in videos such as 'Baghdad Firefight, March 2007' and 'Kidnap Victim Rescued, Baghdad, Jan. 2007'. The latter film is composed of a montage of scenes that recapitulates the trail of evidence leading to a captive hostage and concludes with the grateful family members discovering that their loved one has been liberated by U.S. soldiers; by the end of the video, the time of day has shifted to nighttime, and the scene of emotional catharsis is crudely illuminated by a roving flashlight. In these videos, the sound is often cacophonous and includes loud helicopter noise and digital squeals caused by recording and transmission technologies. Newer videos promote the operation's official website, where those in search of more content can view the daily 'Iraqi Freedom Minute' or read the 'Freedom Journal',³¹ with the tag line 'SEE THE PHOTOS * READ THE STORIES'. In some videos, such as 'Iraqi Boy Scouts prepare for Jamboree', viewers use the comment area to discuss the military's

27. Operations Security (OPSEC) Manual, April 19, 2007,

http://blog.wired.com/defense/files/army_reg_530_1_updated.pdf

28. Leo Shane III and T.D. Flack, 'DOD blocking YouTube, others', *Stars and Stripes* (May 13, 2007), <http://www.stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=53421&archive=true>

29. B.B. Bell, 'Restricted Access to Internet Entertainment Sites Across DoD Networks', http://www.usfk.mil/usfk/bell-sends/5_11_07_27%20-%2007%20Restricted%20Access%20to%20Internet%20Entertainment%20Sites%20Across%20DoD%20Networks.pdf

30. Multi-National Force Iraq YouTube Channel, <http://www.youtube.com/user/MNFIRAQ>

31. Operation Iraqi Freedom, <http://www.mnf-iraq.com>

regulations limiting access to social media.³² Those who object to the war have flagged a number of the videos as inappropriate for minors. Unlike the TSA YouTube channel, videos on MNF-IRAQ often show specific technologies of vision in the context of actual computer generated displays and present footage processed from black and white aerial targeting systems or green night vision scopes.

With over three million views, 'Battle on Haifa Street' may be the most popular video on this state-sanctioned Department of Defense YouTube channel, MNFIRAQ. Without voice-over or appended editorialising, the video depicts small groups of U.S. marksmen firing at enemy positions from a heavily damaged high-rise building on January 24, 2007. Although the YouTube viewer can not see through the scopes of their weapons, the camera sometimes cuts from the soldiers to their targets in the chaotic urban landscape that is visible through windows and curtains. As the soldiers fire, they also damage the building in which they are taking cover, and debris periodically rains down on them. The Haifa Street video received over two thousand comments. Although this army-produced video file received noticeably more positive comments in relative terms than responses to TSA video content, a number of viewers similarly objected to what they saw as stage-directed propaganda. Some served as detail-oriented 'spoilers' to point out inconsistencies in the footage and to note that the fusillade was destroying the dwellings of noncombatants and risking the lives of civilians.³³ Video responses to the 'Battle' included both pro-military thank-yous, tributes, and remixes and anti-military rap videos and films of veterans protesting the war.

This intimate soldier-centered vision of the conflict from high above street-level was not the only coverage of this series of battles, however. CBS journalist Lara Logan, who was embedded with American troops, had covered the story from the perspective of the sidewalk a few days earlier, but the network decided not to air her segment, 'Battle for Haifa Street'.³⁴ Rather than focus on the supposed heroism of U.S. soldiers assisting Iraqi troops in fortified positions, Logan noted that the area's civilians had accused the largely Shiite army of committing atrocities against the Sunni minority. Logan's footage showed evidence of torture and summary execution, and the video displayed corpses of both persecuted Sunnis and Shiites killed in retaliation. According to a network spokesperson, the issue was the violent depiction of a trauma culture that could not be assimilated by Americans, and 'the Executive Producer of the Evening News thought some of the images in it were a bit strong'.³⁵

32. Multi-National Force Iraq YouTube Channel, 'Iraqi Boy Scouts prepare for Jamboree', http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments&v=dH80g_Mkin0&fromurl=/watch%3Fv%3DdH80g_Mkin0

33. Multi-National Force Iraq YouTube Channel, 'Battle on Haifa Street, Baghdad, Iraq', <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nINORX006-c>

34. Lara Logan, CBS News, 'The Battle for Haifa Street', http://www.cbsnews.com/sections/i_video/main500251.shtml?id=2371456n

35. Rory O'Connor and Dave Olson, 'Helping Lara Logan', Media Channel weblog, 24 January, 2007, <http://www.mediachannel.org/wordpress/2007/01/24/helping-lara-logan>

Logan attempted independently to disseminate the video, which had been relegated to a relatively obscure position on the CBS website, by using the following mass e-mail appeal with the subject line 'help':

The story below only appeared on our CBS website and was not aired on CBS. It is a story that is largely being ignored, even though this is taking place every single day in central Baghdad, two blocks from where our office is located. Our crew had to be pulled out because we got a call saying they were about to be killed, and on their way out, a civilian man was shot dead in front of them as they ran. I would be very grateful if any of you have a chance to watch this story and pass the link on to as many people you know as possible. It should be seen. And people should know about this. If anyone has time to send a comment to CBS – about the story – not about my request, then that would help highlight that people are interested and this is not too gruesome to air, but rather too important to ignore. Many, many thanks.³⁶

Logan's pathos-filled plea for publicity appeared in a number of progressive blogs, where it generated many supportive reader comments. A few days later, CBS news ran another Logan piece, 'Battle for Haifa St. Continues', which promoted a sympathetic portrayal of U.S. forces by showing them apprehending an insurgent who had been in the process of rigging up an IED or Improvised Explosive Device.³⁷

Soon, however, right-wing bloggers were picking up reports from Nibras Kazimi about an 'interesting controversy' involving Logan's footage. Kazimi argued that Logan's report improperly appropriated insurgent cell-phone footage without acknowledging that it was first released by the Al-Furqan Institute for Media Productions, under the title 'Some of the Casualties of the Heretics in Haifa Street After Sunday's Fighting'.³⁸ Kazimi claimed to have found some frame-by-frame matches between the CBS coverage and Al-Furqan's materials. Unlike the polished newsroom-style digital video produced by some Islamic fundamentalists,³⁹ CBS chose to incorporate quick-and-dirty street videography that showed the sectarian slayings. The Al-Furqan emphasis on local conflicts in the footage is also very different from the transnational messages that Lina Khatib has described, in which jihadist digital content reflects a cultural conversation about globalisation.⁴⁰ The Vice President of CBS declined to identify the source of Logan's video, citing the news network's

36. Rory O'Connor and Dave Olson, 'Helping Lara Logan'.

37. Lara Logan, CBS News, 'Battle for Haifa St. Continues', http://www.cbsnews.com/sections/i_video/main500251.shtml?id=2396260n?source=search_video

38. Nibras Kazimi, 'Interesting Controversy Surrounding CBS's Lara Logan', Talisman Gate weblog, 26 January, 2007, <http://talismangate.blogspot.com/2007/01/interesting-controversy-surrounding.html>

39. See International Crisis Group, 'In Their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency', <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3953&l=1>

40. Lina Khatib, 'Communicating Islamic Fundamentalism as Global Citizenship', *Reformatting Politics: Information Technology and Global Civil Society*, New York: Routledge, 2005.

obligation to 'protect the source' in 'a matter of life and death', but he emphatically denied that it was from Al-Qaeda, as some pro-war bloggers had claimed.⁴¹

Months after the debate about CBS's reporting had died down, no sign of either controversy about the journalistic ethics of investigators and gatekeepers at CBS could be gleaned just from the Haifa Street YouTube video posted by the U.S. army, although chance aggregations of tags and search terms might cause evidence to appear in 'Related Videos' to the right of the main YouTube player window. Yet army videographers were clearly aware that the footage they had posted still lacked a definitive resolution and so they posted a 'Part 2' the following month that showed Tomahawk missile strikes, the demolition of large structures, and service people exclaiming 'cool', 'nice', 'good', and 'this is better than the first time'.⁴²

Although CBS changed its reporting strategy to one of pro-military triumphalism, during the intervening period other news organisations became involved in documenting events on Haifa Street with their own dramatic digital video from reporters embedded with U.S. troops. Under the title 'Return to Haifa Street', *The New York Times* ran a suspenseful video segment narrated by reporter Damien Cave in which the patrol's leader is killed off screen by a sniper during the filming; afterwards his men shout profanities and then are described as 'alone, shocked, heartbroken'.⁴³ In this video, which was also later posted on YouTube, the Times incorporates footage from the U.S. Department of Defense, which was some of the same footage that would eventually appear on the military's official MNF-IRAQ YouTube channel. Unlike CBS, The New York Times in this case clearly indicates the source of the film with both voiceover and on-screen text. Although the reporter acknowledges that he was 'only with one unit', it is with some irony that he states that 'the military says it was a success, releasing this video to prove how well Iraqis and Americans performed', since later the reporter asserts that the army had left apartments 'open and empty, making it easy for people to return and possibly reignite the cycle of violence all over again'. As the reporter summarizes the history of short-lived U.S. occupation and policing in the area, 'the gains in every case were temporary.'

Both CBS and The New York Times produced what were essentially video remixes about Haifa Street that eventually wound up on YouTube. Both were structured by the familiar conventions of personal testimony, although the voices of the reporters handled the incorporation of video segments from outside sources very differently. In contrast, the MNF-IRAQ materials about Haifa Street were intended to function as evidence that could be used to support the continuing occupation of the country and the moral equations that justified the war. As such, these government YouTube videos were – by their very nature – incomplete in legalistic

41. Brian Montopoli, 'Questions Surround Haifa Street Video', Public Eye weblog, 30 January, 2007, http://www.cbsnews.com/blogs/2007/01/30/publiceye/entry2414754.shtml?source=search_story

42. Multi-National Force Iraq YouTube Channel, 'Battle on Haifa Street, Baghdad, Part 2', <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2BDGItVOAwA>

43. Damien Cave, 'Return to Haifa Street', *The New York Times*, http://video.on.nytimes.com/?fr_story=d4bc9a1d003c33c79e9844688dd816024b0e0555&scp=1&sq=return%20to%20haifa%20street&st=cse

terms, because they required the supplement of a persuasive argument and some rhetorical agency behind a specific case being made.⁴⁴

Noisy Channels

In recent years, a new philosophy about 'public diplomacy' intended to reach citizens directly rather than send messages through government officials has drawn attention to YouTube and other online means for the global distribution of state-produced videos about policy and politics. British diplomats under the leadership of Secretary David Miliband, who actually posts content regularly on his own separate YouTube channel,⁴⁵ have pursued a much more sophisticated agenda in this area than their U.S. counterparts, although both countries use their YouTube channels for international audiences as repositories of stand-alone multimedia content and material to illustrate the text of officially sanctioned blogs. Under the heading 'Global Conversations', the YouTube Channel of the U. K. Foreign and Commonwealth Office uses the second-person address to describe itself as 'a place for ministers and officials to engage in a dialogue with you about international affairs'.⁴⁶ The channel shows the complex strategies of organisation commonly found in the profile pages created by experienced users of social media and techniques of manipulation common in what Ian Bogost has called 'the membership economy'.⁴⁷ On the UK Foreign Office channel a number of 'playlists' are maintained on topics such as 'Support the British economy' and 'Projecting British Islam' and links to several blogs and its Flickr page for photo sharing. Elsewhere, the British government provides links to high-resolution online video files, which television stations abroad are encouraged to incorporate into news broadcasts, thus saving the station money that would otherwise go to shoot or acquire the backdrop B-roll, footage that depicts English citizens, homes, street life, or multiethnic culture.

However, attention to background rather than foreground is common in what Henry Jenkins has described as online 'spoiler' communities who refuse to remain passive audience members and instead test the truth claims of the imagery they see.⁴⁸ Unfortunately for the American government, such practices have been applied by sceptical audiences to public diplomacy videos on YouTube produced by the U.S. Department of State. For example, in the comment area for 'Policy Podcast: Trafficking in Persons', two viewers ridicule the poor sound quality and inappropriately cluttered setting by suggesting that the State Department has been relegated to a 'shopping mall'.⁴⁹ In another video, 'Cal Ripken, Jr., Secretary Rice & Karen Hughes', those who comment on the video not only mock the staged setting but also

44. See also the later work of Jacques Derrida about evidence and testimony in Maurice Blanchot and Jacques Derrida, *The Instant of My Death / Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg, Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000.

45. David Miliband Channel, <http://www.youtube.com/user/DavidMiliband>.

46. Foreign and Commonwealth Office, <http://www.youtube.com/user/ukforeignoffice>

47. Ian Bogost, 'Resisting the Membership Economy', Ian Bogost weblog, 9 June, 2008, http://www.bogost.com/blog/resisting_the_membership_econo.shtml

48. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old Media and New Media Collide*, New York City: New York University Press, 2006.

49. U.S. Department of State, 'Policy Podcast: Trafficking in Persons', http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jaqRkTvn_Ac

question Ripken's credentials from his former career as a professional athlete and express doubts about whether his record really deserves to confer upon this citizen-ambassador the status of sports legend.⁵⁰

In Warren Weaver's introduction to Claude Shannon's 1949 edition of *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, Weaver explored the philosophical implications of Shannon's theory of the noisy channel. Weaver pointed out that 'all the emotional and psychological aspects of propaganda theory' may be highly relevant to what he called 'the effectiveness problem' and that 'the semantic problem' could be seen as analogous to 'the meaning to a Russian of a U.S. newsreel picture'.⁵¹ In the context of the public diplomacy efforts being undertaken in our present era of government YouTube, Weaver's examples from the former Soviet Union suggest that channels of communication invariably have a valence of politics to consider. Weaver wasn't alone among Cold War information theorists in considering the possible ramifications of state-operated media. However, his contemporary Norbert Wiener worried less about a Communist threat to the homeostasis of cybernetic social systems and more about the powers of appropriation belonging to 'the Lords of Things as they Are' who Wiener said protect themselves 'by the laws of libel and the possession of the means of communication'.⁵² Because YouTube is owned by Google, a corporation that dominates the search engine market and that has expanded its online market share elsewhere with integrated authentication for e-mail, blogging, document production, analysis of web traffic, and even the mapping of navigable physical space, Wiener's warning that the 'means of communication' could be constricted by 'the elimination of the less profitable means in favour of the more profitable' continues to resonate today. Wiener deplored the 'machinery of radio fan ratings, straw votes, opinion samplings, and other psychological investigations, with the common man as their object' and the 'statisticians, sociologists, and economists available to sell their services to these undertakings'. As the rationalising work of the state becomes adopted by YouTube and the pseudo-interactivity of YouTube becomes adopted by the state, Wiener's admonitions only become more pertinent over time.

50. U.S. Department of State, 'Cal Ripken, Jr., Secretary Rice & Karen Hughes', <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4LfZ5QHbIBE>

51. Warren Weaver, 'Recent Contributions to the Mathematical Theory of Communication', *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1949.

52. Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics of Control and Communication in the Animal and Machine*, Cambridge, M.: MIT Press, 1948.

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MAKING VIOLENT PRACTICES PUBLIC

NELLI KAMBOURI AND PAVLOS HATZOPOULOS

This paper unfolds around repetition. It discusses the repetitive projections of four videos that have been viewed approximately 200,000 times by YouTube visitors. It also repeats a discourse about them: comments, critiques, outrages, apologies that these videos presumably enacted. It is easy to show though that this is a *repetition with a difference*. The series of repetitions that we are about to reproduce are, this time around, part of a semi-academic paper, which followed a semi-academic presentation at the Video Vortex conference, and are addressed to a quite specific and limited group of readers, quite different from the average YouTube user. Yet, our argument will be – repeating this time Deleuze – that all repetition is such: all repetition is repetition with a difference.¹

From this starting point, three steps need to be followed in order to say something meaningful about online video aesthetics.

1. Online video feeds on repetition, repetition is the key that distinguishes the economy of online video from, let's say, the economy of television which is based on transcription. In turn, YouTube's huge success is partly due to its ability to make repetition almost effortless; the simplicity of 'embedding', the featured option of 'replaying videos'.
2. The Video Vortex conference, where this paper was first presented, attempted to give emphasis on alternatives. On the creation of alternative platforms to the proprietary YouTube model. On the creation of alternative aesthetics that have the potential to subvert/substitute the TV or traditional cinema based YouTube aesthetics.
3. Our point is that if all repetition is repetition with a difference, then YouTube may be based on repetition, but it constantly produces and reproduces difference. In this sense, the 'search for alternatives' might not necessarily lie outside the YouTube model. Alternatives may also emerge at the core of YouTube.

If difference is already inscribed within YouTube, then a pressing question that arises is this: what are the conditions under which difference becomes subversive? We will try to address this question by going first back to the specifics: the repetitive projections of the four YouTube videos.

Once upon a time there was a violent video...

The original video was performed for the first time in a police detention centre in Athens.²

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1. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
 2. The only current link which is not flagged as inappropriate by the YouTube user community is this: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-3oll77bCZU>

The background was naturalistic and simple. The protagonists were two Albanian immigrants forced to act their roles. They were forced to do so by a Greek policeman. They were mainly ordered to slap each other. The director was the policeman himself: he was the one who gave the orders, spanked the protagonists to force them to 'act', and filmed the performance on his mobile phone. He very often shouted at the two protagonists to spank each other harder. The scene was so badly performed that it reminds us of some old fashion computer game where the characters could only perform a few mechanical moves. One wonders why the policeman-director did not choose to stage the whole performance in a more interesting setting with actors who would willingly act their roles. One wonders whether this was the worse torture the two Albanian men actually suffered and if in fact there was something worse, something less comic, something more violent that even the policeman-director chose not to film.

MMS: Sharing the secret

From this rather miserable performance, however, a rather extraordinary set of random events unfolded. Although the video exudes in itself an air of banality, a lack of imagination, the sheer boredom of police life, the unbearable emptiness of everyday acts of racism, this performance became something altogether different as it was projected and shared again, and again.

The video was initially distributed amongst a closed circle of recipients – mainly policemen – who were invited to share the 'dirty secret' of its violence. We can only assume what the recipients of this message felt. Whatever their reactions might have been, what they were called to do was to participate in a 'family secret'. This was a 'family secret' that was supposed to offer secret pleasure to the initially closed circle of viewers and to invite them to join in the family, to ensure that the secret would stay this way, that it will not be revealed to outsiders. In this sense, the repetition of the video functioned, as Akis Gavriliadis argues, as the constituting act of a community.³ This was a community of macho Greeks who hate foreigners but who do not dare to do much more than to force them to act violently on each other in a badly performed video. The bonds uniting this community were formed on the basis of the existence of the secret, but also on the common danger of its potential revelation. The founding act of this nationalistic community was violence; a violence whose virtuality is critical.

The video becomes in this repetition an affirmation of violence, a violence that goes beyond the violent act itself, a violence that goes even far beyond the violent images themselves, and extends to the innumerable imaginings of violent acts that 'we', the Greek policemen, the Greek men and women, could have performed behind the scenes. Paradoxically, the very content of the original performance may deny this (since the policeman is mainly filming and directing the infliction of violence, but does not engage in it, except when pushing the two men with a stick). What occurs, here, is something different from the violence initiated by the policeman-director of the video. What happens, instead, is a violence of repetition: the possibilities offered by digital video make possible the constitution of a Greek racist community, with the common fantasy (rarely fulfilled, most often unfulfilled) of inflicting cruelty on migrants.

3. Akis Gavriliadis, 'Abu Grhaib / Amarnthos / Omonoia (with two green shoes)', *Re-public* (June 2007), <http://www.re-public.gr/?p=174>

YouTube: Revelation and condemnation

Another chapter of the story opened when a self-styled 'ninja blogger', who claimed that he received the video from an 'anonymous source' as a video message on his mobile phone, uploaded the video on YouTube, initiating a new series of repetitions.⁴ In order to denounce police brutality and racist behavior, Kabamuru Igano – that is the name of the blogger – 'directed' the performance of the video as the revelation of its 'dirty secret' to the wider public. Repetitions were intermittently stopped when a government agency asked YouTube to ban the video, but it was then picked up by other users, uploaded again, banned again, till the amount of uploading became uncontrollable and the video still features as one of the most popular YouTube items for Greek users.

Both the roles of the blogger who uploaded the video on YouTube and the policeman who orchestrated the performance revolve around the possible revelation of the same 'secret' of violence. Although in directly opposing positions, (the one denouncing, the other celebrating the violence; the one hiding, the other exposing the secret), for both of them this video is an affirmation of the fact that police violence does *really* exist. The blogger is addressing society at large, attempting to disturb its perception of Greece as a space of hospitality. The director – policeman is addressing a closed circle of like-minded viewers, reassuring them that the Greek police is in fact doing something about the 'threat' of migration and the 'threat' of the 'de-hellenisation' of Greek society.

What seems to be in question is violence itself, or rather the visibility/reality of this violence. It is paradoxical to notice how often the extensively-documented acts of racist violence (and in particular police brutality during detention denounced in the reports of local and international NGOs, which always include testimonies of victims and witnesses) are neglected as a matter of public concern in Greece, whereas the mere repetitive projection of a badly performed online video can make this violence instantly public.⁵

Perhaps, however, there is no paradox: violence seems to become public if it is directed by a policeman, performed by the victims, filmed by a camera, and reproduced by different digital media. The extent to which violence is real is judged by its virtuality. In control societies, violence is not abolished but becomes effective only through machinic assemblage. Policemen cannot be *really* violent without their cameras, anti-xenophobic campaigns against police brutality cannot be *really* effective without the existence of indymedia websites or even YouTube. By recounting this story, we tend to forget that the policeman did not *really* inflict violence on the two Albanian immigrants but forced them to inflict violence on each other. Torture no doubt, but the torturer's violence was only enabled by his machinic extension, his mobile phone camera.

4. See his blog at <http://hitthat1983.blogspot.com>. Interestingly, the original post where Kabamuru Igano announced the existence and embedded the violent video has been removed. The blogger subsequently became targeted by right-wing bloggers and was also threatened with prosecution after the story was revealed so he preferred to cut off all links to his 'claim to fame'.

5. See for example, <http://www.statewatch.org/news/2007/oct/greece-proasyl-refugees-prel.pdf> and <http://www.amnesty.org/library/2002/eur250222002/index.htm>

Mainstream media: Humanitarianism performed

The story was soon picked up by all nationwide media and the video was repeated incessantly as a television news item, as a graphically described newspaper story and as the topic of the day in radio shows. When it became too unspectacular to continue replaying the original video, it was 'discovered' that it was far from unique. Other videos portraying police violence against migrants were also 'revealed' to have been filmed. Most were quite similar to the original, others were performed by migrant women and were mostly related to sexual abuse.⁶

A big scandal was triggered: police brutality was denounced, racism and xenophobia were exorcised, the authorities pledged to undertake all necessary measures so that it will not happen again, the Greek public re-affirmed its natural anti-racism and its ancient desire for hospitality. For a start, the police officer who orchestrated the torture was identified and suspended, although his mobile-phone camera was left unharmed. In this repetition things seem to have unfolded in a linear manner: the guilty person was blamed, and punished, the victims were not identified but a lot of sympathy for them poured out from Greek citizens. The scandal soon died out... justice was done.

Meanwhile on the internet...

The video, however, kept on attracting YouTube viewers. To reinforce the reality of violence, the YouTube community flagged the video as containing content that is 'inappropriate for some users'.

In an interesting twist an ultra-nationalist vlogger, named Daskalogiannis (literally Gianni, the teacher), remixed the video, making the argument that what generated the violence was in fact the Albanians themselves.⁷ In his own version of the event, Greece is invaded by Albanian criminals who rob and threaten peaceful Greek citizens daily.⁸ To prove the violence inflicted by Albanian criminals on Greek citizens, images evidently taken from a different context are shown as proof. The incidents could have occurred anywhere and could have involved anyone; in fact, in many images the signs are written in English. Daskalogiannis inserts, however, commentary in order to highlight the ethnic origin of the criminals. He finally reproduces the incident in the police station in a homemade collage where the policeman-director is cut from the editing. He inserts once more his own commentary: 'The Albanians started blaming each other for their stupidity in front of the police'. 'They admitted that they

6. In this one <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xpV8p9sppY>, for example, there is a quite similar performance where migrants are slapped by policemen. When women are the main characters, as for example, in this one <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kgL-5uJzPNk>. The performance has a sexual content (forced striptease by the migrant women, verbal sexual abuse by the policemen).

7. Three days after the Video Vortex conference in Amsterdam, where we projected Daskalogiannis' video, his account was fortunately suspended by YouTube (with the possible recommendation of some of those who attended our presentation?). In the era of digital (re)productions, however, these practices of outright exclusion are ineffective, to say the least. Daskalogiannis is of course back on air with a new address for his channel: <http://www.youtube.com/user/DASKALOGIANNIS>

8. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cdAHKouS-QQ>

were Albanian thieves and masturbating retards'. Violence is elevated into an ethnic trait: 'To steal, rape and murder is Albanian culture'. Violence does exist, but it emanates from backward cultures invading Greek society. 'God save the world from the Albanian criminals'. The video ends with a cow pissing on the Albanian flag.

The reality of the virtual becomes possible, here, only through a transfer of the violence inflicted on the Albanian immigrants to a violence inflicted by the Albanian immigrants. The reality of the violence is stripped of its machinic content and is attributed to those who cannot become machinic, that is civilised, those who are primitive enough to resort to backwards acts of violence. This transfer works as the exact opposite of the politically correct anti-xenophobic argument of the blogger who first posted the video on YouTube.

Just banal racist fun

What we have described so far, is – repeating Foucault this time – is a discourse. The video through its multiple, differing digital repetitions created a debate, which was organised around the question of violence and was based on the use of digital mediums. This debate had its array of concepts. It spanned from a condemnation of violence to its embracing, with a series of argumentations supporting each position. However, this debate had also its discursive limitations. What was possible within this debate was strictly limited to binaries that assigned opposing subject positions to migrants and citizens: criminals/policemen, victims/racists. These binaries were repeated in different forms but the limit separating the two poles of the binary were rarely challenged.

Furthermore, the debate had its own array of aesthetics. It was based on the aesthetics of repetition. Each different version was particularly directed as to initiate a series of repetitive projections by a different but targeted community of users. What substantially distinguished each version was the accompanying commentary that gave the video a comic or a tragic air. Both the director-policeman and the ultra right-wing blogger Daskalogiannis used repetition for producing entertainment. They tried to cause laughter by reducing the migrant-actors to 'silly', archaic computer game figures. The comic elements of this performance were intertwined with images of humiliation of the Other and imaginings of violent acts that could come next. Nothing came next, however, because the violence did not escalate, but repetitive as it was it continued until the camera was switched off. There was no escalation and no possible explanation. There was no end and no beginning. Just banal racist fun.

We were unable to trace any related YouTube videos made by the Albanians who took part in this incident or by other migrant individuals or groups. Perhaps they do exist. Perhaps they are nowhere to be found, yet. In any case, Albanian immigrants in this discourse are no less virtual than the violence in question. Whether as perpetrators or as victims they have acquired a virtual life that is mostly uncontrollable and beyond themselves precisely because they do not seem to connect with machines at least to the extent that Greek (v) bloggers do. Stripped of their agency, and their ability to generate their own alternative content, they become floating images sometimes anchored in subject positions of victimhood and sometimes anchored in subject positions of criminality. This absence surely calls for acknowledging material inequalities inherent in the spread and usages of new technolo-

gies, but also for an opening up of anti-racist practices in order to enable the production of migrant generated on-line video.⁹

The limits of discourse and repetition

Online video – in a fashion more reminiscent of computer games than cinema or television – devalues beginnings and endings. Violent videos too often capture a series of episodes that extend for ever online. What happened before or after is left for the imagination of different viewers to recreate. Some might desire a more violent beginning or ending, some might assume that all was peaceful before the performance started and everyone returned to normal after the performance ended. What is distinct though – being, in fact, one of the main features of online video aesthetics – is that these episodes, can be cut to pieces, re-assembled, commented on, replicated as many times as possible, and might still be the same.

Violently racist videos feed, in turn, on repetition. The episodes of racist violence that are repeated online are subordinated to the same. The protagonists are only allowed certain subject positions. The roles, the surroundings, the objects used are all determined and fixed in advance. We (including the people who produce those videos) have already been trained to know what is wrong with them.

Racism feeds on the repetition of the same and the denial of difference in itself. It strives for a violent re-ordering of the world into clearly identified elements determined in advanced and fixed forever in natural and eternal identities. Whether it is biological or cultural races, racist categorisations rely on the repetition of the same for their legitimisation and credibility. That is why racist violence finds in online video a new and unexpectedly friendly medium to thrive on and perpetuate. It is in questioning and potentially subverting these discursive limits that the possibility of alternatives within YouTube may be found. What is at stake in relation to online video, what might constitute an alternative to YouTube aesthetics born inside the YouTube model, is a different kind of repetition. A repetition that feeds on difference in itself. It might be that such a repetition will involve deformity and monstrosity, perhaps some stupidity as well.¹⁰ But it is no doubt inevitable, if not already happening, that through repetition a different story of a violent video will be told.

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9. Why is it that migrants have adopted massively as 'their' machinic extensions mobile phones? Low price? Easy to carry and throw away? What about the movies produced in migrant mobile phones? What kinds of repetitions do they enact? What are their audiences?
 10. Amongst disputes between Greek and Turkish nationalist vloggers and reproductions of the same racist speeches and practices by racist and anti-racist groups, a dragon headed monster with a human body – sometimes male sometimes female – has been born in YouTube. His name is Urfurshlaag. Urfurshlaag produces counter-narratives, not mere denunciations of racist videos; Urfurshlaag's videos repeat racist videos, their style of speech, their comic repetitive images, their repetitive themes, but with a twist of difference. See <http://www.youtube.com/user/urfurshlaag>

WHY NOT (TO) TEACH ON YOUTUBE ¹

ALEXANDRA JUHASZ

I decided to teach a course about YouTube to better understand this massive media/cultural phenomenon, given that I had been studiously ignoring it (even as I recognised its significance) because every time I went there, I was seriously underwhelmed by what I saw: interchangeable, bite-sized, formulaic videos referring either to popular culture or personal pain/pleasure. I called them video *slogans*: pithy, precise, rousing calls to action or consumption, or action as consumption. I was certain, however, that there must be video, in this vast sea, that would satisfy even my lofty standards, and figured my students (given their greater facility with a life-on-line) knew better than I how to navigate the site.

I decided that I primarily wanted the course to consider how Web 2.0 (in this case, YouTube) is radically altering the conditions of learning (what, where, when and how we have access to information). Given that college students are rarely asked to consider the meta-questions of how they learn, on top of what they learn, I thought it would be pedagogically useful for the form of the course to mirror YouTube's structures, like its amateur-led pedagogy. Thus, Learning From YouTube was my first truly 'student-led course: we would determine the central themes and relevant methods together. Now, on YouTube there is a great deal of user control, but this is actually within a limited and also highly limiting set of tools. So, I remained the professor, taking roll, grading, and setting forth the rule that all the learning for the course had to be on as well as about YouTube. So, all assignments had to be produced as YouTube comments or videos, all research had to be conducted within its pages, and all classes were taped and put on to YouTube. While these constraints were clearly artificial, and perhaps misleading about how YouTube is used in connection with a host of other media platforms that complement its functionality, it did allow us to become critically aware of how its architecture constrained our atypical goal (for the site) of higher education.

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1. This essay consolidates my blogs about a pedagogic experiment, Learning from YouTube, a Media Studies course I taught about and also on YouTube in Fall 2007 [www.youtube.com/mediapraxisme]. Part of the experiment was to be as digital as possible: as a class and also as a scholar. Blogging about the class continued many of its aims: to make digital and then rethink traditional forms of academic writing, expertise, medium, and audience within higher education. This explains the non-academic tone and style of this particular effort. Furthermore, my blogged endeavors linked to the hundreds of videos we produced during the course, so that my arguments were expanded and enriched by the sounds, images, and words of my students. This paper version pales in comparison, thus allowing us to also learn Why Not (to) Write about YouTube (off-line). You can find the multi-mediated versions of my ruminations at: www.aljean.wordpress.com; www.henryjenkins.org/2008/02/learning_from_youtube_an_inter.html; www.oculture.com/2008/04/teaching_on_youtube.html

Meanwhile, my on-and-about gimmick, plus a press release, were sexy enough to catch the eye of the media, mainstream and otherwise, allowing for the next exhausting, but self-reflexive lesson: this, in the role and value of media attention within both social networking and education. For the most part, the students found that TV cameras in the classroom were intrusive without being revealing, and the journalists' analyses were frustratingly rudimentary and biased (they all began from the assumption that the class, like YouTube, was a joke). The students, while initially awed, quickly came to feel abused, judged, and harassed by a global spotlight that saw them without equal attempts at listening or understanding. In the meantime, I was overextended, responding to multiple media queries each day, all the while gathering hits and attention, but without a quality or depth of dialogue, making the extra labour expended on the course seem little worth the bother. Within the first two weeks, we had encountered simple lessons in YouTube: on the significance of brevity, depth, fame, and communal values for this system, and how different these qualities typically function for advanced learning. Beyond this, students quickly understood how well trained they are to do academic work with the word – their expertise – and how poor is their media-production literacy (there were no media production skills required for the course, as there are not on YouTube). It is hard to get a paper into 500 characters, and translating it into 10 minutes of video demands real skills in the artful summary into word, image, sound, and their layering. So, also within the first few weeks, students were already agitating to go off YouTube and do their school work in the regular way (we eventually did go off for their final projects). However, by mid-term, most students had devised methods to do their academic assignments in video. I would briefly characterise these styles of work as: word-reliant, the illustrated summary, and the YouTube hack, where academic content is wedged into a standard YouTube vernacular form (music video, How To, or advertisement).

Also by mid-term, we could effectively articulate what the site was not doing for us. Our main criticisms came around four structural limitations: communication, community, research, and idea-building. We found the site to be inexcusably poor at:

- Allowing for lengthy, linked, synchronous conversation using the written word outside the degenerated standards of on-line exchange where slurs, phrases, and inanities stand-in for dialogue.
- Creating possibilities for communal exchange and interaction (note the extremely limited functionality of YouTube's group pages [www.youtube.com/groups/learningfromyoutube], where we tried our best to organize our class work), including the ability to maintain and experience communally permanent maps of viewing experiences.
- Finding pertinent materials: the paucity of its search function, currently managed by users who create the tags used for searching, means it is difficult to find what you want in the impressive holdings of the site. For YouTube to work for academic learning, it needs some highly trained archivists and librarians to systematically sort, name, and index its materials.
- Linking video, and ideas, so that concepts, communities and conversation can grow. It is a hallmark of the academic experience to carefully study, cite, and incrementally build an argument. This is impossible on YouTube.

Given that the site is owned by Google, a skilled and wealthy corporation, and that all these functionalities are easily accessible on other Web 2.0 applications, we were forced to ask: why do they *not* want us to do these things on YouTube? This is how we deduced that the site is primarily organised around and most effective at the entertainment of the individual. As YouTube delivers fast, fun, videos that are easy to understand and easy to get, it also efficiently delivers hungry eyeballs to advertisers. It need provide no other services. In fact, expanded functionality would serve to get in the way of the quick, fluid movement from video to video and page to page that defines YouTube viewing, besting older models of eyeball-delivery. YouTube is not made for higher education, nor should it be. However, given that students spend more and more time in the visual culture it produces, their expectations about knowledge delivery, and moving images, begin to be envisaged through its structures of entertainment. Thinking through education on YouTube, after teaching this class, I found that YouTube, and some of the features more generally of Web 2.0, served to dramatically unsettle this education/entertainment binary – as well as six others – that typically structure the academic classroom. As these rigid binaries are dismantled, the nature of teaching and learning shifts (I'd say for the worse). I'd like to briefly name and explain the troubles with these dismantling binaries here.

Public/Private

The elite liberal arts classroom (the setting where I teach, Pitzer College, costs about USD 40,000/year), usually (or at least ideally) depends upon an intimate and 'safe' gathering of high-paying, and carefully selected students, to create a communal pedagogy. In my typical classroom, once the doors are closed, students are asked to publicly contribute their interpretations, and sometimes personal experience or knowledge, always knowing that they are not experts, but are certainly experts-in-training. The steady construction of a confidence of voice, particularly in relaying a complex analysis, is one of the 'services' we professors hope to provide. Students, often feeling vulnerable in the critical eyes of their classmates and their esteemed professor, are challenged to add their voices to the building dialogue, one in which they are an active, continuing member. Ever aware of the power dynamics that structure the classroom – allowing some to speak with ease and others not – I engage in strategies to improve the 'safety' of the space.

Needless to say, these lofty dynamics begin to radically shift when anyone and everyone can see and also participate. During Learning from YouTube, students were routinely judged by critical YouTubers who we would never see or know, who may or may not have been aware of the history of our conversations, or the subtle dynamics in the room. While access grew, the disciplining structures in place in a closed classroom (attendance, grading, community responsibility) could not be applied to our YouTube participants. So they were unruly, unpolite, and often unproductive: not disciplined into being as committed and attentive as were we. Then, in response, it was stunning for me to see the strength of the students' desires to re-establish the privacy of the classroom: they tried to figure all kinds of walls between the class and the greater YouTube community. This, only the first example of their profound need to bring discipline to a class (and space) where I had given much of it away, as does Web 2.0 more generally. Of course, this raises the question: in what circumstances do we find discipline pleasurable or at least necessary, and at what cost do we let it go in certain arena of social interaction? This question is particularly unsettling for

me, a professor committed to 'critical pedagogy', where a significant amount of the power disparities in the classroom are re-thought and undone. Here I was in an experiment in letting control go, and the effect was to want it back.

Aural/Visual

The capacity to express ideas through words is almost entirely closed down on YouTube where both the 500 character limit, and the sandlot culture of web-expression, produces a dumbing-down when using writing that is more or less impossible to improve upon. The place to speak and be heard on YouTube is through video: which easily links language with sounds and images. However, most newly empowered videomakers on YouTube are not educated or adept in the language of images, and thus depend upon the mere recording and relay of their words, primarily through the talking-head or rant of the vlog. On my class YouTube page² I created several 'tours' of the course output, to create some control of the multitude of videos we had created over the semester.³ In my Tour #4, 'The Vernacular, Visual and the Vlog', I propose that there are two dominant forms of video on YouTube: the vlog, characterised by its poor quality and vox populi, and the corporate video, easily identifiable because it is all the vlog is not: high quality production values referring to corporate culture.

'Bad' videos are made by regular people, using low-end technology, paying little attention to form or aesthetics while carefully attending to the daily life, feelings, and thoughts of the maker. They are typically unedited, word or spectacle reliant, and accrue value through the pathos, talent, or humour of the individual. Meanwhile, professional content on YouTube abounds. 'Corporate' videos look good – like mainstream media – because they are made by professionals, are stolen from TV, or are re-cut movies. They express ideas about the products of mainstream culture, in the music-driven, quickly-edited, glossy, slogan-like vernacular of music videos, commercials, and comix. They consolidate ideas into icons; meaning is lost to feeling. Vlogs depend upon the intimate communication of the spoken word. Corporate videos are driven by strong images, sounds, and sentiments. This underscores how YouTube is not the level or uniform playing field people want to pretend it to be. By reifying the distinctions between the amateur and the professional, the personal and the social, in both form and content, YouTube currently maintains (not democratises) operating distinctions about who owns culture. A people's forum but not a revolution, YouTube video manifests the deep hold of corporate culture on our psyches, re-establishing that we are most at home as consumers (even when we are producers).

Body/Digital

Teaching and learning depend upon bodily presence: the forceful, dynamic, inspiring performance of the teacher, the alert attention and participation of the student. While in a typical classroom this may not function in the ideal sense – the professor can be uninspiring or uninspired and the students may be there in body but not in mind – the YouTube classroom diminishes this further, evaporating the powers of eye contact and professorial censure (no-

2. YouTube, www.youtube.com/mediapraxisme

3. These are available in their unstructured glory on the class group page: www.youtube.com/groups/learningfromyoutube

tice the role of discipline again), as well as the expressions of boredom or enthusiasm writ apparent on the bodies of students. When we attempted on-line classes through YouTube, they simply fizzled and died. Outside the paltry offerings of the site for real-time interaction, there is something in the lived shared exchange that creates an atmosphere for education that is not possible on this site. The body seems a pre-requisite for community (at least as far as the classroom is concerned): a better vessel for cementing obligation, trust, and concern between people than is the computer.

Importantly, the architecture and ownership of YouTube draw users by fuelling their desire for community. While many come to the site to be seen and heard by others, to make friends, they are much better served by the world, or MySpace. For, the very tools and structures for community-building which are hallmarks of Web 2.0 – those which link, gather, index, search, version, allow participation, commenting, and networking – are studiously refused on the site, even as it remains the poster-child of Web 2.0. People go elsewhere for these functions, dragging their favourite YouTube videos behind them to more hospitable platforms (with YouTube's permission). YouTube is a site to upload, store (and move off) videos. And YouTube is a mess: videos are hard to find, easy to misname, and quick to lose. The very paucity of its functions feeds its primary purpose: moving users' eyeballs aimlessly and without direction, scheme, or map, across its unparalleled archive of moving images. The site signals to us in its conscientious failings that it is not a place to hunker down or hang out with others, not a place within which to seriously research or study, not a place for anything but solo digital-play.

User/Owner

The user is told she is free, but this is not the case. Nowhere near it. She makes work in forms that best serve the master's (oops) owner's needs. Her ideas, spoken freely through newly accessible cameras, and on little screens encircled by ads, reflect those that the master taught her: re-cut sit-coms, testimonials from reality TV, fan mash-ups. They move freely across the internet, insulting some along the way, and encrusted by the flames of others the longer they sit still.

The user feels she is free, and so she speaks. But the owner uses other users to censor her as the owner sees fit. The user might be a person, she's often a corporation, but more often yet, she's an individual servicing a corporation. And all of this is done gratis, justifying YouTube's highly celebrated 'democratic' claims. Yet little of this labour works outside the corporate economy (even for non-profits) that does very well by all of this users' work. The owner, well, he has very little to do! The user (slave, oops) does all the work: makes the content; rates it; censors it; watches it; marks that she was there (and gets her hungry restless eyeballs to the ads).

Entertainment/Education

This was the first thing we learned in the class: while it wasn't any good for education, YouTube is killer for entertainment, fun, wasting time. The nature of its successful entertainment is not much different from what audiences loved before it, in fact, it holds media primarily produced within earlier times and formats. What differs most is platform and duration: YouTube as at-home or mobile, viewer-controlled delivery system of delectable media

morsels. But these morsels rely upon, integrate and condense three effective stylistics developed from previous media – humor, spectacle, and self-referentiality – to create a new kind of video organised by ease, plenitude, convenience, and speed (although this does sound most like a TV commercial). The signature YouTube video is easy to get, in both senses of the word: simple to understand – an idea reduced to an icon or gag – while also being painless to get to. Both spectacle and self-referentiality are key to facilitating this staple ease. A visual or aural sensation (crash, breast, celebrity's face, signature beat, extreme talent, pathos) holds the iconic center, or totality, of a video (spectacle), or an already recognisable bite of media performs the same function (through self-referentiality). Understandable in a heartbeat, knowable without thinking, this is media already encrusted with social meaning or feeling. YouTube videos are often about YouTube videos which are most often about popular culture. They steal, parody, mash, and re-work recognisable forms, thus maintaining standard styles and tastes. Thus, humor enters through parody, the play on an already recognisable form, or slap-stick, a category of spectacle.⁴

And what of the 'entertainment' value of millions of unique regular people speaking about their lives, and to each other, in the talking-head close-up of the vlog (the style I use)? While often a statement against corporate media, I would suggest that humour (a definitive self-mocking, ironic tone), spectacle (of authenticity, pathos, or individuality), and self-referentiality (to the vernacular of YouTube) also combine within this YouTube staple to create the foundation of its entertainment value.

All of the entertainment of YouTube builds into a postmodern TV of distraction, where discrete bites of cinema controlled and seen by the discrete eye of one viewer are linked intuitively, randomly, or through systems of popularity, in an endless chain of immediate but forgettable gratification that can only be satisfied by another video. I imagine that this must inevitably lead to two unpleasant, if still entertaining, outcomes: distraction foreclosing action, and surface fun precluding depth. Today's students, schooled on YouTube, iPhones, and Wiis, want their information relayed with just such ease and fun: they want their learning pleasurable, simplified, and funny. They don't want to be bored; even as they are always distracted. They want school to speak to them in the language they like and know and deserve. While I'm the first to admit that a good professor makes 'hard' information understandable, this does not mean that I do not expect my students to take pleasure in the rigorous work of understanding it. While I have always been aware that I am a performer, entertaining my students while sneaking in critical theory, avant-garde forms, and radical politics, much of what I perform is the delight and beauty of the complex: the life of the mind, the work of the artist, the experience of the counter-culture. I am not interested in teaching as a re-performing of the dumbing-down of our culture.

4. Interestingly, spectacle and humour were definitive of early cinema, as well. The development, 100 years ago, of this new medium also spoke across class and continent, in a simplistic visual lingua franca. However, within cinema history, ironic self-referentiality is usually understood to occur within an art-form at its later or last stages.

If YouTube videos, or the site itself, are to be used for anything other than blind and numbing entertainment (and certainly on Niche-Tube – the murky, raucous, underworld of YouTube where videos are made never to be found or seen by any but the lucky or insanely committed – this is happening with some [small] success), it is critical that the language of YouTube develops to include context, history, theory, and community, and by this I mean both within the architecture of the site and the form of the videos themselves. Certainly more people are making and viewing media, access to channels of production and distribution are rapidly growing to an almost incomprehensible scale. However, even the most moving of videos needs to be connected to something (other than another short video) – people, community, ideas, other videos to which it has a coherent link – if it is to create action and knowledge.

Control/Chaos

The college classroom is a disciplined space where knowledge moves in a formal and structured routine familiar to all the players. While the critical classroom begins to alter this script by giving more power to students, and allowing knowledge to be created dynamically, this is not the random chaos of information and power that is YouTube. For effective education, structure remains paramount so as to control conversation, to allow ideas to build in succession permitting things to grow steadily more complex, to be able to find things once and then again. On YouTube, amateurs rule, experts are deflated, and authority is flattened. While it is exciting to hear from new and varied people, and while this undoubtedly widens and opens our knowledge-base, it is difficult to learn in an environment where vying opinions rule, where data is helter-skelter and hard to locate, and where no one can take the lead. Again, the significance of discipline within the academic setting proves the rule. Without it, ideas stay vague and dispersed, there is no system for evaluation, and you can't find things or build upon them.

We are clearly living in a time where conventionalised methods must be re-thought because of the increased functions of the media. Teaching and learning are two conventions that will adapt in the face of Web 2.0. I've been an advocate of critical pedagogy my entire career as a professor. In particular, I have been keen on refiguring power, expertise, and objectivity in the classroom attempting instead to create more collaborative, imaginative pedagogic interactions where there is a self-awareness about how embedded structures of power (race, class, gender, age, expertise) organise classroom participation, and access to learning. That said, while trying to learn through YouTube, there were significant challenges posed to the traditions of teaching that both my students and I experienced as obstacles. We found that just what defined YouTube as good entertainment – its compelling lack of depth and expertise, and it's all but disappeared procedures of coherence, order, and forced attention – made it poor for education.

Of the many surprises and challenges of this class, it was most dumbfounding for me to find how resistant my students were to the loss of discipline, authority, and structure in the classroom. They hated the amount of process this course demanded; disliked that I wouldn't just tell them stuff; were reluctant to do course work in a new format in which they lacked training; and generally wanted me to take control so that they could attend to other things and more clearly understand what they needed to do to satisfy me. Why, we might ask, do they enjoy

the aimlessness and devaluing of authority on YouTube, but still want it in their education, even as any student would say, in a heartbeat, that they wish school was less boring, more fun, more *entertaining*? A rigorous, controlled, contained, rational argument is key to learning; not the flow, but the building of knowledge. Meanwhile, ease of acquisition, while comforting, and perhaps numbing, to my mind can never meet the sheer joy of a challenge, and the prize of the steady, often communal and hard work of creating new knowledge together.

MEDIA MASTERS AND GRASSROOT ART 2.0 ON YOUTUBE

BIRGIT RICHARD¹

Communication in the Web 2.0 context mainly works through images. The online video platform YouTube uses this form of visual communication and makes art forms of Western societies visible through their online videos. YouTube, as cultural reservoir and visual archive of moving images, accommodates the whole range of visualising creative processes – from artistic finger exercises to fine arts. A general characteristic of YouTube is the publishing of small everyday gestures of the ‘big ones’ (politicians, stars), like small incidents and their clumsiness in everyday actions, e.g. Beyoncé’s fall from the stage or Tom Cruise’s demonic pro-scientology interview. Through their viral distribution on different platforms, these incidents will never be covered up or disappear from the public view. At the same time big gestures and star images are replicated and sometimes reinterpreted by the ‘small people’ who present themselves in the poses and attitudes of the stars. Generally, a coexistence of different perspectives is possible. YouTube allows polysemic and polyvalent views on the everyday and media phenomena.

This article relies on YouTube research² that started in 2006 at the New Media Department of the Goethe University of Frankfurt. The results of the research have already presented representative forms and basic patterns, that is to say, categories for the clips appearing here. These kinds of clips, recurring in the observation period, have an impact on the basic representation of art or artistic expression within moving images on this platform. Methodologically the focus leads to the investigation (which has to be adequate to the specifics of the medium, or ‘media adequate’) of new visual structures and forms which can create – consciously or unconsciously – an art form. After focusing on the media structures, it will be discussed whether any and, if so, which ‘authentic’ new forms were developed solely on YouTube and whether these forms are innovative and can be characterised as avant-garde.

This article first takes a small step in evaluating how to get from a general communication through means of visibility in web 2.0, an often endless chatty cheesy visual noise³ – to the special quality of a consciously created aesthetic. From where do innovative aesthetic forms

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1. This paper was translated with the support of Jan Grünwald and Marcus Recht.
 2. *Youtube Favourites: Ego and Art Clips*. Goethe University, Frankfurt 2006. See <http://www.birgitrichard.de>
 3. ‘Das Internet verkommt zu einem Debattierclub von Anonymen, Ahnungslosen und Denunzianten. Ein Plädoyer für eine Wissensgesellschaft mit Verantwortung’, Bernd Graff, ‘Die neuen Idiotae: Web 0.0’, *Sueddeutsche Online*, September 2007, www.sueddeutsche.de/computer/artikel/211/146869

emerge, related to their media structures? ⁴ Are they the products of 'media amateurs' ⁵ or do we have to find new specifications and descriptions for the producers? The definition of a 'media amateur' describes technically interested private individuals who acquire and develop technology before commercial use of the technology is even recognisable. Just as artists are developing their own techniques, according to Dieter Daniels, media amateurs are autodidacts who invent techniques, rather than just acquire knowledge about them (see for example the demo scene, the machinima, brickfilm producers as well as many areas of computer gaming in general ⁶). The media amateur directly intervenes in the production processes of the medium and does not just simply use the medium. What is fascinating is the media amateur's process of self education – not the result – and the direct impact on the internal structure and the control of the medium. ⁷ Media amateurs open a previously culturally unformed space of experience. This only partially applies to most of the YouTube clips in the realms of the visual arts; it is here most important to look at the visual content.

This article discusses all these concepts and introduces new descriptions for the different forms of production: the technically oriented media master, the do-it-yourselfer, the tinkerer, the amateur handicraftsman and the inventor. It outlines a basic research project on 'visual media culture' (a triangulation of research on media structure and iconography) of the presented online video platform. It is a product of the analysis of clips focusing on the media structure, analyzing the creative handling of images and the deviations and differences of pre-set media formats and stereotypes.

YouTube Basics

YouTube has been online since December 15th, 2005 and is owned by Google since 2006. The first video was uploaded December 22nd in 2005 and featured a cat called Pajamas. In the meantime, many other video hosting sites have emerged – Myspace, Google Video, revvr, MyVideo (Pro7, Sat 1), clipfish (RTL), VideoEgg, Sevenload (Burda) – which emulate the successful model. The platform is a typical occurrence of the second dialogic ⁸ era of the Internet, the so-called 'Web 2.0'. Here the users judge (through social networking and social bookmarking) the products of other participants by marking their favourites and writing comments. They respond to a video clip visually or provide a ranking.

There are different methods to search the content of YouTube. The most important one is searching by tags (keywords). Other criteria of choice: the 'Most Viewed' pages on the website show which clips were viewed by the most recipients (the same day, week, month, year,

4. See also Wolfgang Ernst, 'Plädoyer für eine Ästhetik der Datenbanken' (Lafitau, Humboldt, dBase). Forthcoming in: Wolfgang Schäffner and Irina Podgorny (eds) *Kolumbus der Datenräume*, forthcoming, 2008.

5. Dieter Daniels, *Kunst als Sendung*. München: Beck Verlag: 2002.

6. Ingo Linde, *Medienaneignung und Medienamateure am Beispiel der sogenannten Demoszene*, 2005. <http://www.uni-leipzig.de/~wehn/anima/theory/demoszene/aneignung/index.htm>

7. Dieter Daniels, *Kunst als Sendung*. München: Beck Verlag: 2002, p. 210.

8. Vilém Flusser, *Ins Universum der technischen Bilder*, Göttingen: European Photography, 1990. (3rd edition),

or in all time). 'Top Rated' are the clips valued most highly by the users, 'Most Discussed' are the clips with the most comments and, finally, 'Most Responded' shows the clips that got the most video responses.

Additionally, the following basic assumptions are essential for understanding the medium under discussion: there is no 'life of the other' represented on YouTube. The myth of 'authentic images' simply ignores the presence of a medium with its unique specifications for pre-formatting the content. Furthermore YouTube is no archive of the aesthetics of the trivial in the early 21st century. ⁹ It most definitely does *not* represent an image of an 'authentic' social 'reality'. YouTube is the prime example of the ingenious hybrid of foreign and 'self-owned' images. The very idea of one's own image is a construct of the social sciences: it does not exist. If there is such an entity it is the result of a conscious, artistically motivated act.

The misleading 'ideology of authenticity' as a cultural consensus is based on the poor quality of the recording tools with their low resolution, as well as the presentation in small windows on the computer screen, which conspire to create 'a look of everyday life'. This effect implicates the intriguing promise of authenticity based on the photo-realistic principle (cf. Richter's term, 'realistic styles'), which is still valid for the moving images of online video. But this discussion is of less relevance with regard to the unique art forms and techniques that are established by amateurs and professionals. Also people with no professional education in the field of art production are testing new forms in this laboratory for moving images, which they generate from materials of everyday media and pop culture. All producers always act within the frame of their aesthetic socialisation.

It has to be figured out if there is a new kind of creativity at work, and in what way it is new. It is of importance to differentiate between the 'artistic' acrobatics of the variété/circus and new art forms and their prototypes, even though contexts generally are afloat. Already established terms and definitions should be discussed and new categories attached, which describe this form of creativity within a new medium. Definitions, like 'Geniale Dilettanten' (amateur genius), prosumer, emancipated consumers or media amateur have too many negative connotations. In concentrating on the product and work, more differentiated terms must be found for the unique creative outputs. Possible suggestions for new terms might be 'art amateur' or perhaps 'media master', because the clip examples imply high media competence and artistic association with the medium and its possibilities, while still not being located within the field of accepted/ high arts. Furthermore the clips that appear notably artistic are often produced by 'young design professionals' who generate the so-called hybrid pop picture. The focus of this article is on the development of a method for the analysis of the visual output and the aesthetic quality of a media structure based young creativity.

9. Bernd Graff, 'Kamerafahrten durch die globale Privatsphäre', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, June 2006, <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/artikel/802/77725>

YouTube-Research: evaluation methods and clip categories

The examination of YouTube¹⁰ makes it necessary to sketch a method of evaluation and classification, which is adequate for this special social-aesthetic online phenomenon. Lacking interpretative neutral methods, a mimetic¹¹ form of scientific research is to be aspired towards, in which the examiners are adjusting to the field, and at the same time developing empirically founded knowledge on the specific cultural system. It is a challenge to obtain basic patterns of artistic representation, but they can be categorised with help of the current research project on YouTube and its derivation of categories which remain stable, even though content constantly changes. This opens up the possibility of refining a typology of representational patterns and conventions. For this goal a double approach seems to be promising: to proceed on the one hand by means of a representative evaluation, which gives an idea of the quantity of a certain type of video; and on the other hand on behalf of a qualitative evaluation by means of selected case studies, e.g. the concept of 'key-images' (in German 'Schüsselbilder') and 'relational image-clusters'.¹²

A degree-model, developed for the examination of the visual universe of Web 2.0, shows the state of the art in research in the following steps:

1. Denomination of the most important tags: it is to be noted, that this happens within the adaptation of the arbitrary classification of tags by other users (pictures should be found by other users).
2. Parallel evaluation of material across three search modalities: Firstly through one or several tags (several are more specific, but limit the number of results – some clips are not found). The automated search concentrates on the titles of the clips and the user-given tags. Secondly on a basis of random checks and within an associative selection or a mind map, e.g. terms, which lie in the associated focus; a form of search, which originates in the flow of surfing and researching YouTube, as an associative search of synonyms within the content of reference. This also involves registering the variations of the same user (as author/artist) or related videos (a connection automatically generated by software). And thirdly, through social bookmarking by way of looking at users' favourites, following users' recommendations and their discussions of videos. Here all videos on the topic must be reviewed with focus on the visual content. The same procedure is necessary for groups based around a specific topic, within these groups it is not possible to search with the help of tags.
3. Investigation of the tags on behalf of a selection by topic in the retrieved material.

10. As well as the photography community Flickr, see Richard, Grünwald and Ruhl. 'Me, Myself, I: Schönheit der Gewöhnlichen. Eine Studie zu den fluiden ikonischen Kommunikationswelten bei flickr.com' in Kaspar Maase (ed.), *Die Schönheiten des Populären. Zur Ästhetik der Massenkünste*, Frankfurt: 2008.

11. Amann and Hirschauer. 'Die Befremdung der eigenen Kultur. Ein Programm', in Hirschauer and Amann (eds) *Die Befremdung der eigenen Kultur. Zur ethnographischen Herausforderung soziologischer Empirie*, Frankfurt am Main: 1997, p.20.

12. The term 'relational image-clusters' was introduced by Richard and Zaremba, *Hülle und Container, Medizinische Weiblichkeitsbilder im Internet*, München: 2007.

The search with tags should lead, step by step, through condensation of the clip material to the specific case analysis.

4. Selecting the representative clips first according to the frequency of their occurrence and by viewing the content too, sorting them into groups. The selection and analysis of clips lead to the emergence of representative clusters.
5. Choice and creation of the key-images of the selected prototypical clips for the analysis.
6. The construction of a clip-typology based on imagery and the search for divergences from the aesthetic average/stereotypes of the platform, looking for a special artistic quality, taking into account the possibilities of the representation and structure of Web 2.0.
7. Creation of related image clusters following the analysis of the specific nature of images. The concluding statements about the basic patterns in the artistic representation are made at first according to the frequency of their occurrence and then in the next step by analyzing the clips in case studies.

Until now there has not been a lot of specific research on YouTube¹³. The analysis of the YouTube clips is now carried out within the scope of 'visual media culture', which acknowledges the specific quality of a 'shifting image' which creates image clusters and produces new relations and references between images permanently. The following clip categories, which were developed within the focus of the Frankfurt Visual Media Culture Research, grasp and extract the basic structures of the platform. The clip categories are fluent and to be classified into several levels; there are always connections between the categories. The superior category is 'response', a visual answer to a posted clip. Response is analogous to the 'cover version' synonymous concepts from other contexts as the 'cover version', a concept from the musical field with the purpose of a version coming close to the original; the 'remake', a concept related to movies, which already implies interpretations of the original; the concept of 'parody', which ridicules the original; the 'remix', a musical concept in which it is essential to transform the original, and the so-called 're-enactment', originally a concept of recreating a historical event or social environments. Within YouTube the concept is now used for, among others, re-enacting movies, game scenes or art performances without the claim of closeness to the original.

The 'media-remix clips' form a very big group, which operates with found footage, originating in the sectors of television, movies (a special form is the 5-second-movie, in which the movie is reduced to its very essentials or films like *Saw* are re-enacted with puppets in sixty seconds), games, cartoons, advertisement (viral marketing) and the huge sector of music videos. In this section the transformations of 'found footage' occupy an immense space and consist of the editing, rearrangement or fragmentation through personal selection of the media material; in addition written text is integrated or the sound is changed, e.g. by using different music, or combining the material with other found footage.

The biggest content category is occupied by the 'ego clips'. They excessively serve the narciss-

13. Note, however, (except see <http://creativitymachine.net/2007/06/15/YouTube-research-gazette/> and the European Videovortex conference under <http://networkcultures.org/wpmu/videovortex/>).

sistic self representation of the users. In this category a wide range from shy monologues to visual self-prostitution are to be found. Because of the diversity of the self-representational field, subcategories emerge like dancing, singing, karaoke, sports and vlogs (video-weblogs). These mainstream forms of self representation have their origin in television program formats reminiscent of casting shows, with limited ways of expressing oneself. This category is not about subversion, more about a nature of self advertisement and self design: following a dream of being famous and to be discovered by the community or even better for the movies or television¹⁴. YouTube shows many productions which were formerly made for parental eyes only: now the child sings and dances for a global audience.

'Fan clips' show the enthusiasm of users for a certain star or a band; they spread hymns and honor their idols (e.g. the band Tokio Hotel). The contrary sentiment is represented by 'hater clips' polemicising against a band (e.g. they express disgust towards singer Amy Winehouse or Tokio Hotel, especially with relation to their deviation of gender clichés) or of those who insult others on account of their video. Hate/diss/flamewar-clips are response clips that serve only to massively insult others.

The 'docuclip' or 'event clip' shows events as well as accidents out of the perspective of the eyewitness (for example footage of the sinking ferry off Santorin in 2007); therefore they also belong to the category of 'random clips'. Personal highlights, like concerts or festivals, also count as docuclips or event clips. 'Funclips' are of a more widespread category since they often show the misfortune of other people. In general a large number of clips are posted to make other users laugh. A special form is the so-called 'mockumentary' clip which appears to be of serious nature at first sight, but then displays itself as a parody. A subcategory of the fun clip is the 'tutorial clip' that is produced with the formality of school television, however, on account of the overdone seriousness, has a humorous effect.

Another section presents itself in the category of the 'experiment clip' or 'transform-clip', in which users show their personal unusual utilization or experiments with everyday objects. They alter things like laser pointers, combine Mentos and Diet Coke resulting in an explosion, show their hacks applied on an iPhone (jailbreaking) or demonstrate lockpicking skills; the last kind of clip is designated by users as a 'MacGyver-clip'. Here the whole range of harmless manipulation up to unlawful operations becomes visible, through which the users show that they are in control of their everyday objects.

'Skillclips' enable the users of the platforms to demonstrate individual abilities for which there is usually no audience or contest: Head-banging, human beat boxing and finger snipping like a virtuoso, every personal talent can be exposed here. Skillzclips are a very special form of the egoclip, because of the focus on self-representation. They however deserve their own category, because they show unusual talents which do not fit in the group of 'art clip' or 'artyclip'.

The category 'artyclip' contains videos that demonstrate special abilities of arts and crafts. It

includes the category 'art response', in which users transform the works of established artists of high art, e.g. Erwin Wurm's *One Minute Sculpture*. The arty/ artresponse categorization includes the recording of performances, in which case it belongs to the category 'mediaremix', films of an exhibition or the documentation of an artist's life and work or artistic works as 'found footage'.

The final and most important category of online video is designated 'art clips', in line with the topic of this article. These clips establish a new media-adequate form, which then could occasionally appear in the global context of art. A new creative appearance of art with limited circulation is the category of 'misheard lyrics', with its prototype the song 'Wishmaster' by Nightwish as the centre for response videos,¹⁵ Misheard lyrics are a 'deficiency' from everyday life, like misunderstanding lyrics in a foreign language, which then develops into a new art form. The misunderstood words appear in a typographic re-interpreted form and are brought together within visual representations in the shape of a simple collage. This category requires a profound sensibility for music, the sound of language and the ironic quality of images selected. Another new artistic form is the so-called 'shred' genre (e.g. Lischka 2008: in music videos a Finnish guitarist replaces the original audio track by badly played guitar-soli of famous guitarists, like Carlos Santana).

The next step in the analysis is to find out in which of the developed categories art is to be discovered. We suspect that videos with artistic aesthetics may be found in the following categories: mediaremix, fan clips, arty/artresponse and in ego clips.

Emergent art in web 2.0.

Firstly, the main tags, their synonyms and their occurrence (at the moment of analyzing process, date of login: 5/2008) are picked out and collected. The tag 'art' (947,000 search results) and the German tag for art 'Kunst' (15,800 search results) are used mainly. Looking at 'Kunst' first, often a direct connection to art is not given. There are band names containing the word Kunst (e.g. Markscheider Kunst) as well as titles from television series and sequels (e.g. the episode of *Sailor Moon*: 'Brotlose Kunst'). The term 'Kunst' appears in languages like Dutch and Swedish, making it harder to isolate the interesting clips. Altogether not many clips can be found that are directly derived from classical fine arts or put themselves in this tradition. If there is a direct relation to art, then it is in the form of a secondary presentation about art, such as television documentaries, or of the documentation of a performance or work ('arty clips' or 'artresponse clips'). The clip itself is not seen as a piece of art.

It can be concluded that searching for the tag 'Kunst', clips about art can be found, but no clips that define themselves as art or are artistic. The tag 'art' mostly brings up clips that deal with art, show art exhibitions, but are seldom art in the classical sense of fine arts. Street art can be found in various ways of presentation, e.g. showing the development of a graffiti in fast motion ('1 Week of Art Works'). Then there are a large group of clips concentrating on peripheral arts and craft phenomena with a highly entertaining factor just through the uniqueness of their production: e.g. plaster-painting, arty cookery, nail art, speed art, sand art (sand is

14. See Matthias Horx, 'Die Me-Volution', CICERO *Magazin für politische Kultur*, December 2007, <http://www.horx.com/Medien-Highlights.aspx>

15. The clip is available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gg5_mIQOsUQ

sprinkled on an overhead projector and a constantly changing picture is generated) and latte art (the milk foam on top of a coffee is used creatively). Another creative phenomenon is 'spit art' (the artist drips water out of his mouth on the street and creates a picture that way), as well the clip 'Bruce Lee – High Speed Painting' in which the painter dips his hands into paint to create the portrait of Bruce Lee, by hitting the canvas with the edge of his colored hands.

The 'search related to: art' button shows alternative tags given by the recipients to specify their supposed field of art: e.g. 'spray art' or 'Japanese art'. All these categories are to file under 'arty clip' or 'skillz clip'. Like in all these YouTube contextual categories, clips from bands that have the word 'art' in their name or in a song title can be found as well.

Next, the contextualization of the clips into media categories is necessary, focusing on the most visible sorts of clips within the tags 'Kunst' and 'art'. Seventy per cent of the found material can be described as self made and self defined forms of art. Twenty-five per cent are connected to everyday media culture, like music videos, computer games. Maybe five per cent of clips present new forms of online video art. It is also interesting that none of the categories under which the clips on YouTube are filed contains the term 'art'. Therefore the category 'Film & Animation' is mostly chosen to categorise the clip (however, terms such as 'Comedy' or 'Music' also appear).

New forms of artistic expression on YouTube can definitely not be found through tags, so another way of locating the clips to get the desired results has to be figured out. The varieties of artistic production on YouTube are not yet limited here by the 'system of art', or by the commercially orientated art market. Many alternative forms are visible on YouTube and they are potentially easier accessible through the Internet without entering the bourgeois realm of museums and art galleries. Most of the artistic manifestations happen here outside the system of art and are often marginal forms of art, like 'street art' (even though the term 'street art' is now a common phenomenon within the art scene, e.g. looking at the success of the artist Banksy). Here also the rehabilitation of marginalised (maybe so-called folk?) art is put in the foreground. Most of the clips are not relatable to the common concept of fine arts. Forgotten forms of media art get contemporary refreshment in the new clip categories, like stop motion and animation. In YouTube art happens without the burden of academic education and the judgment of professional art critiques of media/art history that work hand in hand in the art market system. YouTube clips do not need museums and galleries: they simply emerge through creative acts in a flow of communication that is one of the messages out of this online video universe.

Online video: media art masters?

In the following discussion, we look at the context of production, meaning the embedding of clips in the media system, which exists parallel to the operating system of art. Firstly, Web 2.0 is a natural host for this kind of art. The contemporary artistic forms differ strongly from artistic initiatives of Net art in the middle of the 1990s. For instance the 'P2P Net Art Project' only had an internal vector of distribution. Their art films spread via file sharing and were then modified. The artist gives the first impulse and the modified art circulates within the defined network. The source material is destroyed. All these conditions are described artistically, and are not

comparable to practices of everyday file sharing of normal users. The artistic concept of the project 'P2P Art – The Aesthetics of Ephemerality' defines the development of the action. Limiting conditions are artificially set up, they do not exist that way by virtue of the medium itself.

Keeping in mind the net art debate of the mid-nineties, the following questions can be asked: Can the creative and artistic clips on YouTube be described as a 'net art 2.0' that works within the given structures of the Net? Or is it art on the Internet, having art as content? Both forms can be found on YouTube. For art within the net the clip-category that fits here perfectly is the 'art clip'; for the second one, art on the Net, the category 'arty clip' or 'artresponse clip' is the suitable one.

Secondly, the term 'media-amateur' should be reconsidered for the producers of this kind of online video art, and maybe paraphrased into 'media-master' (in the sense of master craftsman): the media-master is characterised through technical expertise and perfection, and has special skills relating to the medium and its structure. Artistic masterpieces are created, which may count as media design or applied arts. Seen from the point of view of the art system of fine arts, the amateur normally represents the infantile, naïve and unreflected, almost too perfect imagery, that is generated through visual stereotypes or motifs of popular culture. Seen from the system of fine arts, the amateurish visual mostly refers to certain ways of representation that are not part of classical set of the arts. Parallels to terms like 'proam' and 'prosumer' can be seen: new hybrid forms of production and reception – a 'procipient' may emerge. Most YouTube-uploaders do not intend to establish or implement a new art form or aesthetic. YouTube-artists are not generated by the art market, but they develop their ideas within the community. Clips of typical media-amateurs mostly document their own abilities, here classified as 'skillzclip' (like the dance phenomenon 'jumpstyle'). The skills presented are enjoyed by the producers and their friends in the act of narcissistic mirroring the ego.

Global communities use YouTube for communication – the clips serve as a fluid communication-lubricant. The system of art is not of importance to them. These new forms are often commercially used (the ultimate owner of the rights is Google!) mostly by the other side of 'art professionals': applied arts, design and advertising. The communication with the help of these moving images does not necessarily generate art – just as knowledge is not necessarily created on Wikipedia. Often contributions lead to phenomena described as 'knowledge of opinions' or 'search-engine-knowledge'. Every issue produces its own importance. Sometimes even 'irresponsible' knowledge¹⁶ is generated, especially when free information prevails over quality. Accordingly, maybe there is also an 'art of opinions' (only through the quantity of rating) and 'search-engine-art': the café latte art could be one example.

Positively interpreted, YouTube is first of all characterised by simultaneous, instant production and visual reactions in real-time and the resources for the user's own creative outputs. A clip characterised as artistic will not necessarily be successful on the art market or create a new category of art within this context (like machinima), but potentially it could arrive on

16. Bernd Graff, 'Die neuen Idiotae: Web 0.0'.

the market of moving images. Within the context of media art festivals it could be discovered, that the artists themselves use YouTube clips like a VJ (e.g. the artist Björn Melhus for the European Media Art Festival in Osnabrück in 2007). New forms of visual communication are not only generated, but also new forms of presentation as well.

Also, YouTube presents itself as a forum for all forms of re-enactment and accommodates bodydoubles of almost all imaginable stars. There are also revivals of discarded and partly forgotten art forms, like the photo film, as well as revivals of analogue techniques like stop motion or low-tech art-forms like super 8mm with slomo-effects. Besides that the users of YouTube are very up to date with their forms of production, because on a very small scale they also work with hybrid forms of moving images, which appear to have been produced for contemporary cinema.

In what way may the modality of this media based image-production be describable with respect for the categories? Apart from the function of self representation, it always contributes to the communication of the individual within its community. The moving images are the profound base of 'social software' and serve interaction and the sharing of data with other users. The transfer of categories of participation by H.D. Huber from Net art to YouTube shows the participatory character of the platform. It opens up possibilities for users to shape the appearance of a particular project via download, editing, and through inserting text, pictures, audio or found footage. Relating to the Web 2.0 this means that the clips, although as raw material they may be reactive, the user just clicks to play them, which does not result in them being necessarily interactive. But they function as an active inspiration for users to produce their own responses and participate. The result is a comprehensive non-hierarchic rhizomatic online video project (such as is the case with the misheard lyrics project, for which the core and starting point is Nightwish's 'Wishmaster'), which is cross-linked on different levels and changes constantly. An associative online video map emerges. The main focus has moved from the term of interaction to communication and creative participation by the means of moving images in social networks.

Most YouTube users stay within the given media structures. They do not program, yet still new aesthetics emerge and what is most important the users act one hundred percent media literate! YouTube clips would never be a substitution or be an exchange for classic media art, but they are a supplement, a marginal but important fresh addition and revitalisation of art, in parallel to the Web 2.0 blogs' supplementation of journalism. The thus far invisible common creative practices – a lot of them may have existed before – are becoming more visible and open up the possibility of emerging new art forms. A media adequate 'grassroot art' emerges, which affiliates Ullrich's approach¹⁷ of a largely entertaining art, and transforms it into 'l'art pour l'ego et les amis'.

17. Wolfgang Ullrich, *Was war Kunst? Biografien eines Begriffs*, Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 2005.

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FLAGGING OR FAGGING (SELF-)CENSORSHIP OF GAY CONTENT ON YOUTUBE

MINKE KAMPMAN

Introduction

This article is a critical case study about the part of the YouTube community that misuses the flagging system to get videos and other users censored or banned because of gay content. ‘Censorship is the suppression of speech or deletion of communicative material which may be considered objectionable, harmful or sensitive, as determined by a censor.’¹ Because the censor in this case is (part of) the community that is being censored, you could speak of it as self-censorship.

After explaining how the flagging system works, how it got introduced and YouTube’s stand-point towards misuse, the article will elaborate on how this system is misused towards the LGBT² community. This will be followed by a discussion of their strategies and reactions towards this phenomenon, ending with a conclusion about the YouTube flagging system.

Introducing Video Flagging on YouTube

YouTube³ is an online platform where anyone can post videos. The feature of moderating video content by the use of video flagging was announced on August 11th, 2005⁴ on the company’s blog. Moderating other users is a feature that was announced in a blogpost⁵ on December 14th, 2005 where YouTube introduced the ability to block/report other users.

Video Flagging

Video flagging is one of the options given to users to react and respond to any video on YouTube. The other possibilities are: share it, favorite it, add to your playlist, comment on it either in text or with a video response, and rate it. None of these options, with the exception of ‘flagging’ and ‘commenting’, are moderated by the YouTube staff. In the beginning there were five reasons the user was asked to choose from when flagging a video. More than two years later⁶, these were changed into six categories (adding ‘spam’), containing 17 different

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1. ‘Censorship.’ Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. Retrieved on May 18th, 2008. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Censorship>
 2. LGBT stands for ‘Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender/Transsexual people’.
 3. YouTube was founded in February, 2005. It’s a subsidiary of Google, Inc. since November 2006. YouTube Company History, <http://www.youtube.com/t/about>
 4. YouTube Blog. Posted on Aug 11, 2005. <http://www.youtube.com/blog?entry=XgM4c0oGu94>
 5. YouTube Blog. Posted on 15, 2005. <http://www.youtube.com/blog?entry=MykmTeTiooA>
 6. YouTube Blog. ‘Improvements to Video Flagging System’ Nov 6, 2007. <http://www.youtube.com/blog?entry=vQjIMRCXDv4>

reasons.⁷ After a video has been flagged, it will be reviewed by the YouTube staff or, as they say on their blog: 'We will aggressively monitor these submissions and respond as quickly as we can'.⁸ Two blogposts^{9 10} in October address and explain how the flagging system works.

How Flagging Works

(...) A video gets 'flagged' by a user clicking on the 'flag as inappropriate' [this later changed into 'flag'] link located below each video. Once a video is flagged, it is sent into a queue for our customer support team to review. Videos are NEVER automatically removed simply because they've been flagged. Every single flagged video is reviewed by someone at YouTube who then determines if the video contains material that is against our terms of use. You may have noticed that sometimes you're asked to login or register to verify your age because the video you're attempting to view may contain content that is inappropriate for some users. Sometimes flagged videos that we review do abide by our terms of use, but are not quite *appropriate* for all YouTube users. This could be due to a number of things - profanity, violence, adult content etc. Although they still abide by our terms of use, *you can think of these videos as 'R' rated.*

There are thousands of videos that are flagged for review every single day, and since we're still a small company with an even smaller team of people reviewing videos *we do admittedly make mistakes at times.* Occasionally a video gets flagged and we accidentally take it down, or mark it as inappropriate. We're doing everything we can to diminish that margin of error but *we would be lying if we said it's a 100% fail proof system.* - YouTube blog (emphasis mine)¹¹

The fact that it is not an automated process is again mentioned on November 6th, 2007. When the YouTube staff write about the improvements they have made in the flagging system to make 'the video flagging system consistent, fair and less mysterious'¹² they state: 'When

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7. 'This Video is Inappropriate
Please select the category that most closely reflects your concern about the video, so that we can review it and determine whether it violates our Community Guidelines or isn't appropriate for all viewers. Abusing this feature is also a violation of the Community Guidelines, so don't do it.'
Select a Reason: Sexual Content ('graphic sexual content', 'nudity', 'suggestive, but without nudity' or 'other sexual content'), Violent or Repulsive Content ('adults fighting', 'physical attack', 'minors fighting', 'animal abuse' or 'shocking or disgusting content'), Hateful or Abusive Content ('promotes hatred or violence' or 'bullying'), Harmful Dangerous Acts ('drug abuse', 'abuse of fire or explosives' or 'other dangerous acts'), Infringes My Rights ('infringes my copyright' or 'infringes my privacy') or Spam.
 8. YouTube Blog, 11 August, 2005, <http://www.youtube.com/blog?entry=XgM4c0oGu94>.
 9. YouTube Blog, 'How Flagging Works', 8 October, 2006, <http://www.youtube.com/blog?entry=19wva-QR0al>
 10. YouTube Blog, 'Greetings from the YouTube SQUAD' 19 October, 2006, <http://www.youtube.com/blog?entry=XP6y1TfR1-w>
 11. (see footnote 9) Parts of the citation have been bold by the author of this article. This goes for all the following citations of the YouTube blog as well.
 12. YouTube Blog, 'Improvements to Video Flagging System', 6 Nov, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/blog?entry=vQjIMRCXDv4>

users flag a video, it is reviewed by *real-life humans* at YouTube who check to see if the video should be removed, age-restricted or left alone'.¹³

YouTube's standpoint towards misuse

On June 24th, 2006 YouTube commented on a bug in their comment code that was being exploited by several users. Maryrose of The YouTube Team explains the situation, apologises, addresses the users in question and explains a part of the YouTube philosophy:

(...) To all of our users who have been abusing comments with flagrant spamming, hate speech and other malicious activities – this behavior will simply not be tolerated on our site. If you engage in such activity be forewarned *your account will be deleted and you will be permanently banned without warning.*

YouTube is a place for everyone to express themselves. It is meant to be a creative, entertaining and *democratic environment.* Let's not allow a few bad apples spoil the bunch.¹⁴

Maryrose and Mia of the YouTube staff join together on October 19th with a blogpost directed at the YouTube community in which they address the subject of discrimination towards 'sexual orientation or weight or looks or skin color'¹⁵ in comments, without using the word 'discrimination' specifically. YouTube makes it quite clear on their blog, they wish to be a democratic environment where everyone is accepted. Recently however they've softened up by making changes in their policy enforcement. As of April 16, 2008 they're working with 'strikes that expire'¹⁶ and 'muting accounts'¹⁷ instead of banning users permanently and deleting accounts.

F(l)agging gay content on YouTube

Thousands of videos are flagged each day, and though we don't break down specific metrics regarding what content is flagged, the assumption that 'LGBT content is routinely subject to flagging by users, while similar content depicting straight characters/individuals does not get flagged,' seems anecdotal and is not supported by what we observe on the site. YouTube is, and always has been, a forum for free expression. To be clear, our community is made up of millions of people across the world and is diverse racially, ethnically, politically, religiously as well as in terms of sexual orientation.¹⁸

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13. Ibid.
 14. YouTube Blog, 'Comments Bug', 24 June, 2006, <http://www.youtube.com/blog?entry=UR1y8kP-vh0>
 15. YouTube Blog, 'Please Be Decent and Kind', 19 October, 2006, <http://www.youtube.com/blog?entry=e-Fk7vMPqLE>
 16. YouTube Blog, 'YouTube Policy Enforcement Changes' 17 April, 2008, <http://www.youtube.com/blog?entry=cBWbe7SwrV8>
 17. Ibid.
 18. Ellen Seidler, 'Homophobic Flagging of Lesbian Content on YouTube Continues', (8 June, 2007), <http://www.afterellen.com/node/4303>

This written response from YouTube's marketing manager, Jenny Nielson, to AfterEllen.com shows that they actually downplay the issue of 'fagging'. The term 'fagging' in this context, is used by the user 'Grimace' who posted a video called 'Flagged or Fagged?'¹⁹ on January 25, 2007. In his video Grimace and CrazyStacey present a few videoclips from YouTube, while asking the question whether these videos were 'fairly flagged or unfairly fagged'. Grimace himself explains the term 'fagged' as: 'flagged on the basis of homosexual content'. This definition is used with the further use of the term 'fagging' in this article. An ironic sidenote is that 'flagging' has a wholly different meaning²⁰ within the LGBT community, where 'flagging' means displaying a coloured handkerchief from your pocket. And the different ways of doing this indicates that you're gay as well as what's your type.

After a video has been f(l)agged and the YouTube staff agrees with you, the video will get deleted or marked as 'inappropriate' and/or the user account will be deleted.²¹ It's quite debatable²² when a video is marked 'inappropriate' based on gay content, and can therefore be considered as 'R' rated²³. But as soon as a video or an account gets deleted because it has been unrightfully flagged for containing gay content without nudity or sexual content, flagging stops being a tool for moderating content and starts being a tool for censorship. And because it is the community that censors itself, in a way this is self-censorship. Even though it's YouTube that has the last hand in the deletion process, it's the flaggers that decide which videos are up for deletion. Although this article only handles flagging on gay content, more types of content are being unrightfully flagged.²⁴

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19. 'Grimace', Youtube.com 'Fagged or Flagged?', 25 January, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wdWVAKhCOec>
20. Wikipedia, 'Handkerchief Code', http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Handkerchief_code
21. 'Account Termination Policy'
 A. YouTube will terminate a User's access to its Website if, under appropriate circumstances, they are determined to be a repeat infringer.
 B. YouTube reserves the right to decide whether Content or a User Submission is appropriate and complies with these Terms of Service for violations other than copyright infringement, such as, but not limited to, pornography, obscene or defamatory material, or excessive length. YouTube may remove such User Submissions and/or terminate a User's access for uploading such material in violation of these Terms of Service at any time, without prior notice and at its sole discretion.'
 Accessed on May 27, 2008. <http://www.youtube.com/t/terms>
22. In the same article on AfterEllen.com (see footnote 16), they've 'requested clarification as to what specific criteria employees use to determine whether a flagged video contains 'inappropriate content'. YouTube did not respond'.
23. This is the widely accepted film rating system (by the MPAA) in the US, which has been accused of having a double standard towards films with LGBT content in the documentary 'This Film Is Not Yet Rated' (Kirby Dick, 2006).
24. Other types of content (with the names of users reacting to this) that are frequently unrightfully flagged: anti-Scientology (user: AtheneWins, 'YouTube is blocking nearly all anti-Scientology content' <http://ie.youtube.com/watch?v=NmgQHYChrPw>), anti-Islam (suspended accounts: NickGisburne and NickGisburne2000, documentation of deletion: <http://www.gisburne.com/ngban2.php> and there is a whole discussion within the YT community about the suspension of 'Malasonja1') and racist flagging (user: TonyaTko, 'Racist Flagging on YouTube? Flagging me Bcz I'm BLACK!?' <http://ie.youtube.com/watch?v=QZL2N1nbayw>).

It seems that something really provoked the LGBT community in this year. For not only was 2007 the year Grimace posted his video about 'fagging', but many other articles and videos dealing with 'fagging' on YouTube were mostly written and posted in this year. The video that caused a great upheaval about homophobia in the LGBT community on YouTube, was part of an ad campaign of Snickers (called 'Snickers Satisfies') that was aired during the Superbowl in 2007. The accompanying contest, using YouTube as a platform, asked people to vote for 'the most satisfying ending', posting the alternative endings on their own website²⁵. In the ad two guys accidentally kiss after which they try to prove how manly they are by ripping hair out of their chest. The website also displayed the reactions of five NFL players to the several versions of the ad. 'The players' reactions range from general amusement (...) to non-verbal disgust (...) to overt expressions of prejudice (...)'.²⁶ It was the endings together with the players' reactions that provoked gay rights organisations (a.o. GLAAD) to take a stand. Although the original advertisement is still online on YouTube²⁷, the site has been taken down and the players' reactions²⁸ show up on YouTube under the message: 'This video is no longer available due to a copyright claim by Mars, Inc.'

The 'Snickers' outrage was followed up by a smaller discussion in August 2007 in response to the flagging of a videoposting²⁹ of the first teenage gay kiss during American daytime television, between Luke and Noah from *As The World Turns*³⁰. It was claimed to be 'fagged'³¹ and later taken down in request by Viacom due to copyright infringement. The video has been mirrored (that is, copied and posted by other users, while the original video is still online) numerous times since then. Although YouTube responded in its own way by improving their flagging system in November, 2007,³² the main issue as yet remains unresolved.

Strategies

There are different ways in which the LGBT community and affiliates react to 'fagging'. One way is creating awareness by posting videos and writing articles and blogposts about the subject. But other interesting approaches deal with it by using the system.

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25. Site is no longer available. <http://www.snickerssatisfies.com>
26. The Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation 'GLAAD, Matthew Shepard Foundation Condemn Anti-Gay SNICKERS® Campaign' Press Release, 5 February, 2007, http://www.glaad.org/media/release_detail.php?id=3970. The players' names are edited out of the quotation.
27. YouTube.com 'Snickers Super Bowl Ad - Vote!' Posted by SnickersSuperBowl on Feb 2, 2007. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JHkoZ7ngAMO>
28. Reaction of the Bears, <http://youtube.com/watch?v=rPEw0N9ORVI>. Reaction of the Colts, <http://youtube.com/watch?v=WOSlesmeMMQ>
29. 'This video is no longer available due to a copyright claim by Viacom International Inc', <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hfxu6fk26ng>
30. Wikipedia, Luke Snyder and Noah Mayer, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luke_Snyder_and_Noah_Mayer
31. AfterEllen.com, 'YouTube supports Bigotry', <http://www.afterelton.com/node/16064>
32. YouTube Blog, 'Improvements to Video Flagging System', 6 November, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/blog?entry=vQjIMRCXDv4>

Re-posting videos: The paradox in starting a new account is that it's not only done by the so-called 'haters', but also by the users whom account has been 'fagged'. They do this in a way so that their audience can trace them back: for example, adding something to their already established username. So the user 'cha970' turned into 'cha9701' and is currently available under 'cha9704'³³. Her whole account exists of posting and re-posting episodes of *The L-Word*, a TV-series with lesbians in the lead roles. And as soon as her account is about to be deleted, she warns her subscribers by the means of a video in which she informs them that her account will be deleted and what her new account name will be. 'Luvcats4's account has been suspended, while 'luvcats4again' contains solely lesbian themed videoclips. Amongst which a video called 'This Video May Not Be Suitable for Minors YT Protest'³⁴ with this text on the side:

Every time you look around you see the words, 'This video may not be suitable for minors' at the top of the screen. What bothers me is that a majority of these videos are either gay or lesbian and are quite tame in their content. To all you flaggers out there, come into the 21st Century. Don't let homophobia rule YouTube.

Sometimes it isn't the account that has been deleted, but just videos. Also in these cases this strategy is applied as well. For example, 'ChrisCrocker' reposts all his deleted videos under 'ChrisCrockerDeleted'. Renaming accounts can also be done in advance of deletion in the knowledge that not all videos are gone when the account has been deleted. The user 'mightyatomant' also has an account under the name 'mightyatomantagain'. Although she refers to the other on both sites and it's quite clearly a way of categorising her own content, it's striking to see the different use in naming and tags.

Hiding: Mightyatomant's account is used to post clips from *The L-Word* (written out full in the title) and *Queer as Folk* (abbreviated as 'QAF'), while the 'mightyatomantagain' account is used to post lesbian themed movies, from which the titles are all abbreviated except for every first clip of a movie³⁵. This could be laziness of the user due to the fact she had to make an average of ten postings per movie. But the specific use of tags stands out, for she tags a lot of movies with just the tag 'movie', while her first account has an average seven tags per videoclip. Such a tag in combination with an abbreviated title makes it hard for gay haters (also called 'gay bashers') to find the movie in order to flag it. Mightyatomantagain doesn't do this consistently enough for it to be a strategy. She also sometimes uses just the tag 'lesbian', which is also notoriously used to attract users to porn videos. But the activity of specific tagging is seen elsewhere also. Previously mentioned user 'cha9704' avoids using the tag 'lesbian' and with her history of multiple suspensions, being suspended at least four

33. <http://www.youtube.com/user/cha9704>

34. luvcats4again, YouTube.com, 'This Video May Not Be Suitable for Minors YT Protest', 11 February, 2008, <http://youtube.com/watch?v=Yjx5T2T4tiE>

35. A movie can never be posted as a whole, because of YouTube's 10 minute limit to every video posting by a non-premium account to prevent copyrighted material. YouTube Blog 'Your 15 Minutes of Fame... ummm... Make that 10 Minutes or Less' March 26, 2006. http://www.youtube.com/blog?entry=oorjVv_HDVs

times and re-posting at least 74 videoclips every time, it seems she knows what 'aggravates' gay haters and/or allows the YouTube staff to suspend her.

The best example of hiding is enacted by the user account 'mgsg07' (G@B), for she only allows other users to see her playlists after they've become friends with her on YouTube. Consequently her channel contains a mere 40 lesbian themed videos for everyone to see, while her playlists contains 287 videos which can only be viewed by friends and don't show up in search results. G@B also she quite consistently tags her movies with just the tag 'Movie', with exception of music videos. She shows luvcats4again's YT protest video on her channel, which indicates that she's aware of (and active in) the 'fagging' discussion.

Challenging: An interesting, however non-related, trend has sprung up amongst the YouTube community to make videos by the name 'This Video Will Be Flagged.' The trend goes under the name 'YouTube poop', these clips consist of repeated sequences of mostly cartoons, from which the editor has taken a few frames and repeated it. Resulting in videos where words like 'fuck' and 'sex' are endlessly repeated. In the text column they challenge the 'flaggers' to flag the video, often referring to them as 'flaggots' or 'fl@ggots'.

A related trend is to insert 'Flag This' in the video title, or even 'Flag this, YouTube!' This seems to be a direct critique against flaggers, the flagging system and YouTube itself. It must be added that not all users do this to criticise the system.

Reacting: Another strategy against 'fagging' is addressing the issue directly, like Grimace has done, or posting videos about 'Gay Hate' on YouTube in general, without talking about the flagging system. As did the previously mentioned ChrisCrocker with 'Chris Crocker - Gay HATE on Youtube!'³⁶, in which he talks about hate speech, safety and the lack of media attention to this subject. With the exception of an article in the Advocate called 'Homophobicosphere'³⁷, of which he posted the URL next to the video. More users address the issue of 'fagging' and gay hate on YouTube in their videopostings³⁸. But, as many of them claim, the issue should receive more media attention and be taken more seriously. Users attempt to raise the profile of these matters by joining the discussion, starting a platform and/or openly blogging about the subject matter – just as YouTube does with other subjects like terrorism³⁹, American politics⁴⁰ and wars (eg. Iraq, Myanmar and Dafur).

36. Chris Crocker, 'Chris Crocker - Gay HATE on YouTube!', 8 February, 2008, <http://ie.youtube.com/watch?v=Yd10e1LELcc>

37. Will Doig, 'Homophobicosphere', by Will Doig, Advocate.com, Issue 1002, 26 February, 2008, http://www.advocate.com/issue_story_ektid51690.asp

38. The author of this article has collected and is collecting these videos under the account: global-FREAK. <http://www.youtube.com/user/globalFREAK>

39. YouTube Blog. 'Dialogue with Sen. Lieberman on terrorism videos' May 19, 2008. <http://www.youtube.com/blog?entry=MuaJbJV4Qkg>

40. YouChoose '08 platform <http://www.youtube.com/youchoose>

3. Conclusion

The way the flagging system works now resembles a governmental democracy in which YouTube forms the government and flagging videos are our everyday miniature referenda. It's nowhere near the way it could work, an open democracy where the users decide for themselves what they want to see and what not. YouTube is still in denial of the workings and accuracy of the flagging system and tells it as if it's a success story:

(...) hundreds of thousands of videos are uploaded to YouTube every day. Because it is not possible to pre-screen this much content, we have developed an innovative and reliable community policing system that involves our users in helping us enforce YouTube's standards. Millions of users report potential violations of our Community Guidelines by selecting the 'Flag' link while watching videos.⁴¹

But if you've read this piece thoroughly, it is evident that they're not able to pre-screen 'thousands' of videos. But they are able to review/moderate those 'millions' of reported potential violations. In other words, they are actually openly admitting here that their flagging system is flawed.

Or did I miss something here? Either that or they did automate the reviewing process in some way, instead of having it all done by 'real-life humans'. Or could it be that flagged videos aren't reviewed at all by humans and the videos are suspended when they simply got flagged often enough – making the moderating part of the flagging system a numerical phase instead of a human one? And the mistakes it makes are excused as human mistakes. Which they are in a way, because it has all been flagged by human beings. If this were true, it really is 'an innovative and reliable community policing system that involves our users in helping us enforce YouTube's standards'.

41. YouTube Blog. 'Dialogue with Sen. Lieberman on terrorism videos' (See footnote 39).

VERNACULAR VIDEO

TOM SHERMAN

Video as a technology is a little over forty years old. It is an offshoot of television, developed in the 1930s and a technology that has been in our homes for sixty years. Television began as a centralised, one-to-many broadcast medium. Television's centrality was splintered as cable and satellite distribution systems and vertical, specialised programming sources fragmented television's audience. As video technology spun off from television, the mission was clearly one of complete decentralisation. Forty years later, video technology is everywhere. Video is now a medium unto itself, a completely decentralised digital, electronic audio-visual technology of tremendous utility and power. Video gear is portable, increasingly impressive in its performance, and it still packs the wallop of instant replay. As Marshall McLuhan said, the instant replay was the greatest invention of the twentieth century.

Video in 2008 is not the exclusive medium of technicians or specialists or journalists or artists – it is the people's medium. The potential of video as a decentralised communications tool for the masses has been realised, and the twenty-first century will be remembered as the video age. Surveillance and counter-surveillance aside, video is the vernacular form of the era – it is the common and everyday way that people communicate. Video is the way people place themselves at events and describe what happened. In existential terms, video has become every person's POV (point of view). It is an instrument for framing existence and identity.

There are currently camcorders in twenty per cent of households in North America. As digital still cameras and camera-phones are engineered to shoot better video, video will become completely ubiquitous. People have stories to tell, and images and sounds to capture in video. Television journalism is far too narrow in its perspective. We desperately need more POVs. Webcams and videophones, video-blogs (vlogs) and video-podcasting will fuel a twenty-first-century tidal wave of vernacular video.

What Are the Current Characteristics of Vernacular Video?

Displayed recordings will continue to diminish in duration, as television time, compressed by the demands of advertising, has socially engineered shorter and shorter attention spans. Videophone transmissions, initially limited by bandwidth, will radically shorten video clips. The use of canned music will prevail. Look at advertising. Short, efficient messages, post-conceptual campaigns, are sold on the back of hit music. Recombinant work will be more and more common. Sampling and the repeat structures of pop music will be emulated in the repetitive 'deconstruction' of popular culture. Collage, montage and the quick-and-dirty efficiency of recombinant forms are driven by the romantic, Robin Hood-like efforts of the copyleft movement. Real-time, on-the-fly voiceovers will replace scripted narratives. Personal, on-site journalism and video diaries will proliferate. On-screen text will be visually dynamic, but semantically crude. Language will be altered quickly through misuse and slip-

page. People will say things like 'I work in several mediums [sic].' 'Media' is plural. 'Medium' is singular. What's next: 'I am a multi-mediums artist'? Will someone introduce spell-check to video text generators? Crude animation will be mixed with crude behaviour. Slick animation takes time and money. Crude is cool, as opposed to slick. Slow motion and accelerated image streams will be overused, ironically breaking the real-time-and-space edge of straight, unaltered video. Digital effects will be used to glue disconnected scenes together; paint programs and negative filters will be used to denote psychological terrain. Notions of the sub- or unconscious will be objectified and obscured as 'quick and dirty' surrealism dominates the 'creative use' of video. Travelogues will prosper, as road 'films' and video tourism proliferate. Have palm-corder will travel. Extreme sports, sex, self-mutilation and drug overdoses will mix with disaster culture; terrorist attacks, plane crashes, hurricanes and tornadoes will be translated into mediated horror through vernacular video.

From Avant-Garde to Rear Guard

Meanwhile, in the face of the phenomena of vernacular video, institutionally sanctioned video art necessarily attaches itself even more firmly to traditional visual-art media and cinematic history. Video art distinguishes itself from the broader media culture by its predictable associations with visual-art history (sculpture, painting, photography) and cinematic history (slo-mo distortions of cinematic classics, endless homages to Eisenstein and Brakhage, etc.).

Video art continues to turn its back on its potential as a communications medium, ignoring its cybernetic strengths (video alters behaviour and steers social movement through feedback). Video artists, seeking institutional support and professional status, will continue to be retrospective and conservative. Video installations provide museums with the window-dressing of contemporary media art. Video art that emulates the strategies of traditional media, video sculpture and installations or video painting reinforces the value of an institution's collection, its material manifestation of history. Video art as limited edition or unique physical object does not challenge the museum's *raison d'être*. Video artists content with making video a physical object are operating as a rear guard, as a force protecting the museum from claims of total irrelevance. In an information age, where value is determined by immaterial forces, the speed-of-light movement of data, information and knowledge, fetishising material objects is an anachronistic exercise. Of course, it is not surprising that museum audiences find the material objectification of video at trade-show scale impressive on a sensual level.

As vernacular video culture spins toward disaster and chaos, artists working with video will have to choose between the safe harbour of the museum and gallery, or become storm chasers. If artists choose to chase the energy and relative chaos and death wish of vernacular video, there will be challenges and high degrees of risk.

Aesthetics Will Continue to Separate Artists from the Public at Large

If artists choose to embrace video culture in the wilds (on the street or on-line) where vernacular video is burgeoning in a massive storm of quickly evolving short message forms, they will face the same problems that artists always face. How will they describe the world they see, and if they are disgusted by what they see, how will they compose a new world? And then how will they find an audience for their work? The advantages for artists showing in museums

and galleries are simple. The art audience knows it is going to see art when it visits a museum or gallery. Art audiences bring their education and literacy to these art institutions. But art audiences have narrow expectations. They seek material sensuality packaged as refined objects attached to the history of art. When artists present art in a public space dominated by vernacular use, video messages by all kinds of people with different kinds of voices and goals, aesthetic decisions are perhaps even more important, and even more complex, than when art is being crafted to be experienced in an art museum.

Aesthetics are a branch of philosophy dealing with the nature of beauty. For the purpose of this text, aesthetics are simply an internal logic or set of rules for making art. This logic and its rules are used to determine the balance between form and content. As a general rule, the vernacular use of a medium pushes content over form. If a message is going to have any weight in a chaotic environment – where notions of beauty are perhaps secondary to impact and effectiveness – then content becomes very important. Does the author of the message have anything to show or say?

Vernacular video exhibits its own consistencies of form. As previously elaborated, the people's video is influenced by advertising, shorter and shorter attention spans, the excessive use of digital effects, the seductiveness of slo-mo and accelerated image streams, a fascination with crude animation and crude behaviour, quick-and-dirty voice-overs and bold graphics that highlight a declining appreciation of written language. To characterise the formal 'aesthetics' of vernacular video, it might be better to speak of anesthetics. The term anesthetic is an antonym of aesthetic. An anesthetic is without aesthetic awareness. An anesthetic numbs or subdues perceptions. Vernacular video culture, although vital, will function largely anesthetically.

The challenge for artists working outside the comfort zone of museums and galleries will be to find and hold onto an audience, and to attain professional status as an individual in a collective, pro-am (professional amateur) environment. Let's face it, for every artist that makes the choice to take his or her chances in the domain of vernacular video, there are thousands of serious, interesting artists who find themselves locked out of art institutions by curators that necessarily limit the membership of the master class. Value in the museum is determined by exclusivity. With this harsh reality spelled out, there should be no doubt about where the action is and where innovation will occur.

The technology of video is now as common as a pencil for the middle classes. People who never even considered working seriously in video find themselves with digital camcorders and non-linear video-editing software on their personal computers. They can set up their own 'television stations' with video streaming via the Web without much trouble. The revolution in video-display technologies is creating massive, under-utilised screen space and time, as virtually all architecture and surfaces become potential screens. Videophones will expand video's ubiquity exponentially. These video tools are incredibly powerful and are nowhere near their zenith. If one wishes to be part of the twenty-first-century, media-saturated world and wants to communicate effectively with others or express one's position on current affairs in considerable detail, with which technology would one choose to do so, digital video or a pencil?

Artists must embrace, but move beyond, the vernacular forms of video. Artists must identify, categorise and sort through the layers of vernacular video, using appropriate video language to interact with the world effectively and with a degree of elegance. Video artists must recognise that they are part of a global, collective enterprise. They are part of a gift economy in an economy of abundance. Video artists must have something to say and be able to say it in sophisticated, innovative, attractive ways. Video artists must introduce their brand of video aesthetics into the vernacular torrents. They must earn their audiences through content-driven messages.

The mission is a difficult one. The vernacular domain is a noisy torrent of immense proportions. Video artists will be a dime a dozen. Deprofessionalised artists working in video, many sporting M.F.A. degrees, will be joined by music-video-crazed digital cooperatives and by hordes of Sunday video artists. The only thing these varied artists won't have to worry about is the death of video art. Video art has been pronounced dead so many times; its continual resurrection should not surprise anyone. This is a natural cycle in techno-cultural evolution. The robust life force of vernacular video will be something for artists to ride, and something to twist and turn, and something formidable to resist and work against. The challenge will be Herculean and irresistible.

Venturing into the Broader Culture of Messaging

The culture of messaging is transforming art into a much more extensive social and political activity. The role of the individual artist is changing radically as complex finished works of art are no longer widely embraced enthusiastically by audiences. Attention spans have shrunk and audiences want to interact with the culture they embrace. Audiences are consumed by the compulsion to trade messages. Today, messaging is all that matters. Instant messaging, voice messaging, texting, e-mail, file sharing, social networking, video streaming and all manner of interactive synchronous and asynchronous communication are the order of the day.

The speed and pervasiveness of electronic, digital culture is erasing the function of art as we knew it. The world of top-down, expert-authored one-to-many forms of communication have given way to the buzz of the hive. The broadcast and auteur models, where control of content remains firmly in the hands of a few, have disintegrated. Speaking horizontally, one-to-one or many-to-many, now dominates our time. Our cultures are no longer bound together by the reception and appreciation of singular objects of thought, but by the vibrations and oscillations of millions of networked transceivers. Transceivers, those devices for receiving and authoring messages, the video enabled cell phones and laptop computers and PDAs with webcams, are erasing the differences between artists and audiences as both move towards a culture of messaging.

In the early 1960s the communications revolution, satellite-based telecommunications, made it impossible to maintain an art separate and distinct from the culture at large. Boundaries between art and the broader culture simply broke down due to increased communication. Abstract expressionism, the zenith of Clement Greenberg's high modernism (art for art's sake) was crushed by a deluge of advertising imagery. Pop art marked the beginning of the postmodern era. Postmodernism resulted from a technologically determined collapse of the

boundaries segregating and protecting the art world from a broader culture dominated by advertising. Chaos has characterised Western art ever since, as for five decades we have experienced the relative freedom of an 'anything goes' philosophy of expanding pluralism. Feminism and many previously unheralded Others (and content in general – the counterpoint to abstraction and formalism) took their turns in the spotlight of a postmodern era churned by the broad, alternating strokes of minimalism and the ornate. The formal properties of postmodern art and culture swing back and forth between the classic simplicity of natural forms (minimalism) and the playfully complicated synthetic hodgepodge of bricolage (neo-rococo).

If pop art essentially signified the big bang that commenced postmodernity, an era characterised by cultural diversity and hybridity, then we can imagine fragments of art mixed with culture flying away from the centre of a cataclysmic implosion. The postmodern implosion of the early 1960s resulted in an expanding universe where art and culture mixed haphazardly. Art remained as a concept at the centre of the postmodern implosion, recognisable only through art historical references. Art was pure and identifiable only if it quoted or repeated its past, an art history crowned by its highest order: abstraction - the zenith of modernism.

The Second Implosion: Postmodernity Itself Collapses

We have now undergone a second, even more violent and gargantuan implosion. The second postmodern implosion took place early in the millennial decade: 2002-2005. The cultural debris of the expanding postmodern cultural mix, the delightfully insane levels of diversity, hybridity and horizontality characterising late twentieth century culture and its fragmented, disintegrated pockets of contemporary art, had reached a density and weight so disproportionate to the vacuum at the centre of 'art' that a second complete collapse was unavoidable. In other words, after five decades of relative chaos, postmodernity itself has collapsed and imploded with such intensity that we now occupy a vast cloud of cultural disorientation.

If this exercise in cultural cosmology seems unreal and strangely rooted in a philosophical premise that art has an important function in creating, remaking and even maintaining order in our increasingly turbulent cultures, be warned that this text was written by an artist, a believer in the value of art. Artists believe strongly that it is their role to push cultures to change as a result of the imposition of their art. Art is extreme, twisted, marginal culture; a minority report. Artists believe they are agents of change and act accordingly. Artists ask embarrassing questions. Artists are ahead of their time. By simply embracing the present, thereby glimpsing the future, artists lead audiences reluctant to let go of the past. The principle tenets of the belief system of art are that art refreshes culture and somewhat paradoxically that the history of art can anchor culture during stormy times of disorder. We live in such stormy times.

Art is a belief system in crisis. At the centre of this belief system we find art chained to art history, to times before the dominance of computers and the emergence of networks and vastly distributed authorship. We find contemporary art that finds security in looking like art from the early to mid-twentieth century (modern art). While these historical references have been stretched to the breaking point by time and technocultural change, the broadest public persists in embracing an idea of art that remains antithetical to television, radio, cinema, design,

advertising, and the Web. The Web of course encompasses all of the media before it and stirs the pot to the boiling point with a large dose of interactivity. Art at the centre necessarily acquiesces to the parameters of art as have been defined by the history of art, refusing to be corrupted by interactivity, but for more and more thinking people art historical references are unconvincing and useless in the face of our collapsing cultural order. These anachronisms are security blankets with diminishing returns.

One thing for sure is that levels of uncertainty are up big time. The speed and volume of cultural exchange is undermining the lasting impact of 'original' ideas, images and sounds, and the economics of both culture and art are undergoing radical change. In the millennial period, everyone is looking for a foothold. Artists are just as uncomfortable with instability as everyone else, but the prevailing myth has it that artists seek and thrive on uncertainty. But there has to be some order before artists can break the rules. Seeking order and security, artists have been moving back and forth between two pillars of thought throughout the five decades of postmodernity: 1) the history of art is a source of order and content in a post-historical era, and 2) culture in the broadest sense (television, cinema, radio, newspapers, magazines, music, the Web), has its own mind-numbing conventions in formulaic programming, but provides access to broader audiences. Artists inhabit and straddle these opposing, negligibly conjoined islands of form and order and gaze at the turbulent universe swirling around, under and over them.

The Immediate Environment following the Collapse of Postmodernism

The immediate environment is a cloud-like swirl of fragmented particles and perforated strips of culture and art. The second implosion has been devastating; delightfully so if one is selling telecommunications transceivers. Isolation and alienation must be countered by real and potential social opportunities. MySpace, Facebook and YouTube come to mind. Digital, electronic networks provide the only perceivable order and stability in the immediate environment. Digital telecom is the lifeline. This is ironic as digital telecom and the horizontal, decentralised nature of internet communication has been the major factor in eroding institutional authority and order. Museums, universities, the press, religions and the family have all taken major hits. Internet communication, while having tremendous advantages in terms of range and asynchronous time, has serious shortcomings in depth, especially relative to a physical social world. On the other hand, a physical and social grounding through links with a virtual world are better than nothing. Nature, we are told, is on its deathbed. The autonomy of the individual has eroded psychologically to the extent that the body has become a fleshy temple. We savour our food, go to the gym, have sex and otherwise push ourselves physically, to the point of exhaustion, in order to feel our bodies.

The current environment favours messaging, the propagation of short, direct, functional messages. The characteristics of poetic art, ambiguity and abstraction, are not particularly useful in a messaging culture. We desperately seek concrete correspondences between our world of messages and the physical realities of our bodies and what remains of nature. While messaging can extend beyond our immediate physical environment, the body must remain in contact with the earth. Global telecom, the breakdown of space and time, is balanced by the emergence of microregionalism. Cities are redefined as manageable neighbourhoods. Nature

is attainable in specific places; say a clearing in a wooded area behind a graveyard. Messaging often coordinates physical meetings in particular spots at specific times.

Messaging differs from industrial culture (cinema, television, radio, newspapers, and the synthesis of these smokestack media through the Web) in its pragmatic referencing of the body and specific locales. The body is the last autonomous, 'original,' non-mediated physical object, at least until it is cloned, and its geographical position can be tracked and noted. A person, a body, may issue voice or text messages, but the body is referenced physically by photography or video to create a sense of the site of authorship. Messaging is tied down, given weight and actuality through references to the emanating body. Disclosures of place are also key to message functionality. 'I'm having a coffee at Starbucks on Marshall Street. (here's my image to prove it) Where are you?' This message from Starbucks differs from art and industrial culture such as commercial cinema in its brevity and simple goal of placing the body. Obsessive messaging interrupts longer, more complex objects of thought like cinema. Movies, television and certainly literature are perforated as audiences and readers are sending and receiving messages instead of paying total attention, thus breaking the continuity of narratives. Cultural objects are perforated by messaging, compounding their state of fragmentation at the hands of advertising. Longer, more demanding narratives are being blown full of holes by the apparent necessity of messaging.

Ambiguity and abstraction fare poorly under the siege of constant interruption. Explicit, pragmatic short message forms, repeated for clarity and effectiveness, may survive the perforation effect. This perforation analogy can be used to describe consciousness itself in the millennial decade. There is no such thing as an interruption anymore because attention is defined through the heavily perforated veil of our consciousness. We give away our attention by the split-second to incoming traffic on our cell phones, PDAs and laptops. Our observational skills have suffered as we have mastered multitasking. We now commonly send messages while we are in the act of receiving information.

The millennial environment is strangely similar to a premodern environment in that accurate description and literal representation tend to rule. The authors of messages (texting, voice, e-mail, webcam, clips for video file sharing networks...) have short-term, clearly defined goals. In this period after the collapse of postmodern industrial culture and art the environment is 'stable' only in the sense that it is unrelenting in its turbulence and incoherence. There is no room for small talk in this kind of environment. The behaviour of other species in environments and ecologies with high levels of uncertainty offers insights into our current situation. For instance, scientists think that birds only say two things, no matter how elaborate their songs at dawn and dusk. The birds say 'I have a really good tree,' and 'why don't you come over and have some sex?' Human messaging follows similar patterns in terms of directness. I have a body and I am in a particular place. Use your imagination to figure out why I am contacting you.

The medium of video, and in particular live, real-time video, is the heir apparent to the summit of messaging. No medium establishes presence and fixes position as well as video. The development and application of communications technologies forced the initial collapse of

modernism in the early 1960s. The coming of age of digital telecom in the millennial decade has created the conditions for an even more complete breakdown of the meaning of industrial culture and art. We now navigate within a thick cloud of shifting cultural debris, anchored by networks permitting us to interact. Most of the messages insist that we exist and insure that we can sustain ourselves (the business of water, food, companionship, amusement, sex, shelter within the broader concerns of economics and politics).

Given the reality and inevitable growth of such a culture of messaging, there are questions we have to ask about the future of culture and art. When will poetic work emerge again in a network-anchored culture dominated by straightforward pragmatic exchanges? And if ambiguous and abstract messages once again emerge, will there be anyone left with the strength of attention to read them? And finally if artists cling to a belief system that includes the potential for transforming culture through autonomous, strategic interventions, then how will they do so effectively in a culture of messaging that continues to diffuse the power of individual messages in favour of an increasingly scattered, distributed, collective authorship?

Acknowledgment is due to the art historian Arthur C. Danto for the clarity and utility of his analysis of postmodernity. Danto's After the End of Art (Princeton University Press, 1996) served as a springboard for my scan of the post-postmodern culture of messaging in 2008.

YOUTUBE MAGIC VIDEOS ON THE NET

VERA TOLLMANN

Translation by Helen Ferguson

A previous version of this text 'Optically correct? Videos on the net' was published in Springer 2/08, Band XIII

In a very short excerpt from a video interview to be found on YouTube, Paul Virilio recently explained that he has noted that the optically correct is becoming increasingly important on the Internet. The platform offering the scarcely one-minute snatch of Virilio himself is an example precisely what he means. Is he referring to the legal statutes of the largest video database? All the rights in the video are assigned to whoever runs the website as soon as a video is made public there. The line of argument put forward on the *transmission*¹ network's website makes sense, for it explains that the legal situation concerning proprietary rights on YouTube argues against publishing videos there. YouTube can re-sell or censor users' clips, as well as monitoring their tracks in the digital universe. In discussion at meetings regularly organised by *transmission*, operators of alternative video platforms curse YouTube as 'corporate digital vacuum cleaners'.

Wynne Greenwood describes her decision to put her new music video *Big Candy*² online temporarily on YouTube under the gallery's name as 'opening some spaces for myself.' She does not always want to be directly contactable via her artistic work and views her gallery as a firewall. Originally the video, which she recorded amongst the sculptures in her exhibition at the Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects Gallery, was planned to be part of her 'music world'. However, she then came to the conclusion that the clip would be the perfect finishing touch for her installation. Now a limited edition of the video is being sold by the gallery. 'I usually insist that videos should be accessible to everyone. However in my practice now I've reached a point where it is more empowering for me to make access more complicated. I can choose what I do for free and what I produce in order, hopefully, to be able to pay the rent.' *Big Candy* can be viewed on YouTube until the end of the exhibition. Greenwood even identifies potential for an online gallery here, even if her video clip is only on temporary display and is just one single artistic work that does not fill the digital non-space. Furthermore, the video is also online on her MySpace-Website; she always thinks of art and music in conjunction, one production overlaps with the other. You wonder: will users put her video clip online over and over again in the future? Can art videos also be so popular that viewers believe it is important for them to exist online? When Tom Cruise talked about being a scientist, there

1. Transmission, transmission.cc
2. *Big Candy* by Wynne Greenwood, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ej6xIA6ofVE>

were enough attentive users to ensure the clip was put online over and over again, even if the sect wasn't happy about it. Otherwise videos only end up offline, as in this case of unwanted PR, when there is copyright litigation.

Artist Tom Sherman predicts in his essay *Vernacular Video*³, copied from blog to blog a year ago, that 'recombinatory work will become more and more common. Sampling and the repetitive structures of pop music will seek to keep up with the repeated deconstruction of pop culture.' However, in this description Sherman is actually more than anything providing an apposite definition of the logic underlying the creation of artistic video clips on the Internet – videos of everyday life are often put online unedited, the authors of the videos talk straight into the camera. In contrast, artists' videos proceed according to precisely the technique described here; they recombine the material of the anonymous masses. For example Oliver Laric: he took excerpts selected from the immense quantity of amateur raps to a hit by American musician 50 Cent, and edited them together into a sequence including the original volume and atmosphere of the YouTube clips. This then gave rise to a kind of master video clip, *50 50*⁴. At the same time, Laric's sampled video puts forward an analysis of what typical YouTube material offers. Do artists use the structure and footage of YouTube to investigate the platform? Do they provide the visual pendant to sociological observation? In Sherman's opinion the challenge facing video artists, or indeed, to put it in equally uncompromising terms, the only chance for these artists is to ensure their aesthetic awareness and skills make them stand out from the amateur masses. 'Artists must pick up on the everyday forms of videos, but move beyond this. Artists must identify, categorise and order the various strata of everyday videos by using an appropriate video language to interact with the world effectively and with a certain elegance.'

What does it mean then when video artist Stéphane Querrec takes the aesthetics and text of amateur confessions and condenses these to form a new rehearsed script? In contrast with Laric's work, here a host of different voices merge into one universal voice, changing surprisingly as if you were zapping through YouTube with melancholy, hysterical and surprisingly witty monologues. The super-monologue, which is spoken by a non-professional actress with Querrec prompting, is strikingly pertinent and yet also drives you crazy.

The advertising world appropriates the typical rhetoric of amateur video and plays with the strategic mechanisms to guarantee attention for its clips online. It almost seems to want to produce a theory of consumer habits. How can an individual video stand out from the administered crowd? Artist Bernd Krauss, runs three Youtube channels – KraussBernd, Sender MFR and 7shopsaweek – and continues his conceptual video series Sender Mittelfranken (2002-2004) online with every day phenomenological recordings in the same amateurish banal style, but leaving behind 'formal decisions to develop the format broadcast station like commentaries, programme titles etc.'. Sender MFR on Youtube exclusively features videos recorded in the region Mittelfranken, where Krauss grew up. In a loose

3. *Vernacular Video* by Tom Sherman, blog.wired.com/sterling/2007/01/vernacular_vid.html, boingboing.net/2007/01/28/vernacular-video-the.html

4. *50 50* by Oliver Laric, youtube.com/watch?v=17Mb9yFEcwQ, oliverlaric.com/5050.htm

sequence he experiments with the opportunities of the medium YouTube.⁵ In the last few months he recorded more than 400 video clips, often at most a minute long – laconic visual jokes, everyday finds. Just like any amateur video maker, he simply points his camera at absurd situations to expose their quality, sometimes assoicatively combined. With the choice of title he tries to break through the non-hierarchical structures of the online setting. He felt the film title *Lost in Translation* would attract attention, even if it meant users would end up watching his video unintentionally. Again, the titles are similar to his previous videos compiled under the name of Sender Mittelfranken: Flötenkonzert, Lieber CallYA Kunde, Fränkische Grünkernsuppe, (Fernsehturm), Keller Schürer II, Amselkonzert among others and now Landesstudio Franken, The Netherlands or Blumen. Since May 2008 he feeds a second YouTube channel, 7shopsaweek, which he established in the context of his exhibition at White Cube, he publishes videos like Jimmy's, Happy Birthday, Oxford Street (School of Display) or The Pond as a documentary part, 'an additional reality of its own', to his exhibition.

All the craziness of online videos accumulates in the *YouTube-o-thèque* of artist Johan Grimonprez and curator Christine Léouzon: the pieces range from the high production values of commercial advertising clips to recordings of TV programmes and even scenes of everyday horror recorded by chance. However after just a few minutes it grows boring for they only show the programme offline. The charm of Internet videos fades rapidly if you cannot make a choice yourself, start a new search.

Whatever you are currently occupied with or think of writing about or what makes you stumble while reading the media, you will find a matching video on YouTube. It might only be an excerpt of something – a TV show, a movie, a documentary film or a documented situation. But in most cases, you even find additional parts in the database. More and more the old media follow phenomena appearing on YouTube, which becomes a shared experience room for everybody. So whether those are new subcultural phenomena, like Tiger from Kreuzberg, or music videos, you see them first on YouTube while they are debated. Most recently, the independant band Weezer (my favourite band in the mid of the 90s) released their new music video *Pork and Beans*⁶ on YouTube and therefore did not only sample most famous YouTube videos like the Mentos-Cola-experiment, Chris Crocker's crying-for-Britney-clip 'Leave Britney Alone' and some others. But Weezer also invited those amateurs to become part of their video, so you see Chris Crocker with the band members. Its very smart to embrace YouTube in these two dimensions. Or the video by french electro music team Justice: it was taken offline due to its explicit violence. A gang of five migrant teens wearing black leather jackets with a scary cross emblem on their backs walk and run outragedly through Paris, randomly robbing people. Neither the video maker nor the band themselves come from a suburb background like the kids in the video, which was criticised earlier before its deletion. However, it was back online a few days later. So also in the music world a lot of interaction with YouTube-videos is happening.

5. Bernd Krauss' YouTube Channel, youtube.com/user/KraussBernd

6. *Pork and Beans* by Weezer, youtube.com/watch?v=muP9eH2p2PI

Videos can also form a corrective to the mainstream media for general audiences. You can find clips relating to many topical keywords on the Internet—loosely based on the ‘Ceci n’est pas une pipe’ model. In this sense, online videos could comment on media reporting, that is to say, on the public image conveyed by traditional broadcasters. Taking the initial reactions of some artists as a starting point, it nevertheless remains difficult to say how much importance this could assume in future generally.

As both Baudrillard and Heidegger put it: if society is moving to an extreme of technological saturation, then secrecy is generated once again, for the technological can once more become magical, and the users feel dizzy, experience a certain dazed state, a sensation they must be accustomed to from zapping through television programmes. As Bernd Krauss put it, Youtube releases an extra reality.

THE WORK OF ART IN THE AGE OF UBIQUITOUS NARROWCASTING? WHAT EARLY ARTIST-LED INTERVENTIONS INTO TELEVISION BROADCASTING CAN TEACH ARTISTS ABOUT PUTTING THEMSELVES ONLINE.¹

SARAH COOK

You press the red button next to the screen and settle into the plush interview chair. There is the sound of canned applause and the words of an out-of-sight host flash up, flattering you and thanking you for your appearance. You smile your best smile for the web-camera and edge closer to the microphone, ready to answer questions about your famous, glamorous life. Welcome to the *Fantasy A-List Generator*, a project by UK-based artist group Active Ingredient, which suggests that television as we know it today can be completely automated and outsourced.² Questions from interviews with ‘actual’ celebrities are culled from video clips available on the web, the customised software generates the routine, and you choose your costume from the props available in the small personal interview booth. Without a green-room, makeup artists, talent handlers, assistants, and background researchers, the end product is amusingly like what we see on *Friday Night with Jonathan Ross* or *The*

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1. Preface/Acknowledgments: This paper is adapted from a talk given at Video Vortex in Amsterdam and the research which resulted in the international group exhibition *Broadcast Yourself*, co-curated by myself and Kathy Rae Huffman for AV Festival 08: Broadcast, at the Hatton Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne, and Cornerhouse, Manchester (2008). Information on the exhibition is available from www.broadcastyourself.net. The original abstract for the talk at Video Vortex read: It’s all too easy to be swept into the hype of centralised social networking sites and content distribution platforms such as YouTube and forget that so-called ‘Web2.0’ is the marketer’s answer to the truly open file-sharing potential of the Internet. It is worth remembering what artists did in response to the emergence of increasingly commercial television channels and how they first used the web for ‘broadcasting themselves’. Tied to these experiments is the key question of the role of the curator in supporting and sustaining independent practices within an increasingly homogenized media landscape. How are these 2.0 platforms being used to market and distribute information about art projects, and does it work? This paper considers what other open models of practice are available to curators for preserving independent practice, discussing wiki-enabled voluntary programming of moving-image based organisations such as the Star and Shadow Cinema (Newcastle).

Thanks go especially to Kathy Rae Huffman and the artists for their collaboration, but also to others including Josephine Berry Slater and Anthony Iles at Mute Magazine, Tom Sherman, Dieter Daniels, Renee Baert, Beryl Graham and others for their important early work on the subject and their critical feedback and consideration of this more recent research. There were many art projects I could have mentioned, and have, with difficulty, chosen only a few of those in the exhibition, and some not in the exhibition, to describe here.

2. *Fantasy A-List* was a commission as part of the exhibition *Broadcast Yourself*, 2008. Active Ingredient are Rachel Jacobs and Matt Watkins. The project is online at www.make-tv.net

Today Show or *Larry King Live*. The interview is at once pre-recorded (through its ready-made, programmed content) and live – it is streamed to the Internet the moment after it begins (and available for you to watch in an adjacent room in the gallery or on the web for download later). Participants get to experience a few minutes of fame not by being themselves, but by being an enhanced, impersonated version of themselves. The software asks you questions as though you are David Bowie, Princess Diana and Bill Clinton, all rolled in to one. How do you get anyone to notice who you are on the web anyway?

Marisa Olson's project *The One That Got Away* (2005) might have a kind of answer. An artist whose work is about performance and popular culture, Marisa competed in the television show *American Idol*. She kept a blog in the lead-up to her audition and solicited comments from her fans as to which outfit to wear and which song to sing.³ As a result of the non-disclosure agreement she had to sign before appearing on the show, she can't tell us how far she got in the competition ('pretty far') nor what the judges said, and so she has re-enacted the audition in her 12 minute video mash-up, which incorporates material from the show which was broadcast on television but is now available online. Naturally you can watch this video on Olson's website.

On the other hand, Alistair Gentry's project *Nowhere Plains* (2005) might have a different kind of answer to the question of how to get noticed on the web: perform a major newsworthy event. An artist and writer whose work is about popular representations of science fiction, Gentry staged an expedition to the planet Mars in the form of webcasts, broadcast over three nights during a festival in the UK.⁴ These 'live reports' from the shuttle, and the crash-landing on the red planet, took the form of scientific lectures more than video diaries but left the viewer with the unmistakable feeling that they were viewing something unmissably live, even if it too were impersonated, staged, faked.

These three recent projects suggests a current interest artists have in creating situations for what art critics sometimes call performance-to-camera, namely putting yourself onscreen, with the additional step of broadcasting that via either existing or newly created, often targeted small-scale networks, without all the bulky overheads of making actual television shows. The use of commercial, video-file-sharing sites on the web, such as YouTube is just one feature of the mediated landscape we live in, which allows us to consume broadcast television content at any time in any place. But how did we get here? What are some of the precursors to these new, outsourced, artist/self-made, TV-like productions?

The history of artists' appearances on television (not just the screening of their video work), is predominantly about intervention. With the launch of the cable networks and their dominance of the television markets, there were few opportunities for artists to engage in the kind of personal performance-to-camera work which we now understand so well from its

3. Marisa Olson's blog is online at <http://americanidolauditiontraining.blogs.com>

4. Alistair Gentry's *Nowhere Plains* is online at http://www.alistairgentry.demon.co.uk/Nowhere-Plains_Trail.htm

place in video art festivals, gallery installations, and more recently distribution via Internet channels. Salvador Dali appeared on the popular game quiz show 'What's my Line?'; John Cage performed on an episode of 'Tell me a Secret!' which didn't run at all to plan (his proposed act was so flabbergasting to the host that they did away with the game part of the show altogether).⁵

Art historian and curator Dieter Daniels has written:

"The chances of an individual being given the right to create a <TV art broadcast> are extremely slight. Video art does not start to make any impact on television in the USA and Germany until 1968–1969. So artists find themselves in the same role as everybody else: they are viewers."⁶

Being viewers led to artists adopting the tactic of dressing as wolves in sheep's clothing – impersonating television characters – the news anchor, the game show contestant – in order to be on television.

Chris Burden, after many fruitless conversations with a cable television station in California about possible projects, all of which they rejected, convinced the station that he was a non-profit organisation to circumvent American law about self-promotion, and purchased airtime to run his own 'spots' or 'commercials'. His *TV Ad* of 1973 – a somewhat typical Burden endurance performance piece in which he crawled along a floor covered in broken glass – was 10 seconds long and aired 5 times a week, for four weeks, right after the 11pm news, and completely unannounced. He followed this, all in the name of his semi-fictional 'art business', with two more advertisements, aired on various stations in New York and Los Angeles. The first was a 30-second spot in which famous artists names such as Michelangelo and Van Gogh are written across the screen and spoken aloud, concluding with his own name, and the copyright disclaimer '© 1976 paid for by Chris Burden—artist.' The second ad was more biting. Seated at a desk in front of an American flag, Burden reads out his yearly earnings and expenditures in a *Full Financial Disclosure* showing just how much buying the commercial cost him that year (over a third of his annual income).⁷

While initially with his *TV Ad*, Burden commented that 'the content wasn't important, but just being on TV was', he later commented that these spots are 'ultimately about who is in control over what's presented through the media'⁸, something that would be echoed in other artists' interventions.

5. Footage of both of these television moments is available on YouTube.

6. Dieter Daniels, *Television – Art or Anti-art? Conflict and cooperation between the avant-garde and the mass media in the 1960s and 1970s*, online at ZKM, http://www.mediaartnet.org/themes/overview_of_media_art/massmedia

7. Chris Burden, *Beyond the limits*, exhibition catalogue MAK, Cantz: Ostfildern, 1996, p. 132.

8. Chris Burden, as commented in a DVD edition of his *TV Commercials*, New York, 2000.

Later that same year, also in America, Doug Hall initiated a residency at a television station in Amarillo Texas, for himself as his colleagues Chip Lord and Jody Procter.⁹ This residency was one of three planned to investigate some of the more spectacular aspects of American culture, the others being at a major league sports team and at the White House (the latter wasn't realised).

This residency counts as one of the 'astonishing number of attempts to redefine television', as Daniels comments, demonstrating his thesis that 'rather than a source of utopian hope, most 1960s artists saw television as unduly powerful and as an objective for attacks whose widespread media effect made the pictorial world of art seem insignificant.'¹⁰

While at KVII TV Channel 7 News, Hall, Lord and Procter were trained in becoming television personalities, impersonating a news anchor, a sports reporter and an investigative journalist. Only once they had gained the trust of the television news team were they allowed to write stories for the usual anchormen to read, and to produce video content and stories to air at the end of the broadcast. These absurdist scripts, one of which, for instance, describes the local architecture of Amarillo in the most dumbed-down televisual terms, no doubt struck viewers as surrealist moments of conceptual art, but quickly lost their appeal when a tornado devastated a nearby town and Hall, Lord and Procter set about changing the way that tragedy is reported, allowing minutes of footage of the disaster to air without commentary, and scrolling the names of those killed across the screen.

The *Amarillo News Tapes* (1980) denotes the beginning of another tactic for self-broadcasting, namely collaborating with the television channels and networks themselves in order to get on-screen. Within the space of a year, two different examples of this are evident from either side of the Atlantic: Bill Viola's *Reverse Television – portraits of viewers* aired on WGBH-TV in Boston in 1983 and Ian Breakwell's *Ian Breakwell's Continuous Diary* aired on the newly launched Channel 4 in Great Britain in 1984. Viola didn't put himself on screen, but used the high-tech broadcast quality video edit suites of the TV studio to produce 44 uncut video portraits of the people who watched WGBH in their homes, and broadcast those.¹¹ With only ambient sound as it was recorded in the room, these lingering, slow spots were anticipated to appear unannounced, with no credits, allowing for viewers to have a sudden thrilling moment of seeing themselves as though reflected in a mirror through their televisions.

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9. Jody Procter and Doug Hall were founding members of Bay Area art collective T. R. Uthco. Chip Lord had been a member of Ant Farm, an innovative countercultural collective working in media, architecture and spectacle, formed in 1968, which also had disbanded by 1978. T. R. Uthco collaborated with Ant Farm on the now seminal work of video/television re-enactment, *The Eternal Frame* (1975) the recreation of the Zapruder film of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.
10. Dieter Daniels, op.cit.
11. The videos were originally 10 minutes of continuous shooting and were proposed to be broadcast as 1 minute unbroken segments each hour of the broadcast day, but instead were aired as 30 second segments, five times a day, between November 14 and 28 1983. The work exists now as a video of 15 second excerpts presented in the order in which they were recorded.

From the late 1960s onwards, WHGB-TV had an 'Artist-in-Television' program with the support of the Rockefeller Foundation. This kind of direct co-operation with television producers allowed artists to develop innovative media techniques, as seen in particular in Viola's later gallery-based video work. Yet it is interesting to note that co-operation with the channels, as was also the case with the *Amarillo News Tapes*, didn't always result in an abstracted aesthetic video art whose investigation of the medium holds up beyond the broadcast context. *Ian Breakwell's Continuous Diary* represents a similar TV intervention, similarly not announced as Art in the broadcast schedule, but whose content is really best understood as television and not as video art. As Dieter Daniels notes, 'the material battle of the technological demands involved in a real TV production established conditions that can never be disregarded.'¹²

Producer Anna Ridley strove to negotiate those conditions for artists who wished to disregard them, such as Breakwell and David Hall, with the launch of Channel 4. Her stipulations requested that artists should be able to,

1. choose to produce a one-off or a series. These would not have to conform to a particular duration or C.4 slot;
2. that the work should appear in its own right & not be contained within another programme or be compiled together;
3. have access to production techniques and equipment necessary to produce the idea [...] be granted a budget appropriate to their requirements and be paid for their work on the same basis as other TV production personnel;
4. choose the time of transmission and frequency (in the case of a series) as far as possible.¹³

She comments that "having worked for BBC TV since 1968 I was well aware how 'risky' programmes could be tucked away in the schedules [...] To my great delight [C4 commissioning editor] Paul Madden accepted these principles."¹⁴

The risky show that Ian Breakwell produced was little more than a video diary, of the kind we might now think of as a v-log. Twenty-one episodes were produced, each with a different running time between two minutes and fifteen minutes, and they were screened in a somewhat regular fashion: Monday to Friday, in the evening after last orders at the pub (at the time, licensing laws meant all pubs in the UK closed at 11:30pm). Some were made on the previous day to their airing, to coincide with news-worthy events, such as the London Marathon, others were adapted from video diary material Breakwell had already shot and re-edited for broadcast.

It is fair to say that the remarkable freedom given to Breakwell didn't necessarily result in anything more interesting than the current freedom of uploading video diaries to the web results in today. No doubt his talents as a storyteller, and his artistic eye made for great televisual episodes, coupled with the mellow-late-night timeslot, over which he had control but the

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12. Dieter Daniels, op.cit.
13. Anna Ridley, from an email to the author, December 2007.
14. Anna Ridley, op.cit.

viewer did not, garnered the project a kind of intimacy which was completely unusual at the time of its airing, and which we find so bland and commonplace online now. *Ian Breakwell's Continuous Diary* stands not as an intervention which led to a new form of video art per se, but a deeply considered commentary on the culture of television – its broadcast schedules, its generic impersonal programming, its production via committee rather than single authorship and artistic vision – and how it was received.

So how did we get from the moment where the artist could only really be on TV as themselves, a member of the viewing public – generously granted the opportunity by the channel producers, or having tricked the broadcasters into it – to the moment we have today where the artist can broadcast themselves on the web – without external producers and without having to spend a third of their annual income – but not just as themselves but as an enhanced, impersonated version of themselves, the A-list celebrity, the American Idol winner, the Mars-bound astronaut – also just like ‘the public’? Or indeed turning the control of the broadcast itself over to the public? Has it been a straight trajectory between these two moments?

A project initiated by author and filmmaker Miranda July might suggest otherwise. Her video chain letter, *Joanie4Jackie* (1996-today) invites women filmmakers to send their short films to her ‘clearing house’ where they are compiled onto VHS tapes and sent back out to anyone who asks for one, for only the cost of dubbing and postage.¹⁵ Miss Moviola (as it was named before July lost the domain name in a legal wrangle) was in the artist’s mind explicitly uncurated, and would have evolved into something like a YouTube channel, had the technology been freely available. The goal was the widest possible distribution of these otherwise almost never-seen works, many of which were personal, diary-like performances, including July’s own video *The Amateurist*, seen on the first of the co-star tapes in the *Joanie4Jackie* series. Over twenty tapes have been produced to date and July continues to collaborate in sharing systems for amateur and popularly created art, online and off.¹⁶

July’s project seems both prescient and slightly quaint now, which leads to a question of aesthetics. The culture of the web and how work is received there, is different from the culture of television and how work was received when broadcast there. And it is perhaps not as simple as the thought that the one is currently replacing the other. The lack of an airing-schedule (something the television networks took a long time to embrace and are now trying to exploit) is a fundamental shift in viewing habits. The greater accessibility of the technology for self-broadcast, is an even greater shift. Yet, there are similarities in how the web itself has become content for art work, just as the tropes of television were open for criticism in the content and form of the artists’ own interventions.

Thus it is inevitable that the ability to broadcast yourself from any space to any other, at any time, has led to new genres and tropes of personal video making. Artist Guthrie Lonergan

15. Information about *Joanie4Jackie* can be found online at www.joanie4jackie.com

16. For instance, her well known collaboration with Harrell Fletcher, *Learningtoloveyoumore.com*, which takes the form of a website, book, and gallery-based installations, with all content generated by members of the public according to assignments she sets.

has been collecting MySpace introduction video since 2005 (“Hi, I’m Britney. Welcome to my MySpace page. Please Friend me and explore the links on the left hand side to my other friends...” etc.).¹⁷ Seen all together they are at once blandly similar and sweetly personal and to my mind have no corollary in television culture. A number of early web-projects, which were designed to be experienced only online, sought to critique aspects of television culture (such as the broadcast schedule) but not without highlighting the aesthetic qualities of the web as a medium. When Nina Pope and Karen Guthrie launched their collaborative project *TV Swansong*, which included new commissioned and predominantly live performance projects by 9 other artists, all scheduled to be seen on a single day, there was much debate as to whether the video archive of the live broadcast event should be made available after the day itself.¹⁸ By contrast, the collaborative online project *56KTV Bastard Channel* (2004) which has contributions from over a dozen international artists, functions according to an international time-based broadcast schedule, convenient for the capacity of the streaming server when it was first set up, allowing users logging on to only view the projects which are ‘live’ in their local timezone (and previews of the others).¹⁹

Many of these projects suggest another difference from artists interventions into television broadcast – they are collaboratively created, with content generated by a number of artists under a single umbrella-like structure or networked platform.

Ubiquitous narrowcasting?

At the Video Vortex conference Florian Schneider commented in relation to the ubiquity of video on the web, that there is now no such thing as realtime, just anytime, anywhere. This on-demand form of programming has led to the possibilities of a different kind of ‘narrowcasting,’ where content is produced for a niche audience. In keeping with the idea of supply and demand on the internet as the ‘long tail’ of the market, artists are now engaged in completely different kinds of producer/distributor relationships than they once were. Audiences are content providers for platforms which artists create, making artists broadcasters themselves. Anyone can be a contributor, a judge, or a viewer. The web has created a landscape in which video works can circulate according to the artists’ intentions, which is in contrast to many of the early works of video art, which may have been shown on television but are now deeply protected by the works’ distributors, out of a necessity to preserve the material and ensure particular conditions of viewing due to the technical aesthetics of the medium.

17. These are available on a YouTube playlist at http://www.youtube.com/view_playlist?p=EBF5D6DC4589D7B7

18. It is and you can see it online at www.swansong.tv. The other artists are: Jordan Baseman, Graham Fagen, Rory Hamilton & Jon Rogers, Chris Helson, Giorgio Sadotti, Jessica Voorsanger and Zoë Walker & Neil Bromwich.

19. *56K Bastard TV* is a project of X-cult, with contributions by: exonemo, Monica Studer and Christoph van den Berg, Marc Lee, jimpunk, Birgit Kempker, Shu Lea Cheang, Beat Brogle and Philippe Zimmermann, Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries, Nathalie Novarina and Marcel Croubalian, Jody Zellen, Martin Dahlhauser and Dorothea Hein, *telenouvelle vague*, Estee Oarsed. Interface by: Martin Woodtli, Marc Lee. Concept by: Storz/Studer/van den Berg. Curated by Reinhard Storz. Online at www.56k-bastard.tv

As Henry Jenkins argues in his *Nine Propositions Towards a Cultural Theory of YouTube*, YouTube and other video sharing sites work because of users can link to the video content from many places online (social networking sites, blog posts, scholarly articles, personal websites, etc.).²⁰ This differs from the notion that a broadcaster controls the piece of video material they have commissioned. As the examples in this essay have shown, as artists increasingly respond and intervene in the landscape of both media creation and media consumption, they must find ways to impersonate themselves into the existing systems in order to find their audience, their viewer, their fans, and their collaborators.

20. Henry Jenkins, *Nine Propositions Towards a Cultural Theory of YouTube*, May 28, 2007, http://www.henryjenkins.org/2007/05/9_propositions_towards_a_cultu.html

CURATOR AS FILTER/USER AS CURATOR

THOMAS THIEL

Astonishingly enough, access to the art form that has its seeds in its reproducibility, is still the hardest to achieve. Video art was brought to the museums very late and in such a way that the artists often worked off the market, supported only by a favourable technical infrastructure in the form of video magazines, collectives and studios. Apart from spectator's habits and collector's favourites the artists contributed to a democratisation of the video medium and an alternative reporting as well as distribution. Today videos are often treated like oil paintings, although – just like music – their original purpose was none other than distribution. The medium of video really entered the art market in the 1990s. Following this development one of the main questions remains unanswered: how can the financial needs for artists be reconciled with distribution in the art market? Accordingly, the market dictates faith in the original or limited edition. It is no longer a lack of media distribution channels, such as an online offer, to introduce the video as a reproducible expression of art outside the community of collectors. It is more a problem of making the video marketable on these channels. Since the start of professional video and film distribution in the early 1970s there are only a few distribution outlets worldwide that have taken up the task of hiring out or selling art videos and making a success of the job.

Because of this history and conditions we organised an exhibition and discussion panel around these topics at ZKM Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe in 2005. The exhibition *video/economy*¹ featured the most important distributors and a number of galleries along with their artists. For us one of the most important questions that arose – YouTube wasn't a topic at that time² – was just what would the future of video distribution look like?

First, our participants saw the possibility of limited editions in forms of installations and multichannel videos. Second, they envisioned an option of unlimited editions in forms of single channel works, available on the Internet in regard to distributive availability and Blue Ray Disc in regard to image quality. Of course, some questions remained up-to-date and unanswered: What are the financial models of media art distribution on the Internet? Will supply increase the demand? Is there a need for video art viewed at home? What shall we do with the copyright issues? Are Internet exhibitions competing with theatres or museums? Does the availability of online video can produce a real cultural exchange?

I am introducing those questions and topics because I want to stress that from my point of view YouTube is just another form of video distribution – beside galleries, video distribu-

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1. The exhibition and event *video/economy* was curated together with Barbara Könches and Carmen Beckenbach. Further information: [http://on1.zkm.de/zkm/stories/storyReader\\$4871](http://on1.zkm.de/zkm/stories/storyReader$4871)
 2. YouTube launched its new service that allowed people to watch, upload, and share personal video clips at www.youtube.com and across the Internet on December 15, 2005.

tors, archives, exhibitions, festivals, print publications, DVDs, CD-ROMs and artist's websites. Even if there has been a long history of media on the internet YouTube stands – together with other social video platforms – for a new participatory and technology, a popularity and a certain form of video distribution over the internet.

Next to and partly before YouTube there have been a variety of other forms of online video presentations today, as similar video community portals featuring channels and personal play lists like *blip.tv*, *Rever*, *dailymotion* or *Brightcove*, special video art magazines and blogs as *park.tv*, *tank.tv*, *ohv.de* or *specialten.tv*, video galleries in the virtual space of Second Life as *ZKM_YOUuniverse*³ or *noema SL*⁴, media art archives like *UbuWeb*,⁵ *Media Art Net*,⁶ *OASIS*. *Open Archiving with Internet Sharing*,⁷ as well as video distributors who distribute videos online *Electronic Arts Intermix*,⁸ *Netherlands Media Art Institute*, *Montevideo/Time Based Arts*,⁹ *HAMACA*,¹⁰ *VideoArtWorld*.¹¹

But why artists don't occupy YouTube or similar platforms? In my opinion there are several reasons. The first and most important is just the fact that their video would be on the Internet. The original idea of the Internet as a free and open space brings up questions of exclusivity, availability, quality and rights. Beside copyright issues and economic reasons for a lot of artists YouTube doesn't serve a suitable context, their video material tends to disappear amidst the vast number of videos published on a daily basis. A filter, tag or category 'art' wouldn't fulfil its function. YouTube is mostly seen as an amateur or even marketing platform that offers a bad video and better audio quality. Additionally artists rarely produce video (even short clips) for the Internet, they refer more to a special, established form of presentations such as CRT, Plasma and LCD-Displays or projections. General video platforms don't allow inclusion of images and texts (PDF) to act as portfolios or further reference. Therefore artists, if they are open to an online presentation, prefer their own websites for publishing videos, often with password-protected access. Also very common is the use of online storage for sharing and internal discussion with a of their work process.

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3. ZKM_YOUuniverse (2007) by the SLatelliterates [Dagmar Füchtjohann/ Stefan Gebhardt/ Axel Heide/ Bastian Hemminger/ Herwig Hoffmann/ Felix Kratzer/ Torrid Luna/ tx_Oh/ Philip Pocock/ Linus Stolz/ Udo Walker/ Peter Weibel], <http://youuniverse.zkm.de>
 4. noema SL, <http://www.noema.art.br>
 5. UbuWeb, <http://www.ubu.com>
 6. Medien Kunst Netz / Media Art Net, <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de>
 7. The project OASIS. *Open Archiving with Internet Sharing* has established a distributed internet platform for research, preservation and documentation of electronic arts. The goal was to provide a complex system in order to ensure the sustainable availability of European cultural heritage in the field of electronic arts, <http://www.oasis-archive.eu>
 8. Electronic Arts Intermix, <http://www.eai.org>
 9. Netherlands Media Art Institute, *Montevideo/Time Based Arts*, <http://www.nimk.nl>
 10. HAMACA, <http://www.hamacaonline.net>
 11. VideoArtWorld, <http://www.videoartworld.com>

Based on these facts and having searched for art on YouTube and alternative platforms I realised that YouTube is more *about* art¹². There is a lot of marketing and gossip in terms of exhibition opening videos and documentations. It offers exhibition walkthroughs, video documentation of art works, artist's talks and interviews, historic television as well as video and film documents. All are collected and uploaded by professionals and especially amateurs. The last point directs us to the most interesting aspect of YouTube for curators and artists. It can and does function as a great resource for the arts – in terms of content (non-artistic documents), aesthetics (web cam, amateur video) and technology (sharing, tagging, rating).

An artist who makes the most of all three aspects is the Swiss artist Marc Lee. Two of his latest installation *Loogie.net*¹³ and *Breaking The News – Be a News-Jockey*¹⁴ make use of online video, its aesthetics and the possibilities of combination and access. *Loogie.net* generates brand-new news from individual searches. The automated news magazine consists of two mutually complimentary but autonomously functioning parts: *Loogie.net News*, the internet news machine and *Loogie.net TV*, the television news program.

Loogie.net TV shows current television news broadcasts on self-selected thematic priorities. By means of individual searches via a special television remote control, one can determine what is broadcast on television, thus obtaining customised news broadcast. In a second step, the current television program can be thematically focused according to one's particular interests and priorities. What *Loogie.net* (including *Loogie.net News* and *Loogie.net TV*) has to offer is unique in that it generates news the thematic selection of which is determined by the user. The contents are searched for on the Internet in real-time and exclusively compiled by computer algorithms.

The media station *Breaking The News* deals with the world of news. Up-to-date reports from the Internet are immediately transmitted in an exhibition space. The visitor can create news on any conceivable theme and receive comprehensive insight into current or up-to-date news of the world focused on your own interests. In addition he or she becomes a news-jockey by juggling virtually with films, texts, sounds and pictures. *Breaking The News* can be seen as a game with surprising coincidences, accidents and mistakes. It provokes paradoxical irritations and unseen content but also conscious disorientations emerge.

Beside the special and interactive approach taken by Marc Lee there are further examples for dealing with the platform YouTube in an artistic way. 'Untitled' (2007), one of the latest installations by the polish artist Wilhelm Sasnal, consists of a 16-mm film loop with sound, based on found footage of several Elvis performances. Sasnal presents clips from YouTube filmed on the screen of a laptop. The film shows an early performance as well as recordings of one of Elvis' last concerts and further YouTube fragments. As the film goes on, the laptop begins to

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12. One example of this is the superficial documentation about WPS1 ArtBarge, Venice Biennial 2007 (excerpt), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zq0lp_WwZ5M
 13. *Loogie.net* (work in progress), Interactive Network Installation, <http://www.loogie.net>
 14. *Breaking The News – Be a News-Jockey* (2007), Interactive Media Installation, <http://www.news-jockey.com/>, <http://www.1go1.net>

rotate slowly on its own axis. Beside the installation defined by a film projection the film itself deals with found footage, the browser window and a moving pedestal. This document shows the historic and diverse contents of the media archive YouTube.

An actual example and cultural document of YouTube's viral roots is the music video for the Weezer song 'Pork and Beans', directed by Mathew Cullen of the Motion Theory production studio that counted more than 4 million views on YouTube a week after its release May 23, 2008.¹⁵ The video, a compilation of images from the most successful YouTube videos and innovative amateur video ideas, seems to get more popular than the song itself. It is an extraordinary homage to viral video, integrating dozens of viral stars in a total reference to YouTube and its power as a medium. Additionally, by featuring those stars again in the newly produced parts of the video that was shot during one day they also preserve some of the dignity they might have lost by publishing the original amateur video.

These three examples show how YouTube and Internet video can be used as a source for disparate images, cultural surveillance and inspiration. It is interesting which clips are re-incarnated by the format and community of YouTube and how those clips might influence artistic practice.

Beside seeing in YouTube a resource for video that can be used as footage or just inspiration there are more aspects in the so-called Web 2.0 technologies that point to new forms, ways, methods of access, presentation, curating and archiving of digital network-based video¹⁶ in general and the question: What is the challenge posed by dealing with and curating network-based video today?

Answers to this question of curatorial practice between public and software have been already developed since the early internet-based art in the 1990s and have constantly been actualised. As Christine Paul summarizes 'Internet art has inspired a variety of dreams about the future of artistic and curatorial practice, among them the dream of a more or less radical reconfiguration of traditional models and 'spaces' for accessing art... With its inherent flexibility and possibilities for customisation and indexing, the digital medium potentially allows for an involvement of the audience in the curatorial process – a 'public curation' that promises to construct more 'democratic' forms of filtering.'¹⁷ This means networks systems and digital media will and already have changed the practice of curating. I would agree to some extent, as long as we speak about the presentation of digital media, as well as a dynamic idea of an exhibition that includes the visitor actively: the curatorial attention itself has moved from the

15. Weezer, *Pork and Beans* (2008), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=muP9eH2p2PI>

16. I am here choosing the term 'network-based' because it refers not only to the internet but also includes local networks in exhibition spaces or closed networks between institutions.

17. Christine Paul, 'Flexible Contexts, Democratic Filtering and Computer-Aided Curating: Models for Online Curatorial Practice', in Joasia Krysa (ed.) *Curating Immateriality: The Work of the Curator in the Age of Network Systems*, DATA Browser vol. 3, Brooklyn/New York: Autonomedia, 2006.

object to processes and dynamic networks.¹⁸ The role of the curator traditionally seen as a gatekeeper, filter or even 'DJ of Art'¹⁹ can be understood as a provider of cultural context²⁰ for certain artistic activities. But not only has the practice of curating been changed – the understanding of the public has also developed. The visitor or user is to be understood, in a phrase of Jacques Rancière's, as an 'emancipated spectator'²¹. The user itself takes over filtering functions, takes part in a personal or even public selection process. Network-based video as other media art on the Internet allows new forms of research, production, presentation and education. That is first given by an easy access to the media of an institution over the Internet. Second, it allows sharing, searching, filtering and indexing by metadata, categories or tags. As all media is in a digital format it offers new ways of analyzing, for example, frames, scenes, comments or views. Network-based videos function also as footage by contextualising and combining sources in different media (video, text, image).

Different exhibition displays are possible; the artwork itself can exist in different versions. Presentations can differ from projections, screens or even user interfaces and templates, videos can appear in different formats. A constant selection and access of programs can be managed and organised by play lists or RSS feeds. This allows on-demand views within an exhibition as well as creating schedules; scenes, fragments and embedding distributed media. Lately there have been a number of interesting projects such as the software KURATOR, a collaborative project developed by Joasia Krysa and Duncan Shingleton, or the TAGallery by CONT3XT.NET that are based on current ideas and technologies.²²

An exhibition that also made use of the dynamics given by a network-based infrastructure and new curatorial approach was the exhibition *MindFrames. Media Study at Buffalo 1973-1990* at ZKM | Karlsruhe (2006/2007). This exhibition at ZKM Karlsruhe provided for the first time a comprehensive overview from the 1960s to the 1980s, a time which was so decisive for the development of media art and is still influential today. During a period when there was not yet any university which was explicitly devoted to media art, at the same time as making its theoretical analysis a component of the curriculum, Gerald O'Grady founded the Department of Media Study at the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1973. The entire spectrum of media art – ranging from photographic images to slide installations, from music to film and video performances, from film to film installations, from videotape to video environments, and from computer graphics to interactive installations – was investigated, made a reality, and taught in the 1970s and 80s, by the structuralist avant-garde film makers Hollis Frampton, Tony Conrad, and Paul Sharits; the documentary film maker

18. Joasia Krysa, 'Introduction', in Joasia Krysa (ed) *Curating Immateriality: The Work of the Curator in the Age of Network Systems*, DATA Browser vol. 3, Brooklyn/New York: Autonomedia, 2006.

19. Florian Waldvogel, 'Is the curator the DJ of Art?', in Christoph Tannert/Ute Tischler (eds) *Men in Black. Handbook of Curatorial Practice*, Frankfurt/Main: Revolver, 2004.

20. Trebor Scholz, 'The Participatory Challenge', in Joasia Krysa (ed.) *Curating Immateriality: The Work of the Curator in the Age of Network Systems*, DATA Browser vol. 3, Brooklyn/New York: Autonomedia 2006, <http://www.collectivate.net/the-participatory-challenge>

21. Jacques Rancière, 'The emancipated spectator', *Artforum* (March, 2007).

22. KURATOR and TAGallery as well as other models are presented in: CONT3XT.NET (Sabine Hochrieser, Michael Kargl, Franz Thalmeier), *circulating contexts. CURATING MEDIA/NET/ART*, Wien 2007.

James Blue; and the legendary video artists Steina and Woody Vasulka, as well as Peter Weibel. All of these figures have subsequently been canonised and represented in the show. This exhibition about this unique context and its protagonists did not only fulfil the classic mission of the museum (to act as a cultural memory), but offered at the same time an outlook. The teachings, ideas, and concepts of that time were made accessible via the studio laboratory conceived just for this exhibition, which make it possible to study and experience the time-based art of the moving image in a novel fashion. Access was provided in the form of a digital archive, making it possible for artists to study numerous artistic productions, theoretical texts, letters, photographs, documents, and so forth.

The vast amount of works and material included in the exhibition were structured into three sections: The *static exhibition* defined by single presentations, installations and classic galleries, the *dynamic exhibition* characterised by 4 screening rooms (Film, Video, Music, Documentary), a large 3-channel projection screen and as well as corridor with a dynamic digital image gallery. Outside each of these venues informed a LCD-Screen of the precise schedule – by hour and minute – of what was, at that moment, on-screen, as well as a listing of what would be shown afterwards. There were also two other electronic displays that announced the schedule of all dynamic content programs. Finally a central studio laboratory allowed visitors – in the sense of an *on-demand exhibition* – through different interfaces to access, analyze, research and individually self-curate videos and materials by each of the artists.

This flexibility in access and presentation – for instance, the schedule of each of the 4 screening rooms could change on immediate basis – was possible through a server and network system²³ designed by Robert O’Kane, programmer and network administrator at Academy of Media Art Cologne (KHM). His network structure allowed an auto-conversion of different video formats into the MPEG2-standard²⁴ as well as the direction of all dynamic content areas. To allow flexibility in programming a MYSQL-database kept track of the enormous inventory of materials of which *MindFrames* was comprised. As the dynamic part of the exhibition was server-based using standard network protocols, its program could be maintained from anywhere in the world even if the server was located at ZKM Karlsruhe.

Beside this dynamic program there have been video jukeboxes and further interactive stations installed in the central studio laboratory developed by ZKM. The video jukeboxes were operated by a touchscreen and a flash-website. With selection of a video on the touchscreen, information associated with the video was presented, while over a second video output the appropriate video was played and projected. In practice these jukeboxes functioned like

23. The system was developed on a LAMP-Server with pre-installed network protocols that was connected to the playout stations (Thin-Clients based on the Geekbox-Software and MPEG-Cards). Robert O’Kane’s developments were based on a similar streaming system developed by Arne Grässer at ZKM Karlsruhe.

24. The MPEG2 video codec was selected because of the possibility to present videos in an interlaced mode – an important capacity especially in regards to the media and videos by The Vasulkas.

conventional playing devices but with appropriate selection menus and representable background information.

Also exceptional were video analysis stations dedicated to the structuralist films of Paul Sharits and Hollis Frampton as well as a tabloid interface for Gerald O’Grady. These likewise particularly interesting interfaces, developed for the exhibition together with media artist and scientist David Link, had to access all together in very short time a large volume of graphic data in order to permit treatment and/or a use in real time. For this reason the software was written in the object-oriented programming language C++ and open GL. All tools were designed with a graphically simple surface to ensure an easy use and operation.

This exhibition and presentation was meant to be the foundation for a new orientation of presentation, when the Web 2.0 revolution has formulated the media question anew. *MindFrames* was founded on an encompassing notion of the ways in which to organise and define the constellation of roles that museums might play in the presentation of the arts of the moving image, individually or in collaborative concurrent interaction. It raised questions such as what respective roles curators and visitors take, and to what extent a program needs to be defined or open for personal choice – especially in regards to moving images. The show turned the visitor into an explorer and partly a curator – to whatever degree they wished. *Mindframes* was a model that allowed because of its largely digital content to experiment with change and different presentation forms within an exhibition its period and physical space.

Finally, I doubt that software filter and user involvement will replace the curator in the future. But curators are more and more confronted with a large amount of media production – YouTube is just one example for that. They definitely depend on new tools and methods to gain filtered information. Collaborative work and publishing among experts and users – as an alternative to the traditional filter provided by the artworld operating system of institutions, private galleries, critics, magazines, and books – is one important approach to influence a personal, subjective choice and even in the handling of large digital archives today. Alternatively, the institution of curatorship becomes an intimidating search for a needle in a haystack. In another sense network systems can also be understood and used as tools for curating, presentation, education and mediation of art in a digital form. Cultural institutions, online and offline, will still be necessary to provide a context, to function as a provider or archive. The roles of curator and user remain up for discussion and interchange.

CHAUVINIST AND ELITIST OBSTACLES AROUND YOUTUBE AND PORNTUBE

A CASE STUDY OF HOME-MADE PORN DEFENDED AS 'VIDEO ART'

ANA PERAICA

Recently a Croatian pop singer Severina Vučković has won a charge against Internet portal Index.hr for releasing her stolen home porn video. The lengthy court case, concerned two main arguments, the first one of which was lost. The second claim of releasing copyrighted photo material was easily won in light of recent laws on copyright, but also with new agencies defending rights of image libraries.¹

But, what I find interesting is the initial argument posed by Severina's lawyers – that the video it was an art piece stolen and streamed. This strange formulation of (online) video art being actually porn was unfortunately badly defended in regard to the law of authorial rights and had no support at all amidst artist communities. But, it would still be a challenging idea to try to re-define art in terms of home-made works, uploaded somewhere on the Internet. What can be considered as art in those cases? And where is the author? Who is the public?

To further explore these questions I would try to give some idea of the porn that had an author, also an amazingly widespread public, but still could not be defended as art. It was a culture shock for the whole nation, not only as a home-made video porn was stolen and released.² It was a video by very popular singer whose songs were supportive of neo-Catholicism, local ethnology and a bit of international turbo folk. In a way they were contradictory to all her previous work.

The public was uninformed of the medium, but gradually it was evident that a video has educated the nation technically; at the first; the number of downloads was nearly the same as the number of citizens (rarely someone knew how to save and store the video offline); TV has reported gypsies made a great enterprise selling blank DVDs labelled with singer's name (rarely, someone could understand the medium does not contain the video); the singer has asked 'all copies to be returned to her' (retaining a very materialistic and inappropriate notion of this digital medium). The event has shown – Croats were passing a phase of learning the new media but also a kind of sexual revolution. Finally they were interested in seeing more than sports...

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1. The portal Index.hr was charged a fine of 100,000 kuna and court expenses, with an obligation of publishing an apology to the singer in all daily presses.
 2. Paris Hilton, Pamela Anderson, et al.

It was a total hit, which turned out to be not only because of its suspicious origin (a theft), but also because it has immediately gotten itself a mass public unknown to the art world and quite a nationalistic discourse in its eventual interpretation, as if the whole nation was looking through the peep hole.

Mass 'Art'

The first problem I would like to address concerning the online video in this essay is an institutional definition of art connected to the problem the Internet has posed in the last decade as most of technological tools – after being used as rather experimentally by scientists and artists – come completely absorbed by real-space institutions via processes of nationalisation and mass-ification of the market.

Mass availability of equipment previously belonging only to the technological elite (owners of equipment) deconstructed the exclusive space of many professions: the photographer, the cameraman first of all. But has it also deconstructed its art? Flusser would argue that mere owning of or access to the equipment does not make a person a photographer (and let's broaden the issue; nor a video cameraman, etc.), as knowing how to point and click is not knowing the medium. At the same time, it has made a totally different society producing amazing amounts of images no one looks at, professional or not. And these images actually reveal more about society itself than professional photography or video has ever done. It still enjoys looking through the peep holes of well-known people, rather than those unknown.

So, we need to ask, furthermore, which kind of a society is revealed in such images? What are its needs? What an amazing amount of pornography, paedophilia and human trafficking online have taught us, is that we need to face symptoms of a society that was previously not able to express itself, not the society that suddenly emerged. These problems (legal or otherwise) have been there, probably for centuries, only in private spheres. Unfortunately, it reveals a lot even on the previous engagement to prevent such behaviour or practices. As feminism seems to be all the weaker as the facts concerning abuse and women trafficking are becoming visible in higher percentages than ever expected, as UNICEF seems incapable of changing the fact of abuse of children online, it seems – the whole recent history of art attempting to re-socialise and effect change has done nothing, as well.

Popular culture simply shows different points from where what we used to call art still, after decades of its need for a social change, after all of its activism, still stays connected to own 19 century autistic definition of *l'art pour l'art*. Though, why would that be something less than expected if the whole history of photography, produced by an elite, if a movie history, also produced by an elite, has not managed to make an impact on a popular visual culture. Yet how do we know this? It has become visible...

Sex and Nationalism

Immediately after the release, a subsequent development has made Croatian nationalists happy: reports that Severina's video is one of the best international porn movies which has as

a result made her national heroine.³ Though, immediately after a discourse has arisen to decide if a Serbian video with TV star Silvana Mančić was better, advancing the scandalous idea that it is Serbs having better sex – which is a political claim par excellence, if not in fact the ultimate one. Severina used the nationalism rising around her and released the song *Hrvatica* (Croatian woman, my translation), with an accompanying video in which she is wrapped in the state flag, branding herself with sexuality rather than the music.

She has been criticised by opponents of nationalism as a symbol of Croatian corruption, and therefore instrumentalised again; instead of branding sex in national terms, where writers were describing the video with discursive dryness and consequential impotence that is the inevitable outcome in circumstances when someone attempts to interpret and theorise sex (which leads me to conclude it seems plausible that 'only nationalists do sex').⁴

But, at the same time when Serbs, nationalists, and for that matter also intellectuals incensed by this surge of nationalism via sex were waiving and interpreting the video, some (intellectual) discourses have remained silent. Besides later being represented as the 'sexual revolution in Croatia' and finishing up with graffiti on a primary school in Zagreb, where pupils wrote 'Thank you Seve!' it has underlined a certain political and artistic elitism:

1. First of all, feminists were not objecting to the case of a scandal centred around female sexuality, for the obvious reason that the pop singer was not in other way (socially, economically, or even aesthetically...) disadvantaged, which resulted in quite a strange situation in which feminists could be seen as only defending the asocial, poor, ugly.
2. The second, the unique situation in the court, where Severina has attempted to define her charges against the portal 'stealing the *video art*' has not provoked the attention of the art world of a post-socialist country currently having problems with copyright in general, not even mentioning art videos.

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3. Titles in national newspapers emphasize her nationality, quoting 'Performance hrvatske pop zvijezde s njenim oženjenim ljubavnikom biznismenom pokazuje entuzijazam kakav nedostaje većini njenih američkih kopija,' / The performance of a *Croatian* pop star, with her married lover, the businessman, shows an enthusiasm missing to most of *American* copies.' (my translation and emphasis) which clearly shows reasons why actually she has become famous as 'Croatian icon', while local newspapers list the city of birth. Furthermore, a joke reads 'Hercegovinians [Croats in Bosnia, publicly seen as the most nationalistic] were asked if they would have sex with Severina. They replied – never again'.
 4. Borislav Mikulic: Media pulp, Severina u porocnom krugu medija (*Zarez, dvotjednik za društvena i kulturna zbivanja*, no 174, February 2006) describes her consequently as 'Jednako kao i Ceca, i Seve je agent i proizvod nacionalistickog crnila, rata i kriminala, a njezina prihvatljivost je indikator prerade tog napretka' – 'similarly to Ceca, Seve is an agent of nationalistic darkness, war and crime, and her acceptability is an indicator only of the recycling of the progress.' (my translation). She defines her work as 'real-sex performans, a ne art-porno' – 'real sex performance, not an art form' (my translation).

So, two interesting discussions which could have arisen into debate on a huge scale; a taboo of women's sexuality and a video art, were not even started. They were prevented by popularity of the singer, engagement of the nation and branding. As though to defend the video's own thesis that it is art, a number of sexologists were attempting to interpret the video as radical. Finally, they concluded there is nothing new to be seen, as was expected... how could it be after thousands of years of civilization doing things the same way (or maybe there is really some possibility not explored in two thousands years of persistent practice by almost all individuals ever born)? But the symptoms of sexuality were researched, of course in the arts, starting with Bataille and in culture even more.⁵

Copyrighted Penis

The video in question was, at the time first charge was raised, not defended by video artists or producers, using the opportunity to speak on the authorial rights in arts, rather it was seen as a joke... obviously, besides, it had a mass public and served nationalist discourse. But it has shown still another status – the content of the video was pre-cultural in a way that it cannot be subsumed into art.

For the last part of the conclusion it would be interesting to compare Severina's video to a video of artists having sex, though the latter are copyright protected and unavailable – as if there is something really radical in having sex... Well, at least that field of human practice is older than humanity and therefore – free of politics, which, again does not infer that politics, the market and culture are free of sex. On the contrary...

To see how this high/low and informed/primitive dynamic works, I would like to analyze this assumption with two different cases: one regarding the porn video of Croatian pop singer Severina and the other which includes her as well, again – recycling between popular and elite culture, with their formal replacement.

To try to interpret this phenomenon, while not making a historical overview, I would try to contrast the role of the video in popular and elite culture. The enormous resemblance of a Let 3 video featuring Severina to the recent one of a famous artist Marina Abramović – both recalling Mapplethorpe's *Man in Polyester Suit* (1980) – is leaving me astonished in terms what actually recycles what: is it high culture recycling a low one or the other way around?

Due to the inner discursive system of artworks the relationship of Mapplethorpe and Abramović seems to be intelligible (as art is what has an inner narrative structure of art history), although this relation seems quite disconnected to the popular video of the Let 3 group. But it does not diminish the problem of the origin: namely, the problem that arises when we ask ourselves what actually is the original and what is the copy in the visual culture. It is not only a question of whether it was Let 3 or Marina Abramović being first, but actually: was it Mapplethorpe or any other man pissing on the street? And how did it come to be that the motif of an open slit on trousers exposing an organ for urination becomes a picture of sexuality and

moreover the picture that is visually quoted in artistic practice as signifying sexuality? So how could – from the point of the obvious banality of represented primary needs and impulses – Severina's video ever be 'innovative'?

But, to explore the difference further, we need to distinguish between the image of the open slit in the popular video of Let 3 (where it serves the spectacle and scandal) from the quote of Abramović (where it refers to the institutionalisation of the very same image in elite visual culture): its displacement (as with Duchamp's displacement) which makes it simply; art. One thing functions for sure, the image of sexuality, but even more the image of primary needs (to pee) are, after a whole century still – a taboo. They are taboo not because 'cyborgs do not go to the toilet' as Sue Golding once formulated a new society, but because they are animalistic and in that way pre-cultural or even counter-cultural. So sex is also... pre-cultural, pre-political and it is for that reason scary to all progressive thinkers (including leftists, as the interpretation of Severina video has shown). Though – it is not a taboo for nationalists, for sure.

A step further, uncovering titles of works by Let 3 – *Kurcem u celo* (Croatian: Hitting forehead with the dick) with the album entitled *Bombardiranje Srbije I Čačka* (Croatian: Bombing of Serbia and Čačak), but also Marina Abramović's *Balkan Epics* shows that both contexts are deeply ethnological and nationalistic, therefore – oriented to the right. So, from there it is not a problem if the video porn of Severina, with no title, was advocated and interpreted in terms of a nationalistic discourse. Finally, it is only the nation that profits from sex, the aim is the procreation of the nation, of course, within its own political boundaries.

Copyrighted Video

While the sexual practice seems very unique, the visual culture is obviously splitting into two fields – but it is important to note the way in which this split occurs. In elite cultures sex, if it ever appears, seems to have different purpose or idea than it does in popular culture, where sex only generates sex. That would mean that if there were be any outside goal to the Severina video it would be art, but even kids writing graffiti on the school knew sex only leads to sex.

While one can hardly find Abramović's video online searching p2p portals or Emule++, Severina's video is very popular and highly rated on Porntube (a version of youtube). Also, Let 3's musical video is available on Youtube. What obviously differentiates these three 'cultures' is the availability of video and its ends; the matter is essentially that art behaves as if copies are legitimate while it quests for originality. Art keeps a track of own copies, while popular culture does not – in the latter case, all copies are there to raise the price of the product or to broaden the commercial potential. But is this something different than we expected? It is only the real world appearing online.

5. Georges Bataille, *Tears of Eros* (City Light Publishers, 1989).

REFERENCE

Bataille, Georges. *Tears of Eros*, San Francisco: City Light Publishers, 1989.

YOUTUBE.WORLD, OR: JEDER MANN SEIN EIGENES AVATAR

KEITH SANBORN

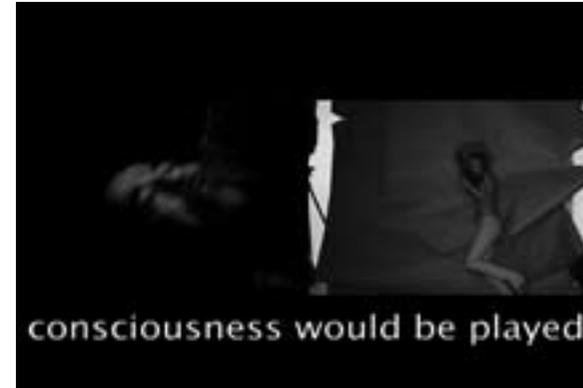


Figure 1: From 'Equivalences' a video installation by Keith Sanborn 2007, MuKhA Media and Monty, Antwerp.

1. In the spectacle, everything promises to be at your disposal: stupefied super-models at least half-naked, powerless tyrants in the final humiliations of their executions. In the digital world, equivalence reigns – that is, the commodity form. Equivalence is presented as equality, democracy, value, power, freedom. It is, in actuality, the source of inequality, the rule of the few, the loss of judgment, powerlessness, unfreedom. It is, unnoticed, horrific in its banality. In place of the encyclopedia, it offers the search engine, for controlled access to pseudo-knowledge. But the digital world sometimes still folds over on itself, escaping the grasp of even its most aggressive handlers, from YouTube.com to the so-called 'People's Republic of China'.

2. The Situationists clearly saw the potential for enslavement in the closed circuit of Cybernetics. But they failed to recognise we would eventually be constrained to engage with this new engine of commodification and control – that it would be not only in the streets, but in the virtual world that the battle for consciousness would be played out. This text is only indirectly a form of resistance. But its apparent nihilism does index the qualitative indifference of the commodity and its equivalences.

3. Since it has existed, the net has operated according to a dialectics of potlatch and recuperation, followed by *détournement*. Hegel slowly revolves, wide-eyed in his grave. Intelligence and generosity bring innovation into the free public sphere, generating prestige. Innovations are exploited for fantastic profits via privatisation and commodification. 'Value adding' converts potlatch to profit motive. But exploiters can be hijacked as well. Marx nods, but retains a

quizzical look. The unquantifiable gift – which ranks givers socially in a community according to the relative quality of their gifts – becomes an object of exchange – which is sold – only to be stolen and re-gifted as a potential poison to the system. Linux becomes Apple OSX, which is hacked into OSx86. Turing wonders why this was not self-evident to all at the outset.

This system of exchange and transformation parallels the linguistic circulation of ‘gift’ among Indo-European languages, though the customs to which it refers, *potlatch* and *kula*, are very widely practiced. In English, ‘gift’ is ‘what is given’; in German ‘Gift’ is ‘poison’. Both, Mauss tells us, devolve from common roots; the association of potlatch and poison is deeply rooted in Indo-European languages and culture. Nietzsche winks – having already spoken of the power of the gift to induce reciprocal obligation. An ancillary logic of scale, which relates quality to quantity, plays itself out in the ingestion of drugs: certain substances, taken in a small dose, have no effect; in a slightly larger dose, they may alleviate pain; in even larger doses they induce ecstasy; above a certain dose, they bring death. The notion of ‘dosage’ forms a part of this linguistic and cultural complex: from the Greek δόσις [dósis]: what is given; later: a specific amount of medicine. The classification of substances as controlled, prescription, or over the counter, refers to the logic of power and of the commodity even more than to the logic of public health.

The dialectics of potlatch, recuperation, and *détournement* can be seen in the imaging of the cyber-tribalism of the 90s as ecstasy becomes exchange: the new body electric celebrated in Mondo 2000 ends up decorating the neo-libertarian pages of *Wired*, pin-ups for the dotcom digerati, nostalgic for a world they never inhabited. We await the final rewiring of *Wired* in the super-downsizing of the US Economy in progress.

4. In the metropolis, transient net-induced cyber-communities are invited to party under marmoreal institutional umbrellas; there and then, they are subjected to loose taxonomy and weak taxidermy, contained and displayed as frail trophies. These transients enter out of curiosity and ambition, but drifters remain ever-drifting, even beyond the grave. They come and they go, leaving their mortal remains behind them, but return to the scene of their annihilation and immortality, the living dead. It should come as no surprise that museums are inhabited by ghosts and that the vengeance of the dead is feared. Is the archive a place of terror for the present, or a rehearsal for future banality?

5. In YouTube.world, we experience the transformation and loss of the qualitative – the personal, the subjective – in the quantitative. And this digitised stance outside the self – *ekstasis* – can be experienced as a transient pleasure, as a form of pseudo-transcendence. The era, which witnessed the rise of the internet, has also seen a parallel rise in gambling and a radical pyramidalisation of the world economy. In the era of 9/11 and Abu-Ghraid, the sole force of law, sacred or profane, experienced by *homo sacer* in the permanent state of exception, has become the law of large numbers. And gambling, like the use of drugs, has roots deep in religion: divination is only gambling in sacred form, or should we say, that gambling is divination for the culture of the commodity. As the tumblers spin, the gambler seems to surf the probability curve: to assume the position of the little man behind the curtain. To win is to become god, at least for a moment.

Even taxation has taken the form of gambling, as the state has come to substitute lotteries, which are arguably voluntary, for the taxation of those most able to pay and to resist paying. The New York State Lottery tells us: ‘You gotta be in it to win it.’ Not only must you cast your lot, in order to gain riches, but you must participate in this statistically skewed system of exchange in order to compensate for your loss of social and economic subjecthood – that is, to exist at all. It is no accident that both gangsters and the state derive large sums of money from protection rackets and gambling – in the words of a friend who used to work in a casino in Las Vegas – the closest thing there is to legalised robbery. Lottery players, voters, the citizens of YouTube.world, (including the residents of Second Life™), all share a common desire for community, for recognition, that they pursue through self-commodification within the fiction of ‘representative’ neo-liberal democracy. They are sadly and equally and willingly self-deceived: casting your vote is a form of annihilation sadly similar to casting your lot. No one wants to read the depressing fine print: solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, short. The gambler/citizen of YouTube.world refuses to recognise the fallacy of the doctrine of the maturity of chances; he continues to salivate, to project desire, to buy in long after any possible reward has been removed from the equation.

6. In a parallel universe, sometimes, impossibly, intersecting with YouTube.world, the Zapatista electronic sit-ins and their successors have shown, that in translating the old mass tactics of the street, large numbers can display collective intelligence – rather than its opposite – to create swarms capable of paralyzing the electronic Leviathan™, to whose terror we otherwise consent. The battle of Seattle reminds us of the importance of the street, as do the ambushes, which have taken place world-wide, against the rituals of Olympic spectacle, that mask the Chinese subjection of Tibet.

7. It might be argued that the form of experience provided by an avatar on Second Life is different from that provided by a YouTube self-posting, but whatever their phenomenological differences, they are in actuality two forms of the same pseudo-agency; what we might call ‘YouTube.world’. Following Debord, we might designate them the *diffuse* and the *concentrated* forms of pseudo-agency. YouTube.com – the diffuse form – retains the gritty DIY aesthetic of publicly projecting one’s self-commodification in the exhibitionistic grammatical second person via the experience of perspective-governed, though digitally pliable, chunks of time. Second Life – the concentrated form – with its grammatically first person narcissistic pseudo-intimacy, quickly sells you professional services to shape your image as a ‘Resident’ of utterly commodified space. Snakefinger watches blankly as irony drains away.

The avatar – the term most immediately associated with Second Life™ – is historically the older form of pseudo-agency, both in net usage and as a form of mask, or puppet: that is, a form of fetish, of cathected erotic energy. It can only exist within a closed system that assumes its value and regulates its exchange functions. The avatar appears, at first sight, to be something trivial, and easily understood. Analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very strange thing, full of metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties. As a use value, there is nothing mysterious about it, whether we consider it from the point of view that by its properties it is capable of *seeming* to satisfy human desires by prosthetic means, or from the point of view that those properties are the product of the coding of human labour.

As bandwidth increases and 3D models and modelling tools are further diffused at higher resolution, we might predict that the two forms of pseudo-agency currently operational will eventually merge as did the two forms of the spectacle – after the fall of the Berlin Wall – into an *integrated* form of pseudo-agency. Perhaps, in a dialectical reversal, the final consolidation of the great firewall of China, or the completion of the one in Russia will be required to trigger that quiet cataclysm. But predictions buy into the paradigm of the gambler's prophetic fallacies, and the merging of the first-person and second person forms of address will require qualitative transformations, not simply the quantitative ones enabled by higher bit rates. And should be recalled that China's material precursor to its current firewall was no more effective at repelling invaders than the border wall at the US Mexican border, or at breaking spirits than Israel's architectural cipher of apartheid.

The text-driven interface of YouTube.com and its list of keyword-associated pre-recorded psychodramas may wither away into smiley-faced puppetry, or the totalising banality of the first person interface may grow in narrative sophistication. But the underlying data base structures, which guarantee their ultimate equivalence, will remain. An integrated form of pseudo-agency may require not only a mutation in the form of narrative, but changes in the relationship between data base structures and interface as well. We have already lived through the bankruptcy of opposing substructure and superstructure.

For the moment, we remain interchangeable wizards with the curtain pulled back by a noisy troublemaking meatpuppet, sitting at the consoles of the dispassionately utopian, networked successors to the HAL 9000.



Figure 2: HAL 9000 in Stanley Kubrick's film 2001: A Space Odyssey, 1968.

8. In the cold, totalizing world of Second Life™, the possibility of punking the system with lo-res 2D modeling offers only the mild *frisson* of neo-primitivism. Resistance through indulging in unconventional personal behaviour (surrealism, dada, fluxus) similarly finds little purchase in a world where everything, including interactive Kiddie Porn, is for sale. Even the theft of virtual objects is uninteresting, unless it can be anchored to the so-called 'real world' of property, aka 'First Life'.

The most ingenious attempts to detourn Second Life™ by the art world only take on meaning when they are removed from its totalizing realm, for irony implies a kind of doubling back, a folding over on itself of culture and context, where a momentary singularity reflects a larger condition. Where equivalence reigns – where qualitatively identical multiplications constantly coexist – how can meaningful difference be established? *The 13 Most Beautiful Avatars* project

of Eva and Franco Mattes aka 0100101110101101.ORG is one such problematic example. In-world, it functions largely as an art world insider (hence outsider) joke in search of an audience. As a self-conscious form of *Warholism* it exists in a kind of vacuum, for the material world, previously required for establishing an ironic distance from the commodity form via its debilitated representation, is absent, except as the re-mapping of a 3-D form, to decorate the untouched dollhouse walls of a virtual gallery. Outside Second Life, in the art world sector of First Life, the shift in scale and the translation from 3-D to 2-D form becomes meaningful as do the art historical references, but only for those with a modicum of in-world knowledge. Their re-staging of famous performance art pieces engages with much the same shifts between in-world and 'real' world meanings, an attempt at subversive miniaturisation. Like the originals, these re-enactments can exist only as stated intention, heresay, or documentation, though recorded game play has a special relationship to the notion of documentation.

An attempt at even softer engagement with the experience of Second Life™ is Cao Fei's *I, Mirror*. Here, machinema is slathered with wanky pop music, for an effect of nostalgia. Not exactly the *silence éternel des espaces infinies*. More, the Sophie Calle gambit, but without obvious personal risk and only the faintest of the scent of sexuality: that is, human interaction. *I, Mirror* may, however, be an accurate, if sad, index to the place for personal subjectivity in the blogless privileged cultural sector of one country, two systems. It is thin on the big screen and fragile on the smallest – the Youtube screen. Perhaps fragility is underrated; perhaps not.

9. In YouTube.world, the clearest, if not the most interesting victory for hijacking of which I am aware, was the creation of anti-SUV commercials on a corporate site devoted to exploiting the DIY aesthetic of Youtube.com. Users were allowed to create their own SUV commercials from ready made clips and their own texts. I don't think users were even lured by the explicit chance to move to the big time, *American Idol* style. In a cultural laboratory of quick mutations, user-generated commercials quickly passed through the stage of competitive formal innovation, to applied merchandizing to social protest: potlatch, recuperation, *détournement*. A classical example of under-estimating the audience and misunderstanding the stages of cultural evolution, or a sophisticated attempt to draw hip consumers even at the risk of invoking their wrath? The anti-SUV commercials were up for a very long time, implying either that the company didn't care, the webmaster was lazy, or more likely that having failed to account for this possibility, they were forced to gut it out—G.W. Bush style—in order to save face, to give the appearance of detached omniscience. It is the stare of detached omniscience we must learn to return if we are to make meaning and create value under these conditions.

The now venerable instance of the Zapatista collective denial of service attacks as a form of protest, remains without a sequel in the more radically commodified realms of YouTube.world. The highly controlled conditions and complex interface of Second Life™ make mass gatherings difficult, though hacks spring eternal. In YouTube.com™, even direct attacks only drive more hits, stirring profitable controversy, thus increasing ad revenues. The Warholian principle of no publicity being bad publicity has been translated from the artisanal creation of fame at the 'factory' to getting paid for advertising hits at the corporate server farm. Small inroads have occasionally been made by adding false keywords to videos in order to lure astray

viewers searching for the Saddam execution telephone video, or the Paris Hilton sex tapes. But this tactic is essentially an adaptation of the ubiquitous and conventional false meta-tags used to attract bots, and deceptive subject lines used by spammers. More engaging, if equally apolitical, has been the meta-critique of irony in Paper Lilly's celebrated *Ban Sarcasm from YouTube!* and the recuperation of the sincerity and authenticity of the confessional form in the lonelygirl series. Each masters the prevailing mopey late adolescent psychology of YouTube.world for fun and profit.

The creation by the Yes Men of a Union Carbide website, apologizing for Bhopal and offering reparations, created a temporary rent in the fabric of ubiquity. As such, it got a quick smack down and the ISP temporarily lost its access to the net via its upstream provider. This gesture, while effective in leveraging media attention, was somewhat of a strategic anachronism, since it was clearly possible even before the advent of YouTube.world. Its parallels are to be found in spoofing of website identities, used for profit or politics (wikipedia.com, Georgebush.org, or innumerable phishing sites). It is, in that sense, historically less advanced than even the venerable Zapatista browser attacks, which preceded it by several years. It veers more towards pranksterly direct action than collective protest.

Of all I have seen on YouTube.com, only *In My Language* by A. M. Baggs, unquestionably breaks the frame to return the blank stare of power; for, it is dedicated to 'all other people who are considered non-persons or non-thinking.' I can think of no better description of the perceived condition of its 'users' by those running the show in YouTube.world.

10. In place of one-way broadcast communication (What appears is good; what is good appears) the 'new' spectacle offers inter-passivity, pseudo-agency: that I appear is good; it is good that I appear. Through the small shift to the personal pronoun, star commodity status is within my grasp, but the price of admission into the spectacle is self-commodification. *Jeder Mann sein eigenes Avatar*, as John Heartfield might have said. The world is within my grasp in YouTube.world, therefore in order to grasp myself I must become a part of YouTube.world. But this participation requires me to assume a form suitable for YouTube.world, to learn its language of subjection. Creating resistance requires bringing forward the background; it requires questioning the assumption of the universal good of YouTube.world.

'Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain,' says the pathetic Wizard of Oz, when Toto exposes him at work with his instruments for projecting power. To ascend to the all-powerful small screen, you must not only add prosthetic technology, but downsize yourself for cloning. For the subject of YouTube.world is a scalable, though primarily miniaturised clone; you must be reborn as an *homunculus*. Identity politics – the expression of the self as a member of a class of persons – has been recuperated within the form of the avatar. The Enlightenment subject returns, shorn of authentic difference, as we agree to agree to agree to a limited set of possibilities. We agree to subject our collective undifferentiated selves to being voted on, to being rated, to being ranked in popularity: a sick scenario born of some junior high school nightmare, reality tv, or an anonymous market research report.

Themroc! Themroc!! Themroc!!!

11. In the current phase of the exploitation of user-supplied content in YouTube.world, 15 nano-seconds of fame are exchanged for consigning the aura of individual subjectivity to the ads that frame it. In a necessary irony, my work functions by translating the offerings of YouTube.world to other contexts, repurposing them as commentary upon that context, demonstrating, if nothing else, that there is a world *beyond* YouTube.world.

Since this unauthorised translation violates the principle of 'host' ownership, I don't necessarily wish for my efforts to return directly to the scene of the crime, though more for strategic than for legal reasons. I can only assume they will eventually drift into that cultural mausoleum, by some other agent, when their impact is utterly lost. But that is, perhaps, tautologous: their very presence on YouTube signifies their loss of impact.

My purpose is to offer an exploded view of the social structures at work in and through the public circulation of images. 'Explosion' implies a scattering of the pieces, a coming apart at the seams and the creation of unexpected patterns in the tipsy juxtaposition of the component parts of the thing subjected to critical force.

Benjamin spoke of an idea of translation that allows the original to shine forth via the refractive process of passage from one language to another. I am interested in processes that refract one another, creating echoes, divergences, convergences, bringing the shifts themselves into view. Images migrate; texts migrate. This migration causes invaluable and otherwise invisible shifts in perspective. And these shifts make possible changes in understanding of the shifting patterns of the worlds.



Figure 3: New York State Lottery winners, and the motto.

THE FUTURE OF FESTIVALS AN INTERVIEW WITH ARJON DUNNEWIND

SABINE NIEDERER

*Arjon Dunnewind is the founder and director of Impakt Festival (<http://www.impact.nl>), a yearly festival in audiovisual arts that takes place in Utrecht, the Netherlands. Since the eighties, Arjon has strived to make a progressive and current festival, devoted to bringing together various art forms. The 2008 edition of Impakt was titled *YourSpace*, and was an attempt to redefine media art and the festival in the age of what he referred to as *Society 2.0*. As one of the many people who has been involved with Impakt throughout the years, I decided to ask its director some questions about his views on the future of media art in the Netherlands, and Impakt festival in particular.*

Sabine Niederer: When was Impakt festival founded? What did the art scene look like at that moment and what kind of contribution could Impakt make to that cultural landscape?

Arjon Dunnewind: I was a student at Utrecht Art Academy and I was interested in the relationships between art forms, especially between film and art. In the beginning of the 20th century Surrealism, Dada, Russian Constructivism and Futurism radically changed the art scene and showed the potential of thinking across platforms. In the sixties, experimental filmmaking was in pace with developments in society, with new emerging music styles and with the call for change from a young generation. In the eighties, the art world seemed to be segregated again. Film and video were not regarded as autonomous media by most Dutch Art Academies. Major Film Festivals stuck to a very conventional definition of 'cinema' instead of having a very open approach to 'the moving image' or 'media art'. Museums didn't pay much attention to video. And when they did, it was approached as a marginal niche phenomenon within the arts.

With the Impakt Festival I wanted to create a platform for new and innovative approaches. A place where art, music, film, performance and video could merge and where artists could see what other artists in other media were doing. I wanted to give the audience an opportunity to enjoy works of art that were beautiful, important and influential but almost impossible to see because they were hidden in archives, museum collections or only available through foreign distributors.

SN: Did you encounter difficulties from the start? Was it well received by artists, press, fellow institutions, curators, funding bodies, audience?

AD: The main difficulties were organisational. Finding the people, the spaces, and the money to organise it. The first festivals were organised in the framework of the program of Ekko, a student-run cultural centre in Utrecht. Ekko provided Impakt with the basics to start and further develop the program. In many ways it was a good place to start, open-minded, with



Figure 4: Chinese oracle bone.



Figure 5: Leviathan.

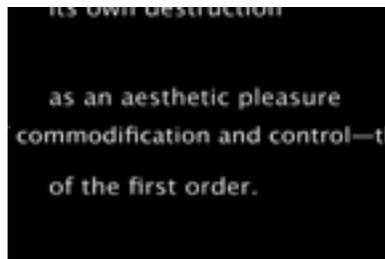


Figure 6: Stills from 'Equivalences' a video installation by Keith Sanborn 2007, MuKha Media and Monty, Antwerp.

volunteers, equipment and an audience. There were downsides, too. Many didn't see it as place where interesting art projects could be presented. The press found it easy to label it as marginal and obscure. Because it was volunteer-run it was difficult to have continuity and the screening and exhibition facilities were mediocre.

Where the press has always had difficulties to pigeonhole, Impakt's fellow institutions have valued Impakt from the beginning for showing missing links in the arts and offering specialist programming that they couldn't provide themselves.

It took us a while to find out how to approach funders and where exactly our ideas would be best appreciated. Art funds have always supported us better than music funds. Film funds rejected us in the beginning because they didn't see the importance of the developments in the arts for 'cinema'. Luckily that has changed now although their contribution is still small in comparison with the art funds.

I think the audience has liked the mix that Impakt offered from the beginning. Even when people had their specific interests, be in it music, arts, film, etc, they were still interested to see what was happening in other areas in the arts.

SN: Over time, did you feel the changing media landscape affected the role of the festival? How so?

AD: Absolutely. The mix that Impakt offered got more common in the nineties. Video overtook the museum halls. Artists started getting involved with cinema. Digital media and the Internet entered the scene. Other festivals were started. Existing film festivals opened themselves to developments in art, new media and music. Impakt was still special in its thematic approach, our focus on 'off-stream' developments and in the way the festival was designed but it became more difficult to communicate our uniqueness to the audience.

SN: How did you respond to or deal with these newly emerging media and art forms?

AD: Most important here is of course the Internet and network related projects. We have used all kinds of formats to present these projects: exhibitions, artist presentations and computer terminals where the audience could navigate through the projects. The latter proved to be less and less satisfactory for both artists and audience. They artists missed the exchange with the audience and the opportunity to talk with fellow artists. For these reasons, we found that a presentation with an artist talk or panel is a much better solution. Projects with an installation approach, which interact with or relate to its surroundings are of course best presented in an exhibition.

SN: This year, you decided to make the 'future of festivals', a theme in your festival. How did this come about?

AD: Our media landscape is changing rapidly. Developments on the Internet are a key factor, but there's more going on. The way people relate to art and culture is changing, as well as how, when and where they 'consume', interact with and enjoy it. The relationship between culture and, for instance, commerce and technology is constantly changing. Certain qualities of the festival format are becoming less important, while others remain strong or even gain importance.

Film festivals have a tendency to be conservative. I think they could be more adventurous in their way of programming. Art manifestations, museums and alternative exhibitions

spaces on the other hand are very open to using new and changing formats, but they sometimes fail when it comes to bringing across the ideas behind the works in an effective way and creating a dialogue with the audience.

I still favor the festival format because of its density and the possibilities to create meaningful exchanges of ideas and a strong synergy between different approaches and art forms. Over the years, Impakt has introduced many new formats and concepts in its program. After organising the 18th Impakt Festival I wanted to take a step back to discuss the strengths and weaknesses and how to further develop the festival and the various other programs Impakt organises. In two meetings with programmers, members of our selection panel, curators and other people involved in programming for Impakt, we discussed various topics related to programming, formats, our relation to our audience and to artists, etc. These were rewarding talks and I thought it would be good to have a similar discussion about questions that concern the festival world and the art scene in general.

SN: What is Society 2.0 and what role does media art play in this new era?

AD: Society 2.0 simply is the world we live it with Web 2.0 as a dominant factor. Society 2.0 is our contemporary media environment. Web 2.0 came with a lot of promises: interaction, participation, exchange, recommendation, adaptation to personal preferences, democratisation, speed, freedom, etc. Should these possibilities and promises be enjoyed or watched with scrutiny? I think Media Art should do both. It can show potential and promote creativity and pluriformity as well as point out situations where the web for instance gives a simplified, limited or distorted version of reality.

SN: How can art institutions use this culture of participation and recommendation? Or shouldn't they?

AD: The whole idea of rating and recommending proved itself to be a useful tool that people use to find what they like faster. But giving the audience what they like is not the main goal of art institutions. In essence, systems of rating and recommending promote what is popular in connection to preferences the viewer already has. This can be very limiting and it conflicts with core tasks art institutions have: to offer things that are new and unknown, to show the off-stream and to encourage people to think out of the box.

Art institutions can use the culture of participation and recommendation and find out how it can serve their goals, by for instance involving their audience with their program in a different way or reach a new audience. Both the festival format and Web 2.0 offer possibilities for exchange, each in their own way. In the Impakt Festival 2008 we blended the offline festival experience with an online environment that was all about commenting, recommending, interaction and exchange. Navigating through a festival and seeing the program can be a different experience when each visitor can share his preferences, the programs he/she attended and the rating. This can be a helpful tool. When it is made visible for all other visitors it can evoke discussion. Artists and organisers can respond to the outcome.

SN: There was a panel on this very topic of the future of festivals at Impakt Festival 2008, what were the most important outcomes of that discussion?

AD: Well, we have good news. There is a future for festivals! Topics in the discussion ranged from very analogue to very virtual. Questions on how to address a local audience and mani-

fest yourself in your field alternated with statements on the difference between film made for the web and film made for a cinema, and ideas on how a festival can successfully merge offline projects with online platforms.

The panel consisted of two Internet initiatives, Submarine Channel and tank.tv and two festivals, the New York Underground Film Festival / Migrating Forms and the Version Festival. Obviously the festivals were actively seeking for ways to use the Internet and the possibilities of Web 2.0 to promote their program and exchange with their audience. But it was interesting to see how also the Internet platforms were trying to connect again with the offline world. For instance, Submarine Channel is bringing its Internet projects back in to the real world by organising an annual festival weekend. The future lies in merging the two worlds while maintaining the specific qualities each world has and using the new possibilities that arise.

SN: Did you also apply this shifting notion of what a festival could or should be to your own festival? What has changed or will change for Impakt?

AD: The changes we discussed prior to the Impakt Festival 2008 only partly related to the topics in the 'Future of Festivals' panel. We also asked ourselves questions about the necessity of a competition program, how to make the festival more personal, how to bring festival themes across, what role curators should play, the size of the festival, etc.

We decided to work with one central theme for the Impakt Festival 2008: YourSpace. This theme was all about how the offline and the online world interrelate and how new social structures develop because of the rise of network sites, how people express themselves and create or enhance identities on the net. It offered a very good starting point for a festival that had both an online and an offline presence.

Curating a festival around a central theme also worked our very fine and we will continue with this. But for instance the way we present our international selection of new films and videos will be changed. The emphasis will be on small and idiosyncratic themes rather than extensive and general. This has to do with the size of the festival and the proportions of the various festival programs to each other. Our so-called Event Nights where film, music, performance and lectures were presented together proved to be a successful formula to get a wider audience involved. The outcome of the 'Future of Festivals' panel was very inspiring and offered interesting leads on how to improve the online qualities of Impakt and have them enhance the festival and all of the other projects we organise.

SN: Any advice for the media art festivals and curators around the world?

AD: Reboot, re-invent. Apply the same innovative, progressive qualities that you look for in art projects to the way you design your manifestation.

FAR FROM IMPACT

STEFAN DE COSTERE

For more than twenty years I was active as maker of documentaries for BRT (Belgian Radio & Television). That was abruptly put to an end in 1997 when, at the top of the station, the director-general was replaced by the corporate manager. The network was given a truly spiritual leader. He successfully turned the TV station into a company and made it absolutely market-driven. On all strategic positions managers were put in place who believed in the future, and all personnel were given the opportunity to enter paradise regained. As for me, I was relocated from the art department (which was soon after dismantled) to the news service (where reality was made to burst into entertainment). This was the new horizon.

From day one I was putting four news broadcasts per day to air and got to adapt to an ergonomic work floor that resembled the control room of the military. As a bonus, I was allowed to follow a series of workshops on storytelling. There I saw my former colleagues sweating it out, learning the latest formatting techniques of documentary making, and learning fast the techniques for creating impact and keeping their viewers clustered to the screen, whatever the content.

I was in shock. I went part time and founded Cargo, at first as a refuge platform for survival, then slowly developing it into a network of kindred spirits interested in criticism, (new) media development and (independent) artistic creation. With them I initiated research projects, organised workshops and held open doors. For ten years however Cargo hesitated to go public, as the paradigmatic shift in cultural production mentioned above was not limited to television alone. Indeed, the corporate religion was effectively operational everywhere, not in the least in the homes and heads of the working and consuming public itself.

Last year Cargo decided to come out. Of course – speaking retrospectively – how else could this have been done, if not with a platform that was capable of taking a distance from the phenomenon of impact mentioned above, and employ the same techniques of impact in order to turn them around and see their effects. Obviously Cargo had to come up with something more than a piece of work. It had to be an environment capable of showing and giving the experience of the great transformation mentioned above. It was given the title 'Warum 2.0' and was ultimately built and tested last February during the Artefact Festival in Stuk (Leuven/Belgium).

Warum 2.0 is an installation arena, an installation of installations, where nothing is limited to what is, but is constantly doubled into something else, not according to the logic of 'this or that' (to be or not to be), neither of 'if/then' (one thing results from the other), but of 'this is as if it is' (the refusal of what is). It is a tragic space, in which no event can stand for real; with

which nobody can merge for longer than the time it takes to escape; in which words, sounds, things and images happen in a constant state of suspense.

In this environment, technological per se, Paul Virilio was invited with some of his warnings against 'impact', against the makers of it, against their techniques of 'storytelling' and against the very renewed possibility of 'synchronizing affects' on a massive, if not global scale.

What follows here, then, is a list of events that helped me through the crucial development phase of Warum 2.0 just before its first instalment. And I was very anxious to see what kind of event would happen there, exactly in a situation far from impact, or at least just far enough to create a certain distance, to give hope, to allow visitors to take in positions realising to what extent technology already had changed them, and ultimately testing new kinds of freedom.

Far From Impact – Event 1

Brussels, October 2007, the Video Vortex international symposium part 1, organised by the Institute of Network Cultures, in collaboration with Argos Brussels. One of the speakers present was media artist Keith Sanborn.

At one point during his presentation I heard Sanborn describe an installation project he produced not long before in Antwerp, where, in one and the same room, he apparently showed a collection of very extreme videoclips, all equally loud and simultaneously visible on multiple screens of all sizes. It was clear: Sanborn definitely succeeded in creating impact there. The visitors, he said, could stay no longer than 5 minutes in the installation environment.

But then he said something very strange. He said he wanted to understand what the impact is of all these surrounding pictures. Then he said he wanted to understand their impact. And then, that he wanted to discover in this way, new ways of relating to the images again.

At first, these remarks made me think only about the notion of impact and its relevance to videomaking, television and more specifically to YouTube, the theme of the Video Vortex symposium. But then I started to think more about the phenomenon of 'impact'. Whenever 'impact' happens, so I thought, the only thing one can do – and, inevitably, does – is to run away from it, to look for shelter, if not to react to it, then respond to it with counter-impact, with more impact that is.

When one is confronted with impact – of a bomb, an explosion, a newsbyte, a shout (be it by an artist, a guru, a politician, it doesn't matter by whom), an info bomb – the only one thing one definitely cannot do, is to start thinking about it, to reflect on it, to try to understand it, let alone to start searching for new ways of understanding, to discover new ways of expression. Neither can one start then a new kind of development, form an opinion, start up a new creation as a witness, as a pro-active visitor, definitely not as a maker. Impact excludes, annihilates creation. It only calls for reaction or even intensification and repetition of the same.

Only with a certain distance from impact, I started thinking, only 'far from impact' indeed, can one reflect, think, investigate and comment, as a person, as a user, as a maker.

Far From Impact – Event 2

Amsterdam, January 2008, the Video Vortex international symposium part 2, organized by the Institute of Network Cultures, in collaboration the Netherlands Media Arts Institute. On this occasion, I was invited not only to be part of the public, but to give a short presentation as well. I had titled it 'Impactology'. It thought it would be fun to announce and propose this new science on this unique location and to the fine assembly of people present.

In fact, I didn't do anything more than announcing on that occasion. The whole notion was very new to me, being at first introduced to 'impact' by Sanborn as mentioned above, and afterwards, in the period in between the first part of Video Vortex and the second one, having it put forward during an interview I did with Paul Virilio for Warum 2.0. I needed more time to develop the idea and definitely wanted to put more 'lightness' in Virilio's doom-laden thinking. Having noticed during the first instalment of Video Vortex how also critics, academic people and artists employ techniques of impact to enforce their presentations with performance skills and visuals, I chose for the element of surprise and the sublime, and to introduce 'impact' as 'impactology', glorious as a brand new science.

The aim of 'Impactology', I said, is to study 'impact', to take impact as a concept, to turn it into a new science, a new field of knowledge, and to analyse impact, chart and define it, and to study its practical consequences. With Impactology, to take, to put forward and to invest impact as a mode of analysis, as a tool of analysis, rather than just as an object of it. I proposed 'Impactology' as a science of the techniques of impact, such as 'storytelling': a machine for fabricating stories and revising histories, for formatting spirits and ways of synchronized thinking and reacting. In this field of study, even YouTube could be seen and understood as a late kind of technique of impact.

Far From Impact – Event 3

1985: Elim Klimov and his film 'Come and See'.

In 1985 there was another artist creating a great impact: Elim Klimov, with his film *Come and See*, a film on war, and more specifically on Nazi army troops burning down hundreds of villages in Belarus and killing everybody living there at the time.

Looking for historical extreme examples of artists acting as impact makers, I arrived at Klimov. I found it astounding in this context to see how he had opted for turning his feature film production itself into a form of impact, and thereby succeeding in making his fiction as powerful, for the viewers at least, in its emotional effect on them, as similar as possible, to the original Nazi 'impact'. At some point, Klimov had decided to repeat the original horror of the fact on the screen, and to employ all his cinematographic skills to this one goal of 'killing' his audience, to shoot at his film itself. The effects on the viewers of this impact were nearly as disastrous as the original massacre was on the victims in Russia. The effects on Klimov himself were also terminal: he never made another film again afterward. And the staged effects on the main character in the picture were also extremely significant. The only option the director left for his character to evolve, to deal with the event, was to make him shoot the picture itself.

So then, I thought, this is a strong case of how far it all can go: Klimov, the film, the main character, the audience: all of it and them and us and me have to be sacrificed. In this logic of impact, in this logic of war that is, everything and everyone is fatally destined to get trapped and destroyed.

Far From Impact – Event 4

From January 14 till the end of February 2008: building the Warum 2.0 installation arena and the first public presentation, during the Artefact Festival in Stuk (Leuven/Belgium).

There it is, Warum 2.0, a complex of projection screens installed on four centrifugal curves spreading out in a dark space of two hundred square meters around a suspended 360° panorama, all transparent. Many visitors walk through it. They take in viewing positions and try to relate to the projected images, discovering the many look-throughs and superpositions. The installation employs and displays the interface of an automatic scanning system that translates their movements into parameters, instantly changing the positions of the projected pictures. There is a dynamic surround-sound system of shooting, bombing and crying. At one instance the voice of Paul Virilio can be heard; at another, the shrieks and shouts of battle of assaulting marines on some exercise mission in a real desert. Visitors handle the joystick of a networked surveillance camera and grab views and pictures of their friends, unaware or waving back and smiling in the camera lens attached high up to the ceiling. Three cutouts in a huge human tetris wall sculpture invite visitors to take in and mimic positions of falling victims or shooting soldiers while activating sensors, interacting and playing with the footage of more training soldiers in combat. Other visitors teleport their hand live into a double of Warum 2.0 on Second Life, while a robot hand steers an avatar around and about falling pictures of war victims, also on display in the physical arena. With laptops on a long access point to the Web, more visitors add the YouTube video of their own choice to the overall projection. From every side faces of war victims stare at the public. They were all personally shot by cameraman Daniel Demoustier at Darfur, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Kosovo and Haiti, again and again, during his missions for Doctors without Borders and ITN.

If this is not absolutely impact! you say. It is impossible to deliver a fully convincing proof of it here, but it wasn't the case. All the sounds, pictures, tools and machines were indeed exactly those with which, usually, impact is being created most effectively. But here, there was none, except by accident, now and then, when a visitor felt like testing the sensors in some frenzied way, or when a quick jump 'n run was done, to see if the scanning system would hold. Visitors were seeing and testing out the apparatus and its powerful potential. They were discovering and learning more about the techniques of impact, instead of being manipulated by them. They did appreciate the opportunity, and said so, again and again, to the five hosts standing by, ready to explain, to answer questions, and engage in a discussion.

The initial idea of 'Warum 2.0' was ambitious from the start, as it wanted to create an environment in which viewers would spend more time and start thinking about technology and relate to the documentary images processed by it. The installation wanted to make possible

personal experience with media, instead of simply offering presentation, information and interpretation. Ultimately, it wanted to invite the visitors to experience and deal with the phenomenon of impact, and not just create it.

As for the content (for this occasion, as it is quite imaginable to choose another one for a next instalment), it was developed out of a videotape I made in 1985 with Paul Virilio, titled '*Warum Wir Männer die Technik so Lieben*' ('Why we men love technology so much'). It took up the issue once more of 'war' and 'technology'. As for war and technology, between then and now, nothing really changed in essence. One could say, there is just more war, more technology and there are more victims. But what changed really, because of technology, is the way we relate to war and to pictures of victims, and to the documentary image as such. New media changed all that. Precisely for this reason, Warum is called Warum 2.0 because it reflects on and challenges the notion of 2.0. Over the years it has become clear to me that 2.0 is kind of a fraud, at least if one understands it as I did as a situation of 'user made content', instead of what it is: 'user driven impact'.

With Warum 2.0 and possibly along further related instalments and developments in the future, I hope to facilitate and focus critical reflection on media and the techniques of impact. A horizon for public experiment, with technology, where there is no need to hide.

Paul Virilio: 'Today, faced with what's happening in science and knowledge in general, not only science but philosophy too, political philosophy, we need people who are not afraid of tragedy but who interpret, analyze, dissect, talk about things. It's the opposite of story telling. It's something much more modest and in my opinion more useful today than grand spectacles'.

Far From Impact – Event 5

1984. '1984' is not only Orwell, it is also the year Paul Virilio published his book 'The Negative Horizon'.

As I interviewed Paul Virilio again a few months ago, for the installation project Warum 2.0 (after the first interview we did together nearly 25 years ago), I read *The Negative Horizon* again. I had read it at the time, of course, but now reading it again, it was as if I read a new book. Obviously because I had changed, my understanding had changed – but also, the times have changed. Today, it read like a prophecy that came true.

In the book I even found descriptions which were like literal descriptions of the main element of the physical installation arena Warum 2.0. At one point Virilio describes the 'dromosphere' (the sphere of speed) as a 'centrifuge', a stadium for one person, in which one is witness of the anamorphosis of the speeded up reality, an environment driven by technology in which one experiences – as daily while driving a car – the grotesque deformations of what we once called 'reality'.

In the interview, Paul Virilio again and again repeats a quote by Octavio Paz, and keeps on expanding on it: 'The impact of the moment is as uninhabitable as the future' (*L'impact de*

l'instant est aussi inhabitable que le futur). And he goes on saying that life in the impact means futurism. When we say that an artist is an impact-maker, we actually are saying he is a futurist. And remember, he says, futurists inspired fascism. Futurism lead to fascism, leads to new kinds of fascism which have nothing to do with panzers, Mussolini or Hitler, but to fascism linked to technical achievements.

'Why do men love technology so much? If you would ask me that question again', Virilio says, 'I would answer, because they think they are God! They have gone beyond the mastery of knowledge, towards an illusion of divinity. They create accidents of knowledge.' There exactly lies the incentive for his latest call: no longer for a museum of accidents, but for a university of the accident (*une université du désastre*): a contra arsenal. In all modesty, a kind of Warum 2.0.?

Far From Impact – Event 6

In 1983 Vilém Flusser published his book *'Towards a philosophy of photography'* (*Für eine Philosophie der Photographie*). In it I found some helpful tools for analysing further the techniques of impact.

Talking about photography and pictures and visual media in general, Vilem Flusser offers a model of investigation based on four basic concepts: the image – the apparatus – the program – and the information. And what is important, I think, is that he defines 'information', not as 'information as data', but as the unique expression of the critical 'handling' of this trinity of image/machine/program.

Coincidence or not (and very probably not), also in the eighties, Henri Lefebvre started to publish work developing his notion of 'rhythmanalysis'. He introduces the 'rhythmanalist', a person he describes not as a user, but as an observer who intervenes, in a situation of 'mediatised everyday', an everyday that is simultaneously fashioned and ignored by these (technological) means that make the apparatuses. Just like Virilio after him, he proposes to study the disasters we live in (futurism, impact, the synchronization of instantaneous emotions – what Virilio calls 'the communism of affects') – and to intervene.

Far From Impact – Intentions

In the Warum 2.0 installation project, I tried to install distances from impact, by all means. I tried to create a possible but concrete context 'far from impact'. I wanted to get away from the daily 'dressage', that 'training' (by media, by programs, by gadgets and by technological expertise) that constantly imposes, educates and breaks-in onto us, but that in effect is based on the military model (again a military model) once instituted by Roman traditions.

In the end, 'they' who wish for, refine and execute this 'training' are not concerned with us (users and makers who want to express works and opinions of our own). They are mostly operating from a specific strategy and a certain desire for power. Call it: populist circumstantial interventionism; a certain cult of a scientific-military messianism; a cult of the arsenal; a lust for unheard of strategic possibilities of social, environmental and psychological management; a kind of extermination of the personal expression on a daily basis, bypassing arenas, open public forums, even institutions of justice.

So then, again, far from impact, with some distance to impact. Can we exist, if not without impact, then at least, can we find ways to act, make and think from a certain distance (a critical distance, that is) from impact? That is what I tried and try to explore with Warum 2.0. A real challenge. Is it possible to 'be' as we are, pro-creators that is, far from impact – and intervene?

Far from impact. My feeling today is: we will never be that far from it. Especially if we want to intervene as well. And even more so: what if we phrase it as 'far from war'?

What I suggest with *impactology* is not so much a radical critique that is itself impact, but a tool for analysis that may add that extra critical investigating rhythm to the world as it is. I guess we are done with the idea of the spectacle, for a while. So far from impact, so far from war, at least from the logic of it.

However it could also well be that YouTube, just like TV and 'corporate science', as such, also offers a way out, because as it is and happens, 'it' definitely triggers all the violence and excess there is, and it puts it in the open and onto the public stage. Let's always be aware of individuals and organisations (the 'us' of us, that is) who offer their unique alternative, especially so if they are as arrogant to say: this is for your own good.

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DETAILING AND POINTING**ANDREAS TRESKE**

In the last years we are witnessing a transformation and change of screens around us. Televisions became flat and thin. What was once establishing itself as an obligatory piece of salon furniture is about to merge in a 'blinking', constant changing wall painting. Mobile Phones displays are video enabled. Telephones have already merged with digital cameras for still and moving pictures. Cinemas are connected through digital networks with more screens and smaller theaters. We are experiencing that any space or any object can become a screen. Screens are not any more bound to a fixed reflective or projective surface in the old style of monitor or cinema projection-screen. Walls, windows, curtains, fluids and even smoke can become surfaces for screening moving images and moving image content. We are about to redefine the screen in urban dimensions.

When observing these phenomena the major development appears to be the merging of television, telephone and the net. The keyword is 'convergence'. Small devices are able to receive and transmit moving images while being used as a telephone or being connected to the Internet and using an expanded range of web services. It seems the ability to watch video on small devices and the ability to communicate through live images change not only the way we live, but also our screens (or vice versa). We are leaving the fixed, programmed sphere of controlled TV channels to watch what ever we want, wherever we would like to – anytime and anywhere. In this matter the net becomes the major independent distribution facility for everyone's video.

From an artistic point of view a question arises: how does the development of smaller screens and online video influence how we compose and create images? How is the reproduction of images influenced by its assumed viewing environment, how is it related to the viewing situations of its audience if these are not the cinema theater or the television set with its attached couch? Is there a difference or can there be a difference for the practicing artist? Does the size of the screen matter?

Indeed it appears that the size matters. Video produced for the internet or for small devices like the iPod, the iPhone, or any mobile phone has to be composed according to the conditions of the medium, the way it can reproduce moving images, technically as well as in reference to the viewing circumstances and assumed environment. Aesthetically because of the size of the device it seems obvious that artists are confronted with a strong emphasis on lower levels of detail and closer shots - tendencies that are already characteristic of television.

Historically the size of the screen was already used by Hollywood in the fight for its audiences as a reaction to the increasing prominence of television. In 1952 Hollywood introduced Cin-

erama. Cinerama was a widescreen format, which was based on the simultaneous projection of 35 mm images by three synchronized projectors on to a huge, curved screen.¹

What is at stake in Cinerama is not only the enormous screen but with the question of the relation of the screen's magnitude to the human body.

The screens height is a multiple of the average human body height. If we relate ourselves emotionally and physically to this image then the projected image places us into the depicted perspective of given landscape. The scale of the Cinerama acts to overcoming the frame in order to place its audience in a seat not only in the front row but also in the middle of these landscapes. The cinerama screen actually aims to replace/re-locate the viewers horizon – therefore creating an absolute immersive vision. In contrast, the television in 1952 gets reduced to the 'Guckkasten', the living room furniture, the radio-like box.

The well-known film editor Walter Murch while editing the film *Cold Mountain* on a digital editing system uses small cutout figures of the human body attached to the side of this viewing monitor to relate the image size to the size of the viewers body and therefore relate the final projected image to the perspective of its audience sitting in a theater with a large wide-screen.² With this simple setting Murch can transfer and compare the appearance of any cut, any edited rhythm to its supposed effect on the large screen by using the model setup and its relations. As a result of his craft, his decision editing practice, the final cut of his films might refer in their supposed viewing conditions more to the huge widescreen of a cinema theater than to a small screen like a TV set or an even smaller screen presented on a mobile device. Psychologically, the appearance of (for example) the speed of an object should also change according to the size of the screen.

Size seems to have been already in the calculations of Abel Gance with his Napoleon biopic from 1927. The final reel of his epic production was supposed to be projected by 3 parallel projectors creating a Triptychon-like total image. Abel Gance was far ahead of his time with the use of handheld and moving cameras as well as the style of editing. His conceptual thinking could be easily compared with today's new media performative artists, therefore building an historical reference for today's art practices. Of course, Gance might have been influenced by F.W. Murnau and his cameraman Karl Freund by their 1924 film *The Last Laugh*, which includes more than 40 moving camera shots.³ Murnau's film opens up with the famous scene where the camera is inside an elevator, descends into and then moves through the lobby of a hotel to a revolving door, similar to scenes of *The man with the moving camera* by

1. For more on Cinerama: <http://www.answers.com/topic/cinerama> or <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cinerama> also <http://www.cineramaadventure.com/> (a website for a documentary produced on Cinerama and its pioneers, April 2008).
2. I refer to the documentary 'The Cutting Edge: The Magic of Movie Editing' by director Kathy Bates from 2004 where Murch is seen in his editing room working with Apple's Final Cut Pro editing software editing *Cold Mountain*.
3. Seminar notes Academy for Television and Film, HFF Munich 1988 with reference to 'The Mobile Mise en Scène' by Lutz Bacher (1979), the standard work on long-take camera movement.

Dziga Vertov to whom Manovich refers in his *Language of New Media*.⁴ Murnau's practice is nothing else than the continuation of what Méliés figured out already in 1897 of our curious interest in movement as the birth and main force in cinematic production or moving image creation.

Pursuing this approach of looking critically at screen sizes the question remains: how does the effect of image size related to the human body aesthetically influence the way we perceive media today?

The iPhone appears to be one of the hottest gadgets in 2007 and 2008. Its combination with web services like iTunes and connect-ability to the web makes it an ideal instance of video and image reproduction as well as viewing on mobile devices. An interesting fact here is that Apple introduced the iPhone with lower resolution digital photo sensors than its competitors, shifting the device's emphasis and potential to its user interface and its networking abilities.

The Apple commercials from 2007 as well as the user manual of the iPhone set the screen of the iPhone directly in relation with the human finger.⁵ The size of the screen is depicted as related to the human hand holding the mobile device. The single finger is operating the device. If we relate the device screen to the average size of the human head as well as the field of sight, then we are becoming immediately aware of the fact that this device is only a small object somewhere between many other objects in our environment.

Awareness of this object is or may be given through its dynamic screen image. The changing displayed content results in movement on the objects surface, which therefore grabs attention. Should the device be depicted in a photograph in-between other objects only its design and foremost the chosen frame and composition of this photograph could guide the viewers attention to this particular object and make it the center of interest. Should this object be viewed against a very crowded background, it would hardly become the point of main interest and other attractive elements could divert the attention of the viewer. Of course, the factor of presenting something moving as well as combining it with sound and, additionally, the personal and even private interests of the viewer will serve to direct and guide the attention.

Considering image composition principles any image presented on a mobile device like the iPhone should emphasize stronger detail. Instead of depicting wide detailed landscapes, it should be used for simple shapes. Instead of having a huge variety of details and fine differentiated tones, less details and a quicker changing screen, which means shorter and less complex takes or shots are preferable.

Consequently, the smaller the screen the closer we the viewer will be, which means that the distance between the viewer and the screen will be reduced. This is not only the physical distance determined by our holding the mobile device in front of us, but also the emotional distance. Consequently this should result in a style which emphasizes the use of more close

4. Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, Boston: The MIT Press, 2002.
5. Apple Website: http://manuals.info.apple.com/en/iPhone_User_Guide.pdf

ups while acknowledging the role of mobile devices as viewing devices. This means shots on the mobile device or for the mobile device are becoming close and closer, so we are getting increasingly closer to whatever is presented or depicted.

In 2005 Okan Altıparmak (Paul Okan) and I produced and directed together a fan movie or fan documentary about the supporters of the Turkish first league soccer club Fenerbahce from Istanbul.⁶ Our goal was to be as close as possible to the fans. Usually, if you are not a licensed TV station or a crew that is working for somebody who owns the broadcast rights for a football match, you are not allowed to shoot with professional equipment in a football stadium. The only alternative for us to shoot in the stadiums, considering our budget constraints, was by using amateur handheld single chip cameras. So we used small handy palm cameras and blew the video shots up on 35 mm for theater release. Out of 300 hours material, in one year we cut together a 106 minutes feature documentary for cinema, and distributed it classically in the theaters. Of course, within the first days it appeared in the cinemas, it was also available on pirate websites or as bootlegged copies in street sales.

Because we were shooting in between the fans in the stadiums with our small handheld low quality devices, we mainly had to use wide-angle close ups. The camera operators were by themselves fans out of the portrait groups and had as an image reference only the small LCD screens of the palm cameras. In the final film the close ups became very intensive and emotionally very dense. Each game's intensity is transferred through the intensity of the close depicted faces and the reactions of these fans in these phases. The close ups clearly amplify the emotional immediacy of the spectators.

So, if the close up becomes so intensive, and if we are studying the way it gets so intensive, we realize that the small screen amplifies movement and therefore emphasizes gestures. Video by itself becomes related to gestures we are acting with. It is not only that we see the object closer, we also might want to touch it. The closeness increases the intimacy of the viewing process. This intimacy brings us to the Apple iPhone, which promoted its operational techniques of taping, pinching and flicking. The Apple promoters have been very creative in naming these operations, to tell us what we are actually doing with the images on the screens. We are taping the screen, pinching and flicking the images. The images appear as a sort of an intimate interface. This makes the iPhone a fetish object, which alongside as the media player iPod, becomes a kind of intimate sexualized object that is in our pockets and immediately available to us.

We are not really taping, pinching and flicking with video, we are using our finger only to control video playback and not yet manipulate the video itself – at least, not yet. With photographs we can zoom in, with maps we can zoom in. What is called pinching is the operation of dragging the photo with our single finger operation and resizing it. The operation brings a part of the image closer to us. Flicking would be the change from one photograph to the

6. Internet Movie Database (April 2008): <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0763327>

other. And what can be done with video at the moment is little more than changing the format from standard to widescreen or initiating play, pause or stopping of the video. If we could apply such operations to video right now this would open up a wide range of different intimate viewing experiences and could even help to immerse deeper through the close up intensification or amplification of our emotions and emotional involvement.

The short span or ultra short movies displayed on mobile devices, as well as online on websites, with their apparently decreased detail will serve to orient the media experience towards the viewer. Just as the close up was seen before as something coming towards – but also pulling the viewer into the cinematic experience, a movement from the screen to the viewer – here now we might observe an antithetical movement pushing towards the content as a challenge for the artist. The push towards the viewer might not come from the image itself but rather be intended through the operation of taping, flicking, or/and therefore touching. Once more at issue is the modern aim of technology as a set of tools to overcome distance, an extension of tele-technologies like telegraph, television, telephone. Another question is if this resulting meta-movement of content and viewer is a movement of content towards the viewer, or a movement of the viewer towards the content. What was once seen as an object, may be referred now to as a subject and vice versa. The object-subject relations seem not only reversed but also transformed continuously in process, which calls to mind the theoretical reflections of Vilém Flusser in various essays on technical images. A change in the object-subject relation and the loss of their mutual clarity resembles a more non-linear characteristic and approach than a linear one. Following this thought further while defining history as linear, this has ramifications in terms of a lack or loss of history itself.⁷

The transformation of the cinematic will force the artist or create the need for her/him to simplify the content, to adapt to the screen, pointing towards the small screen or consciously towards the huge screen, include gestures, gestures of pointing and detailing as elements of design and composition.

I would agree with Michelangelo Antonioni who once said that the cinema screens will get smaller and the televisions will get bigger, so they must meet finally in the middle.⁸ Meeting in the middle will also mean overcoming the problem of screen size as well as overcoming the distance between theatrical film and online or mobile video. As long as this is not happening content will be divided by the industry like the games industry has done

7. Not many of Flussers writings are translated into english. A very good collection of essays is by Ströhl, Andreas (ed.). *Writings*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.
8. Michelangelo Antonioni: *The Eye That Changed Cinema* (Sandro Lai, 2001) [a documentary from the extras of *L'eclisse* DVD, Criterion collection] Here Fuori Orario interview from December 1985: 'The so-called 'film-idiom' and the so-called 'television-idiom' will end up coming together. On the one hand, we see large movie theaters being broken into many small ones, and screens, once huge, becoming much smaller. On the other, we see television screens becoming larger and larger. So when the screens in our homes and movie screens become the same size, there will be no need to separate the expressive needs of television from those of films, because they'll be the same. The exploitation of films will be the same, both in our homes and in our theaters.'

for years now. This does not mean that the user or viewer will necessarily follow such a division of content and screening technology.

There is of course a marked aesthetic difference between the cinema, the television, the video and the net today. The format of these technical appearances dominates each different aspect of a common language. It seems like a spoken regional dialect existing outside of the grammatical. This common language is or was developed as a language of cinema, a set of conventions dominated by the aesthetic condition of the apparatus cinema. The transformation of the cinematic through television and video practice added simultaneity as a major factor to the repository of the formed cinema language – meaning the emphasis of the live event. Of course, cinema's imitation in amateur and semiprofessional practice contrasts to the development of its own form of expression in video.

The artist in transition, a transition technically caused by or through changing tools and their availability, aesthetically caused by or through expanding image formats and their availability, will have to use techniques of simplified or adapted design and gestures in or through time, gestures like pointing to or emphasizing this detail, while detailing her/his work strategically politicizing the formation of an aesthetic of an medium in becoming, a medium which is not there but already there in its formation.

Machinima movies point back to the game as simulation. Moving images produced in *Second Life* point towards the 'real' character of a simultaneously experienced mass medium.

What is called in German *Gestaltung*, the design, the presentation of the moving image, here exaggerated in reference to the close up, the pointer, the detail, emphasizing simple shapes in a minimized area of change through moving images, strengthen a reduced number of colors, increasing the influence of sound (and therefore the characteristics of radio) for the small screen, might be consciously or unconsciously influential factors on art works in the transition we are currently experiencing.

In a complex and multiple viewing environment the small screen is only one part of the attractions on offer. While cinema is necessary a two-eye view, the aesthetic conditions of the small screen are referencing only one eye and may be only one point in the field of view of the viewer.

While cinema was, like Kafka claimed, shutting down the senses to take you in to one illusion space, here the artist is competing with the senses, the circumstances, and the environment.⁹ Therefore he or she is forced to create that immersive impact for a short span of time, to point and focus, to point and shoot. The pointer as the close up is called here is a relative of the joke, the fable, the aphorism, the haiku, or the quote - short literary forms.

The haiku is characterized as a combination of form, language and content in one

compact, compressed form. The haiku enunciates everyday experiences like nature, feelings or experiences. Because of its simple words and grammar it can be shared with a wide spread audience. The haiku would paint a mental image in the mind of its readers or viewers. What many today would see as an operation of a ripping-apart of audiovisual content and a subsequent re-distribution could be seen in light of this discussion as parallel to the literary form of the quotation. The re-distributed video quotation becomes marked and distinguished. The short dramatic form might appear at first glance a source of the unusual, the extraordinary, but it becomes less innovative, and less deep, and less differentiated, because it will repeat what is already established.

'Close', short span videos on small screens might result in a wider variation of genres and subgenres, which were already developed in more or less comparable artistic forms. Of course, genres are already merging and not easily identifiable any more in a wide range of media. Convergence will smooth the borderlines as it already does, but in practice the artist in discussion might refer to the structural constitution of those mentioned forms and genres to stand out of the mass with her or his artistic reflection and work. Therefore a video language might evolve closer to the characteristics of video than cinema where cinematic narrative structure and form is just one element or possibility in the evaluation of its mediated contents and forms. The juxtaposition of shared user generated online video images potentially then expands beyond a non-fictional and non-dramatic form, leaving the realm of old media. Here finally in the closeness of the screen the close-up might reach its destination.

9. Referring to lecture notes taken from Stephen Heath talk on 'Identification' on the 20th April 1999 in METU Ankara, Turkey.

PROGRAMMATIC STATEMENTS FOR A FACETTED VIDEOGRAPHY

ADRIAN MILES

What happens to editing when video moves from a hard to a soft environment? This chapter is a rough-cut sketch that explores what video editing is, and the implications of this for an emerging, network specific video practice. While this essay discusses video with some degree of specificity the practice that is under consideration is not video art but those works that are, for want of a more accurate term at this historical point, representational and indexical in some manner. They're videos of things. Such representational practices dominate internet based video practice including commercial, populist, critical and creative uses.

Granularity

Granularity is a term that is appropriated from hypertext and refers to the smallest meaningful unit within a system. In hypertext this would be a node, in a blog it would probably be a post, and in video this is the shot. Obviously what constitutes 'smallest' and 'meaningful' are sensitive to different contexts, so that in classical hypertext a node could contain a single word, a phrase, or several paragraphs, as could a blog post, and of course a shot could be of extremely brief duration through to the recent examples of 90 minute plus continuous takes. However, historically it has been the granularity of the cinematic, and now videographic, shot that has provided the basis of cinematic practice as the capacity to subdivide a shot into smaller parts, and then join them to other similarly subdivided shots, is the basis of editing which forms the keystone to cinematic narration.

From the point of view of granularity the most significant feature of the shot is that it is always and already whole. You can't have 'half' a shot: if the shot is twenty seconds and you then cut it in half you end up with two shots of ten seconds, each of which is still whole. This, of course, demonstrates that the 'wholeness' of a shot is qualitative, not quantitative, so that the integrity of the shot is not tied to scale or even duration. This is a significant feature of the shot, and while not unusual in the general scheme of things (for example, our emotions provide a common enough example of something that is qualitative in the sense being discussed here) it is quite unusual in terms of a discursive and creative mode of practice because for so many other ways of doing to cut something in half, or other sized bits, produces quite different things. For example, you can't just cut a sentence in half and still have a meaningful unit, or a book, or a line of a poem. Yet in video the granularity of the system is such that it can be subdivided in terms of duration and still be immanently meaningful – it is still a shot of a gun, or a vase of flowers, or of someone walking.

These are the wholes that film deals with, and this attribute of wholeness is external to the shot precisely because the shot can be subdivided. If this were an internal quality then cutting the shot would qualitatively change it, but as is well documented the most significant

way in which the shot can be fundamentally altered is by the relations it is placed within – where and how it is placed within a sequence. This provides evidence of the external relations that are a necessary attribute of the shot, as the meaning or value attributed to the shot is highly contextually determined by these sequences. What that image of a woman's face is understood to mean (apart from its simple and possibly trivial denotation as a particular woman's face) is determined by the shots it finds itself surrounded by.

However, once we recognise the importance of such external relations we can see that any shot must, by definition, exist in a multiple set of possible relations with other shots (this is what allows for editing in the first instance), and that the specific art of editing in traditional film and video practice is of course the determination of these relations into a fixed, canonical and singular linear form – a form that in the traditions of all good modernist and romantic aesthetics will appear to make perfect good sense in and of itself. Editing is therefore the production of relations between small wholes into larger wholes where the larger whole (the sequence, the work) appears to be self sufficiently whole. These variable wholes are possible because its constituent parts have a high level of granularity.

Softvideo

This granularity has been very important to the relevance and use of digital technologies in film and video editing since non-linear editing systems offer the sorts of functionality in relation to sound and image that word processing has afforded text. In traditional film editing (as with the typewriter and traditional typesetting) sequences had to be edited manually, and there was no way to preview or visualise any transitions between shots apart from direct cuts. Older forms of video editing were even less flexible than film because they relied upon linear tape systems, so in many instances it would be impossible to insert an edit into an already cut sequence without overdubbing whatever footage was already at that point on the videotape. Computer based non-linear editing obviously does not have these limitations, and so allows for the visualisation of a wide variety of transitions and effects, and of course the insertion of new material at any point into the timeline with the ability to shift existing editing footage to accommodate the new insertion, or if you prefer, to overwrite existing footage.

This suggests that video's granularity (like text in word processing) has been instrumental in facilitating the development of digital editing and desktop cinema – that if video were not made of small parts with loose connections then the applicability of computing to video editing would have been lessened. These systems, just as with word processing, offer all the advantages of the digital for the production of content, but remove them for the user at the point of publication. For example, while using a word processor it is trivial to move text, annotate it (with voice, image or other text), change fonts, resize the screen and so on. But as a word processor all of these tools are actually directed towards getting those words on paper (hence pagination, page numbering and so on). Once on paper, all of those functions just listed (and many others) are gone. It is exactly the same with video, where similarly the video work is malleable and fluid in quite extraordinary ways while being edited, but once committed to publication these features are removed – it becomes resolutely and immutably flat. This is what I have, elsewhere, described as the distinction between hard and softvideo, where in softvideo it is possible to imagine a video architecture and practice that is able to

retain this granularity after publication, where videos can be created that consist of shots that no longer have a canonical sequence. The multiplicity of possible relations between shots, which granularity affords, can then be preserved and made available to the user or viewer as a material property of the completed video text.

Two Softvideo Systems

Two projects that achieve this, albeit through different strategies, are Videofunct and the Korsakow System. Videofunct currently allows the publication of clips or sequences that are individually tagged and then dynamically displayed through a triptych structure based on the user's selection of tagged terms. By having a suitable reservoir of clips, with enough tags (so that clips share a large range of tags, many of which they have in common), the user can compose, in concert with the system architecture, individual videographic works by selecting individual tags. In Videofunct the user selects a tag from an initial list. This generates a series of thumbnails where, again, the user makes a selection. This loads and plays a video in the central pane of the video triptych, and simultaneously generates relevant tag lists under the remaining two, empty video windows. Selecting these tag lists reveals a thumbnail index, which then allows videos to be loaded and played when selected. What may appear, and what sequences may be developed, are subject to this play of author-defined, user-selected tags and clips. The sequences shown, and the relations created between sequences via the triptych video panes, are always variable and open through the ongoing aggregation of additional content (more clips) and of course by users selecting other tags or even repeating the same tags which can return other clips and sequences.

Similarly Florian Thalhofer's Director-based Korsakow System achieves a very similar outcome through the use of what is in effect a tagged clip library which supports basic Boolean operations. Within this architecture a clip can have any number of text tags applied to it, including at specific points in an individual clip's timeline, and the engine searches for matches to these tags from its library based on the authored rules. This produces very complex associations between clips in the system, which can be as open or as closed as you wish. In other words clips can have lots of possible connections to other clips or a highly constrained set, and through the use of its Boolean rules it can make connections based on the usual criteria of 'is', 'is not', 'else', and 'if'. In addition it is able to preserve rudimentary state information and utilise this as a parameter so that the number of times a clip has been played can be used as a governing rule for clip selection (or non selection). For example, a central video plays, and as it plays the system identifies clips that meet the criteria that the author has defined. These criteria might be that at the beginning of the active clip a search is made to find other clips that match a specific term, and then at twenty seconds find clips that don't contain a specific term, and at thirty seconds select a clip at random. These clips are displayed as thumbnails below the central video window, and selecting any of these loads this in turn in to the central window and plays it, and this clip will then parse its arguments and populate the clip pane. This architecture is very similar to a hypertext system such as Storyspace with its use of guard fields (rule-governed link structures) and provides the possibility to produce 'tangle' like series within a larger work that are densely interconnected (whether as shots or sequences doesn't matter), and then narrow corridors or pathways out of such tangles into other densely connected series, or some combination of

these – a structure utilised in HTML by Amerika's *Grammatron*, and in Storyspace by Joyce in *Afternoon: A Story*.

In both of these examples we have three major levels of sequence and relation operating. The first is determined by whoever creates and selects the shots or sequences that form the basic clip library within each authoring environment. These are, strictly speaking, hard video as they are fixed in the usual and traditional way of shots and sequences. The second level operates largely through what is commonly known as spatial montage where relations between shots and sequences are no longer only temporal within a single video window but now spatially distributed across the screen. In the case of Videofunct this is realised through its triptych of video panes, while the Korsakow System offers a single dominant video window below which appear thumbnails of related clips. Through this collaging of video windows montage moves from being only the sequential relation of parts within a single video window – this and then this – to both the sequential relation of parts and the simultaneous relation of multiple screens to each other. Finally, a third level operates where some aspect of decision making is granted to the system itself where, much like the throw of a dice, the constraints can be quite strict but the outcome remains and is determined outside of the user or the author's individual agency.

For Videofunct and the Korsakow System the attachment of tags to shots in concert with rules of combination proves capable of producing complex patterns and relations amongst their respective libraries. As a consequence this larger video work, that is a single Videofunct or Korsakow project conceived as a whole, is precisely the generation and discovery of such patterns by users. This poses significant and fascinating problems in turn for narrative practice in such softvideo environments as we move from being video makers creating specific and single video works towards being designers of combinatory engines and the possible narrative, and non-narrative, discourses they enable.

Relations and Facets

These systems allow us to revisit and reconsider the role of editing. As we saw it is possible to cut a shot in any number of places and for the shot to retain its wholeness, and to then place this shot into a variety of sequences with other shots and that these sequences will have a substantial, if not a determinant, effect upon the meaning of such shots. As such we can describe the shot as a whole that has multiple possible relations to any other shot where these relations are determined by where the edit is made (an internal series of relations) and what it is then connected to (an external series of relations). I intend to describe these relations as 'facets' as facet has connotations of a shot being multifaceted, of having an enormous number of views, or faces, towards which it looks out towards other shots, where these facets are not just internal to a shot but are constituted by the very possibility of the relations it may form with other shots. These facets are then not determined internally, as some sort of immanent given where you could catalogue all the facets of a particular shot, but rather they come to be by the interest they arouse (I can't think of any other way to describe this at the moment) in or for other shots by the attitude or pose they offer other shots.

In practice any edit may have several such facets simultaneously, and, as a shot is more or less infinitely divisible (it can be cut at any point) there are an enormous set of facets available.

Remember, it is not just each frame that may provide a facet, but also those relations with other shots and edit points that might inform a decision to edit, each of which in turn can be thought of as providing or having facets. They are orientated towards each other by the possible action of an edit.

For example, a simple shot may consist of a figure walking. What I am calling the facets of this shot are all of the possible parameters that may be used (consciously or otherwise) to edit this shot with another. These might include elements of the content of the shot, for example where the figure walks to or from, or what they walk towards. It could include pacing and duration, and the speed of the walk. Shot scale, angle, lighting, graphic patterning, colour, storyline, dialogue and character action and so on all provide facets which can be used in making an editing decision. In determining an edit some facets may be more important than others, and indeed may be more 'visible' than others. However, such facets are always a multiplicity and can be thought of as those aspects of the shot that are made to become available to other shots by virtue of the relations established through the edit. Which facets get identified are a consequence of these possibilities of connection. This is, historically, one of the reasons why things like storyboards and shot lists have been developed in professional cinematic and televisual production as they are, if you like, a way to domesticate and industrialise (manage) this multiplicity and so an effort to predetermine and constrain these relations towards normative and narratively hegemonic models with their attendant teleological structures.

Virtual and Actual

Conceptually what I have described as facets have a strong affinity with Lévy's concept of the virtual and the actual. Schematically, the virtual is that set of possible expanding futures that any instant has before it, where, for example, the possible futures I may have a few minutes from now are much more highly constrained in terms of what I may be doing than one year into my future. In addition, all of these possible futures are considered to be virtual, they are all present as possibilities in this future, and while some may be more likely than others, in terms of the virtual all exist. On the other hand the actual are those aspects or trajectories within the virtual that actually come to be – that are actualised. Now, Lévy makes a very substantial distinction between an almost garden variety sort of virtual and actual where what comes to be is a more or less mechanistic playing out of the consequences of the present moment, which he terms the possible. This is contrasted to a system where what comes to be actualised is a qualitative change, an act of creation. In the former what comes to be involves no creation or creativity, and so is about the production of the same rather than the new, while the latter is a response to a problem posed within the virtual. As Lévy notes:

Actualization thus appears as the solution to a problem, a solution not previously contained in its formulation. It is the creation, the invention of a form on the basis of a dynamic configuration of forces and finalities. Actualization involves more than simply assigning reality to a possible or selecting from among a predetermined range of choices. It implies the production of new qualities, a transformation of ideas, a true becoming that feeds the virtual in turn.

Editing has these qualities of actualisation precisely because editing establishes novel and external relations between parts. These relations do not reside implicitly within the shots – if

they did it would not be possible to edit any shot into another – yet it is clear that what these shots do and mean is certainly as much a consequence of the relations they are established within as it is of what the content of the shot may be: a shot of a gun firing is a gun firing, but what comes before and after that particular shot makes all the difference to what we understand that shot of the gun to mean.

In addition editing, certainly editing that wants to move away from the simple representation of a highly descriptive storyline (which in Lévy's terms would be editing that is subject to the possible), is a response to the problem posed by the shot and its possible relations, where this problem is a 'knot of tendencies or forces that accompanies a situation, event, object, or entity' Clearly in video editing these forces are never singular (which accounts for the intense promiscuity of video and film, we can and do join anything to anything), yet in traditional hard video practice this promiscuity and the qualitative possibilities immanent within every shot must be reduced to a single and fixed vector at the point of editing, and is forever hypostatised within the published work.

We can then define editing as the activity of actualising the virtual that each shot expresses. The shot poses and contains problems, where each of these problems express what are best thought of as vectors of force offering particular trajectories – how to narrate the story, cutting on action, colour, narrative event, shot scale, shot length, contrast, mise-en-scene, total length of the work and so on. How a work is edited becomes the actualisation of these virtualities, and in their actualisation they are not merely possible (the realisation of the same) but are the creation and invention of the new.

These actualisations, while made linear, sequential and fixed in hard video, provide a theoretical and practical point of difference for a softvideo poetics. A softvideo architecture would be one that allows these multiple facets to remain available, in some manner, after the work is 'published'. This is the achievement of Videofunct and the projects created within the Korsakow System as each allows for a multiplicity of actualisations between shots and sequences after publication.

Conclusion

A theoretical argot is needed to make concrete the concept of these facets, and to describe how video works may acknowledge the granularity of the shot and the multiplicity of these facets after publication. Such a model implicitly requires, and accepts, that the network and computer are no longer merely tools of production and distribution, but are integral to the possibility of being able to create and use video online.

Videofunct and the Korsakow System are substantial steps towards a softvideo practice that is able to maintain the faceted nature of the connections between shots after publication. Each provides a system for the production of multiple relations between content and user, and while it is a commonplace (and naïve) error to describe systems such as Videofunct and Korsakow as 'interactive' they are more accurately and productively characterised as combinatorial environments which provide templates or structures that provide for the possibility of connections being formed. That is, they are not authoring or publishing systems in

the traditional sense in which I author and then 'publish', but engines that allow content to be contributed and then 'mixed' (for want of a better term) in an ongoing basis. Such practices look strongly towards design and systems development as our role here moves from being content creator towards the architecture of poetic and possibly autopoietic systems. As demonstrated by the example of blogging, where technical features such as a publicly available permalink for every post and trackback exists, a fine level of granularity is preserved producing an architecture where parts can easily be loosely connected to other parts. Similarly video must maintain its granularity after publication so that it becomes porous to its own possible connections to those clips that are near to hand (those in the systems clip library) as well as far (other clips available via HTTP requests). In this way any video shot or sequence remains available to be actualised after the moment of publication. While such an architecture is only one element towards realising a softvideo practice it provides the affordances to develop highly granular works that allow for the multiplicity of connections between parts. This contributes to a videographic poetics that is able to look beyond internet video's current atavistic misjudging of the merely televisual as a properly network specific videography.

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VIDEODEFUNCT: ONLINE VIDEO IS NOT DEAD

SETH KEEN

This is purely explorational; a writerly text. A conversation is in progress between the creators and the functionality and capabilities of multiple-streaming, interactive video. Its creators on the frontier, finding future pathways for video experience... Vlogging is evolving at breakneck speeds, videodefunkt suggest where this evolution may be taking us.¹

In this blogged review of the Videodefunkt prototype *Pedestrian*, the author Daniel O'Farrell acknowledges the experimental nature of this research project which aims to create some type of synthesis between the video medium and the Internet. Videodefunkt (VD)² is a project that explores an alternative form of online video content, which differs from the linear, single window clips that users are familiar with on the meta-platform YouTube. In the context of this research, YouTube is seen as a publishing platform for moving-image content that is predominately produced offline and remains largely unaltered by the Internet environment. A version of Internet TV that continues the tradition of passive viewers sitting back and watching moving-imagery from beginning to end. In contrast, the aim with this research project is to produce video content online, which responds to some of the inherent characteristics of the Internet and web2.0. Following a project-based research model, an iterative process of design and production is used to generate theory that makes a contribution towards online video as an emerging field of inquiry.

Videodefunkt

Going against the status quo directed the project towards the freedom of open source development and re-inventing existing web applications. The 'itch' that motivated the development of the VD system was a frustration with the existing ways that video content was being displayed on the Internet. A key objective was to find a more poetic way to display online video. With an emphasis on presentation and subsequently the production of content the VD project involves the parallel development of an online video system alongside the production of prototypes as discrete media objects. Each VD prototype provides an insight into the type of content that can be produced, along with design modifications towards the ongoing development of the VD system.

Engaged in an ongoing examination of video blogging as part of teaching and research, I noticed that weblogs originally designed for text-based content were being modified to ac-

1. Daniel O'Farrell, 'Integrated Media: VideoDefunct', Daniel weblog, April 16, 2008, <http://raws.adc.rmit.edu.au/~s3163382/blog2/?p=77>
2. Keith Deverell, Seth Keen and David Wolf, Videodefunkt project website, <http://videodefunkt.net>

commodate video as the main form of content. An early example produced by Mefeedia³ now obsolete was a plugin that automatically created a separate video archive page for video content as it was posted. Video bloggers wanted to separate video content from other posts, like for example text-based content and provide users with the option to access that material directly. The design of plugins like this one are motivated, I would argue, by the chronological focus of a blog as form of online journal in which the idea is to keep providing new material for users as the latest post at the top of the home page. For example, a video blog like *Chasing Windmills*⁴ acts like a television soap series, utilising this chronological feature to get users to return for the latest instalment. In comparison, some video bloggers see each video clip that they post as having equal relevance for users and therefore they want to provide an alternative form of access.

Introduced to some modifications that David Wolf a member of the VD collective was doing on a video blog called the *The Guild*,⁵ provided the initial impetus for the VD project. He was experimenting with using a video blog to display TV commercials online. Wolf was customising the open source weblog application WordPress⁶ and was sharing his developments on his own blog. Working with a large volume of material, he had designed a streamlined process for posting video clips and a more detailed method of archiving. Over time this customised video blog has moved to using a number of features that provide users with varying ways to cross-reference the television commercials published on the website. The chronological access that features on most video blogs has been removed from the home page, along with the use of the date and time stamp attached to each post. Starting with Wolf's open source development in WordPress, the VD collective decided to explore a hybrid version of a video blog that moved beyond the display of linear, single window clips like TV commercials.

Joining the open source community of WordPress developers with a twist, the VD project focused on creating a Video Content Management System. Weblog applications belong to a group of software called Content Management Systems (CMS) that are designed with a predetermined infrastructure that is used to publish and manage content on the Internet. The presentation of a CMS infrastructure can be modified with varying 'skins', which as the names suggests are the front layer of the web page that is viewed in the browser. Blogs were designed to make personal web publishing user-friendly and accessible – not only how they functioned, but also how they looked. WordPress developers in response to bloggers wanting to personalise the 'skin' of their blogs created themes, which enabled the WordPress community to make a myriad of themes for users to download. Themes are made up of a number of template files, which makes them a flexible tool for modifying the way content is presented in web pages. Utilising this flexibility, the VD system was developed as a version of a customised WordPress theme, a type of web template with additional video functionality.

3. A major aim as stated in the Mefeedia mission statement is to improve the way online video content is located on the Internet. <http://www.mefeedia.com/aboutus.htm>

4. Juan Antonio del Rosario, Cristina Cordova, *Chasing Windmills*, <http://chasingmills.blogspot.com>

5. *The Guild*, <http://theguildfilm.com>

6. Wordpress Codex, 'about', <http://wordpress.org/about>

Spatial Montage

In earlier Masters research⁷, I had examined the effect the Internet was having on moving-image narratives. In this inquiry the analysis of a number of case studies led to a focus on Lev Manovich's concept of spatial montage:

This new cinematic aesthetics of density seems to be highly appropriate for our age. If we are surrounded by highly dense information surfaces, from city streets to Web pages, it is appropriate to expect from cinema a similar logic. In similar fashion, we may think of spatial montage as reflecting another contemporary daily experience - working with a number of different applications on a computer at once. If we are now used to switching our attention rapidly from one program to another, from one set of windows and commands to another, we may find multiple streams of audio-visual information presented simultaneously, more satisfying than the single stream of traditional cinema.⁸

Experimenting with spatial montage offline in a number of video projects led to exploring this concept online within the Internet. The affordances of this environment, along with working with 'multiple streams' of video content caused the video clips to become shorter in duration. Traditional montage, the editing of a number of shots together to make a sequence was replaced with a single shot. *Train Trip*,⁹ is an example of one of these experiments, where a trip to work on the train is broken down into single shots as 'fragments of aural and visual experience, rather than something that starts at a beginning and has an end.'¹⁰ The resulting spatial montage in the browser window is nine looping short duration shots that can be viewed simultaneously in varying combinations.

But, *Train Trip* remains fixed with the users only being able to start and stop the nine clips that appear in the browser. The next step was to create an interface that allowed users to have more involvement in the construction of the narrative by providing the option to choose numerous clips from an archive. Keith Deverell the third member of the VD collective had been developing through his VJing practice and Masters Design (Communication) research, interfaces that also explored the simultaneous display of multiple video windows. These interfaces following the VJ process of calling single clips from an archive, acted as a type of mixer. Recognising the potential of integrating the modified WordPress theme by Wolf with Deverell's interface designs produced the first iteration of the VD system.

Creating a feature that provided the potential to play numerous clips back online in varying multiple video window configurations. This additional web page we called the Videofunct

7. Seth Keen, 'Video Chaos: Multilinear narrative structuration in New Media video practice', MA Thesis, 2005.

8. Lev Manovich, 'Cinematic and Graphic: Cinegratography', *The Language of New Media*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001, p. 328.

9. Seth Keen, 'Train Trip', July 4, 2006, <http://dazed.adc.rmit.edu.au/~e62420/blog2/2006/07/04/train-trip>

10. Seth Keen, 'Net-vlogs: Networking Videoblogs' Association of Internet Researchers conference, Brisbane, Australia, October 2006.

Player. The chosen interface design of this first VD player featured a triptych composition, which allowed three videos to be viewed simultaneously alongside each other. Also, the WordPress developers in the latest update of the application finally responded to the folksonomy 11 practice of classifying content with tagging. Tags 12 along with categories as text-based metadata attached to each video clip were used in the interface design to allow users to select and mix clips in the triptych composition.

Pedestrian

But, what can be made in this online video system? The first substantial prototype, *Pedestrian*,¹³ was produced for a net-art exhibition that was exploring 'how artists use a 'blog' for artistic purposes'.¹⁴ *Pedestrian* started out as a vlog response to the banal, the everyday as in plain vanilla, humdrum, boring, run-of-the-mill, dull, and ordinary. The content in *Pedestrian* is shots of locations in Melbourne city and a train trip from Melbourne to Adelaide city, in South Australia. Deverell recorded the shots on a domestic level video camera as he moved through these locations. The material has a personal candid tone that reflects his point-of-view. The style of the shots has a lot in common with early home movie footage that documented holiday and travel experiences. These recordings have been edited into short duration clips that vary in length from 15 to 60 seconds. It was intriguing to discover that clips of such short durations could provide so much insight into experiences and locations. Set to loop continually in the interface, each of these clips was chosen to repeat a moment in time at a particular location.

In the triptych composition the central window is used as a pivot point for the left and right windows of video content. To begin the user is given a written list of categories to select from on a separate web page (which has now been moved directly into the centre of the player page in later iterations). Choosing one of these categories brings up a group of thumbnail images that shows what clips have been allocated to that category. Selecting a thumbnail downloads an individual clip into the central window, revealing the title and tags that have been assigned to that clip. These tag keywords are duplicated in the left and right windows. Choosing a tag reveals another group of thumbnails that have been tagged with that particular keyword. The user can then begin to curate varying combinations of clips together across the triptych composition.

Pedestrian, an experimental work, has been allocated abstract themes as categories that create a random viewing with an open narrative structure. What the prototype provided was

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11. Folksonomy is a form of classification that utilises tags to categorise content. The word folksonomy brings together the words folk and taxonomy as a way to describe a type of classification that is created by the both users and producers of content on the Internet.
 12. Tags are generally used in social media environments on the Internet like social bookmarking, blogging, image and video sharing websites. Tagging generally involves assigning a keyword as metadata to varying forms of content. In most cases tags are created informally by individuals as a way to categorise their own and other people's content.
 13. Seth Keen, 'Pedestrian', <http://www.videofunct.net/pedestrian>
 14. NewMediaFest 07, JavaMuseum, 'a+b=ba? art + blog = blogart?', 2007, http://www.javamuseum.org/2007/a_and_b/?page_id=2

an introduction to classifying video content, with each of the clips being titled, categorised and tagged. Adding text as metadata to the video clips created associations between the moving imagery and text. The decisions made with these associations have a significant effect on how the work is read, in regards to the context that this text creates for the viewer. It entails a shifting of the archival process to one that was user-generated by the producer of the material, creating an individualist form of folksonomic classification that is then deciphered by the user.

It could be argued that due to working with mainly video content within a blog infrastructure a prototype like *Pedestrian* is situated within the established practice of video blogging. But, generally in video blogs, video content is posted as linear, single window clips that are viewed in isolation as a chronological post. In contrast to this the VD player features as the home page and clips can be viewed together in varying thematic configurations. In comparison, the work is made up of many clips that make up a larger whole. The usual individual posts that are on the home page of a conventional video blog become an archive of secondary supporting web pages. With no date and time stamp on each post the monthly archive system used in conventional blogs and video blogs has been removed. In this archive like in the VD player clips can only be accessed through categories and tags.

Hitting vlogging with a hammer

The Hitting Vlogging with a Hammer¹⁵ workshop run as part of the Video Vortex II exhibition revealed a corresponding interest in creating alternative ways to access online video content, across both the Videofunct and Show in a Box projects. Show in a Box (SIAB)¹⁶ in a similar way to Videofunct is modifying the blog application WordPress into a Video Content Management System. A non-profit community of video bloggers, SIAB are developing a range of video blog plugins and themes. The project comes out of a community that has formed around the videoblogging mail list¹⁷ and previous projects including freevlog¹⁸ and Node 101¹⁹. Video blogging for these communities follows the blogging dream of everyone having the freedom to publish on the Internet and they aim expand this globally. SIAB as a project progresses this personal media aim and focuses on developing accessible technical tools that allow video bloggers to independently manage aesthetics and publishing.

Similarities between the two projects as demonstrated in the title of the workshop, involved reshaping the current video blog architecture and interface. In his presentation, Dedman referred to a number of video blogs that demonstrated a need to design a system and interface that afforded alternative means to access video content. He showed his co-presenter

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15. Jay Dedman, Keith Deverell, RYANNE HODSON, Seth Keen, 'Videofunct and Showinabox: Hitting Vlogging with a Hammer', Video Vortex II exhibition, Netherlands Media Art Institute, Amsterdam, January, 2008, <http://networkcultures.org/wpmu/videovortex/archives/34>
 16. Show in a Box, <http://showinabox.tv>
 17. Video blogging mailing list, founded June, 2004, <http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/videoblogging>
 18. RYANNE HODSON, Michael Verdi, Freevlog, <http://www.freevlog.org>
 19. Node101, <http://node101.org>

Hodson's video blog, *Ryan is Hungry*²⁰ as an example that utilised SIAB plugins.²¹ The related videos feature used on YouTube had influenced the development of the 'VideoPress Related Videos' plugin, that provides the video blogger with the potential to create associations between clips. A connection could be made between this plugin and the process of categorising and tagging used in the VD system. In comparison, the other SIAB plugins rely on chronological influences. 'VideoPress Recent Videos' continues the chronological 'recent posts' feature that has been available for some time in text-based blogs. Also, reclaiming the earlier video archive page with the new, 'VideoPress Video Archive' plugin demonstrates a necessity in the SIAB project to maintain the chronological characteristics of conventional blogging.

In comparison to the VD project, a key objective in the SIAB project is to continue utilising the social media functionalities of video blogging. Most conventional video blogging utilises commenting, trackbacks and web syndication available on each post, as a way to generate connections and communities across other websites. A defining feature of blogging is the permalink, which provides each post with a singular identifiable web address. The permalink has a significant effect on the social media functionality of blogging by fragmenting a web page into smaller units that can be accessed as individual web pages. In contrast, the VD player creates a type of self-contained media object that is made up of numerous clips. Not being tied to these social media functionalities allows the VD system to move to a form of access that does not rely on chronology.

Conclusion

Following an ongoing evolutionary process of design, the VD system continues to be developed by reflecting on the issues that occur in each prototype. A recent prototype, *Glasshouse Birdman*,²² follows a more traditional documentary approach towards a subject. A form of personalised documentary that captures the day-to-day life of a wildlife carer in Queensland, Australia. In this example, the use of categories and tags in the classification process are refined to create a more structured narrative for the user. *Glasshouse Birdman* begins to demonstrate how a larger scale online video narrative can be displayed as fragmented short duration clips in a non-linear structure, presented in multiple video windows. Temporal constraints imposed by temporal montage and linear narrative structures are dissolved through the use of categorising, tagging and spatial montage. In contrast to YouTube, which acts as a type of repository for moving-image content, the VD system provides the opportunity to construct moving-image narratives online, within the Internet. The user involved in the curatorial process of selecting and remixing clips, gains access to online video content as a type of archive held within the networked structure of the Internet.

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20. Ryanne Hodson, Ryan is Hungry, <http://ryanishungry.com>

21. Show in a Box, 'Plugins' <http://showinabox.tv/plugins>

22. Seth Keen, 'Glasshouse Birdman', May, 2008, <http://www.videofunct.net/GlasshouseBirdman/player>

ANOTHER TAKE ON TAGS? WHAT TAGS TELL

JAN SIMONS

Problems with tags¹

Tags and tag clouds are icons of what has become known as 'Web 2.0', the upgraded version of the Internet which promises the user: 'You control your own data'.² Tagging systems are considered as key instruments for this user control because they allow users to assign keywords of their own choosing to Internet resources of their own making as well as – at least in some cases – to objects produced by others. These tags are often primarily added for personal use, but in most so-called social network sites, tags are also accessible for other users. Because tagging systems allow users to freely choose and assign their own keywords, they are expected to liberate the users from the oppressive authority of pre-fixed, pre-defined, and often not readily intelligible vocabularies of prescribed top-down expert classification systems and taxonomies. In line with the guiding idea of Web 2.0 as the information infrastructure that facilitates the emergence of 'the wisdom of the crowds' – the Web 2.0 variety of what used to be called 'collective intelligence'³ and nowadays best exemplified by the collectively produced web encyclopedia *Wikipedia* – the idea is that through the myriad interactions of individual users tagging systems will eventually make the tags chosen and assigned by individual users converge into a emergent bottom-up common vocabulary or *folksonomy*.⁴

But what would such a folksonomy look like? After all, users may apply keywords in different ways and tag resources for different purposes; tags are applied to a wide – if not wild - variety

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1. This article is based on a presentation at the conference *VideoVortex: Responses to YouTube*, 18-19th of January in Amsterdam, Netherlands. Another version of this presentation was published as Jan Simons, 'Tag-elese or the Language of Tags', *FibreCulture Journal*, Issue 12 'Models, Metamodels and Contemporary Media', 2008, http://www.fibreCulture.org/issue12/issue_12_simons.html
 2. Tim O'Reilly. 'What is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models For The Next Generation of Software' (2005), <http://www.oreillynet.com/lpt/a/6228>
 3. Pierre Lévy. *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace*. Cambridge, Ma.: Perseus Books, 1997.
 4. Peter Merholz. 'Metadata for the Masses' (2004), <http://www.adaptivepath.com/ideas/essays/archives/000361print.php>; Peter Mika. 'Ontologies Are Us: A Unified Model of Social Networks and Semantics,' *Journal of Web Semantics: Sciences, Services and Agents on the World Wide Web* 5.1 (2007): 5-15; Clay Shirky. 'Ontology is Overrated: Categories, Links, and Tags', *Clay Shirky's Writings About the Internet: Economics & Culture, Media & Community*, Open Source (2005), http://shirky.com/writings/ontology_overrated.html; Thomas Vander Wal. 'Explaining and Showing Broad and Narrow Folksonomies', (2005), http://www.personalinfolocloud.com/2005/02/expaining_and_.html

of objects (texts, blogs, bookmarks, photos, videos, music files, book titles, films, games, and what have you), and tagging systems themselves vary in design, ranging from 'blind' systems that let their users freely choose their tags to systems that show tags that other users assigned to the same or similar objects and gently recommend the user to choose one of these, and from 'narrow' systems that allow users to only tag their own documents to 'broad' systems that allow users to freely tag other users' objects as well.⁵ These are so many incentives for very divergent, idiosyncratic, and inconsistent uses of tags and it is hard to see how anything like a controlled vocabulary could ever emerge from this highly uncontrolled labeling of what are often themselves already highly chaotic collections of heterogeneous objects.

It is hardly surprising, then, that the most discussed problems with free tagging systems are polysemy (does *music* refer to an audio file with music, a picture of a musical instrument, a file with a musical score?), homonymy (is *rock* used to tag a picture of a rock formation or a video or a rock concert?), synonymy (a Macintosh computer can be tagged with either *computer* or *apple*, and the latter can also be used to tag a piece of fruit, the former record company of *The Beatles*, or in combination with *big* to refer to New York City), and differences in levels of categorisation (a pet can be tagged with *cat*, *feline* or *animal*). To these problems one could add spelling and orthography. Many users of *Flickr*, for instance, tag pictures of New York as *new york* or *new york city* without realising that *Flickr*'s tagging system interprets isolated strings of symbols as separate tags. The result is on the one hand the unexpected appearance of the city of York in *Flickr*'s 'all time most popular tags', together with the lexical item *San* of which complements like *Francisco*, *José*, or *Bernardino* didn't make it to this distinguished list, while on the other hand New York (and other cities with composite names) is tagged in at least three different ways (*newyork*, *newyorkcity*, *nyc*). Other problems are unlikely compounds (*TimBernersLee*, *sometaihurts*, *handsclawsandallkindsofpaws*), personal tags (*mydog*, *me*, *natasja*) or one-offs (*billybobsdog*).⁶

At closer inspection, however, it turns out that polysemy, synonymy, homonymy, and levels of categorisation only scratch the surface of the semantic problems with tags. Is a picture tagged with *england* a picture *from* or *about* England, or is it simply a picture taken somewhere *in* England? Do tags like *red*, *green*, *blue* refer to properties of the objects in a picture, do they refer to salient properties of a photograph itself (e.g. the use of filters, or the application of post-production techniques), or even to a property that makes a picture eligible for admittance to a group or 'pool' of pictures? These problems do not arise from any ambiguity of the meaning of words like *England*, *red*, *green* or *blue* – there is nothing ambiguous about

5. Vander Wal, 'Explaining and Showing Broad and Narrow Folksonomies'; Cameron Marlow, et al. 'HT06, Tagging Paper, Taxonomy, Flickr, Academic Article, ToRead', *Proceedings of the Seventeenth Conference on Hypertext and Hypermedia*. New York: Association for Computing Machinery (ACM), 2006. Also available from <http://www.danah.org/papers/Hypertext2006.pdf>; Scott Golder and Bernardo A. Huberman. 'The Structure of Collaborative Tagging Systems', *Journal of Information Science* 32.2 (2006): 198-208.
6. Adam Mathes, 'Folksonomies – Cooperative Classification and Communication Through Metadata' (2004), http://blog.namics.com/2005/Folksonomies_Cooperative_Classification.pdf; Marieke Guy and Emma Tonkin, 'Folksonomies: Tidying Up Tags?', *D-Lib Magazine* 12.1 (2006), <http://www.dlib.org/dlib/january06/guy/01guy.html>

the meanings of these words in themselves – but rather from the different relations these tags entertain with the objects they are used for.

Of course, one could argue that these ambiguities dissolve the very moment these tags are seen in connection with the objects they label. But the point of tagging is precisely to make objects retrievable either for later use by the producer/owner of the object or for other users if the objects are stored on social network sites like *Flickr*, *YouTube*, *Last.fm*, *Del.icio.us* and others. As *Flickr* explains, tags are 'like a keyword or category label. Tags help you find photos and videos which have something in common'.⁷ But tags can only accomplish this if their meanings are largely independent of the particular objects they label, because if one first needs to match an object with a tag in order to disambiguate its meaning, tags would be rather poor instruments for finding objects in the first place. Using a tag for a search would be like firing a shot in the dark. And such indeed may be the sad truth about many tagging systems....

Problems with tags

But the problems with tags may result from the particular ways in which they are thought and theorised and the particular expectations that are brought to bear on them from these theoretical perspectives rather than from some inherent properties of tags themselves. As the end product of the myriad interactions of individual tagging practices a folksonomy is eventually nothing but a democratically – or rather, collectively – defined taxonomy. Just like classical taxonomies, folksonomies use tags as labels to identify objects for purposes of classification, indexation, and retrieval. Whether the meanings of these labels are prescribed and imposed by expert authorities or result from a consensus that has emerged spontaneously from the free practices of the multitudes of users, both expert terms and democratic tags are expected to reliably and unambiguously identify and retrieve the members of the categories they are supposed to cover. This unavoidably means that once the tagging practices of the multitudes have settled into a more or less stable and controlled vocabulary, newcomers to a folksonomy will have to conform to the established consensus and 'learn' the meanings and proper uses a tagging community has already assigned to their tags which is in principle not that much different from learning the terms of an expert taxonomy (it is very well conceivable that a folksonomy will be published as a 'wiki-dictionary'). Proposals for the remediation of the flaws of tagging systems already indicate solutions pointing in that direction.⁸

The problem with these approaches to folksonomies is not so much the unrealistic expectation that some stable vocabulary will eventually emerge from tagging, but rather that their view on tagging itself is tainted by the very taxonomies they want to provide an alternative for. This view could itself be tagged as what Christian Metz, one of the founders of French film semiotics, once called a 'FIDO-fido'-view of language because it treats lexical items in general and nouns in particular as labels that 'name' objects like the proper noun *Fido* 'rigor-

7. Flickr, <http://flickr.com/photos/tag>

8. Guy and Tonkin, 'Folksonomies: Tidying Up Tags?'; Mathes, 'Folksonomies

ously' identifies the dog that goes by that name.⁹ This view is, of course, encouraged by the very purposes taxonomies and folksonomies are designed to serve, which is the classification and identification of particular objects. The 'FIDO-fido' view is further encouraged by the very design of taxonomies and tagging systems: most classificatory systems, including tagging systems, allow users to use only separate and discrete lexical items as labels. Tagging systems, that is, force users to treat words as single and isolated items with which they must capture and 'name' a salient or significant aspect of the target object. This accounts for the heavy predominance of nouns in tagging systems, since it is part of the semantics of nouns that they typically denote discrete 'bounded entities' and because unlike verbs, adjectives, adverbs or prepositions nouns typically do not require other lexical items as syntactic complements.¹⁰ Moreover, tagging systems are typically a-synchronous and asymmetrical systems for 'communication through metadata': taggers do not interact with each other in 'real time' and on a person-to-person basis but they get feedback from tagging systems that presents them with the aggregate results of previous tagging practices. The system, however, only samples tags on the basis of the frequency of their use but it is blind for the particular context in which tags were used and has no clue as to the particular meanings tags might have had in those contexts, let alone being able to provide prospective taggers with such clues. Lexical items, that is, appear in tagging systems deprived from any semantic, syntactic or pragmatic context which might help to 'ground' their meaning.

These factors promote a 'dictionary' approach of lexical items and a 'picture' view of language, in which words have well circumscribed and context independent meanings and in which linguistic expressions are supposed to 'mirror' real world objects or states of affairs. In other words, tagging systems favor the classical positivist view of language in which words should ideally have definite meanings and according to which the meaning of an expression consists of its 'truth conditions'.¹¹ In this respect proponents of folksonomies only disagree with (what they perceive as) authoritarian taxonomists about how and when tags will acquire their 'definite meanings': top-down or bottom-up, before or after tagging.¹² However, the concern for a reliable and stable classification system might obscure what is actually going on in tagging practices and prevent seeing with clarity the emergence of an order that

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9. Christian Metz, 'Le Cinéma: Langue ou Langage?', in *Essais sur la Signification du Cinéma*. Tome 1. Paris: Klincksieck, 1983, p. 68. Metz borrowed the label 'FIDO-fido theory' from the American philosopher G. Ryle.
 10. See Ronald W. Langacker, *Cognitive Grammar: A Basic Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008; Adele E. Goldberg, *Constructions at Work: The Nature of Generalisation in Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
 11. See A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1987; Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*. London and New York: Routledge, 2001 [1922].
 12. This is, for instance, what Clay Shirky has to say about the 'filtering' process in folksonomies: 'Similarly, the idea that the categorization is done after things are tagged is incredibly foreign to cataloguers. Much of the expense of existing catalogue systems is in trying to prevent one-off categories. With tagging, what you say is 'As long as a lot of people are tagging any given link, the rare tags can be used or ignored, as the user likes. We won't even have to expend the cost to prevent people from using them. We'll just help other users ignore them if they want to'. Clay Shirky, 'Ontology is overrated'.

the 'wisdom of the crowds' actually has introduced in the seemingly 'feral', 'out-of-control' hypertext structure of tagging systems.¹³ Folksonomists might have been looking for order at the wrong place.

What is the problem with tags?

If one takes the brief of Web 2.0, 'You control your own data', seriously it does not make much sense to approach what users actually *do* with their data from the point of view of some desired end result (e.g., a 'controlled vocabulary') only to come up with remedies for perceived problems (e.g., polysemy, homonymy, synonymy, etc.) that get in the way of achieving the desired outcome.¹⁴ Rather, one should try and approach users' practices from a user's perspective to try and find out what they actually do and how they proceed when they attempt to get a grip on their data by tagging them. Although this seems to be an impossible task, given the massive numbers and the geographical dispersion of taggers, taking a user's perspective does not necessarily require that the researchers sits down next to a tagger in order to 'examine user's motivations when adding tags, see why they decide on particular words, observe how many tags they add and compare how the same items are classified by different users'.¹⁵ The higher-level order that emerges from the myriad interactions of the components of complex systems typically displays properties and behaviours that are not reducible to or predictable from those interactions (nor are those properties and behaviours the results of bottom-up, 'democratically' made choices). Higher-level orders tend to 'transcend' the behaviours, perceptions and awareness of the individuals who participate in the lower-level activities that give rise to higher-level orders, which makes it very unlikely that research methods that focus on the decisions of individual users are capable of grasping even the onset of higher-level complexity.

Languages, for instance, are good examples of complex systems that emerged from countless usage events through which units, schemas and constructions of different levels of gen-

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13. Jill Walker, 'Feral Hypertext: When Hypertext Literature Escapes Control', *Proceedings of the Sixteenth ACM Conference on Hypertext and Hypermedia, Hypertext '05*. New York: ACM Press, 2005. See also Marlow et al. 'HT06, Tagging Paper, Taxonomy, Flickr, Academic Article, ToRead'.
 14. The term Web 2.0 has itself been tagged in various and not always synonymous ways. The *Webopedia*, for instance, offers the following definition of Web 2.0: 'Web 2.0 is the term given to describe a second generation of the *World Wide Web* that is focused on the ability for people to collaborate and share information online. Web 2.0 basically refers to the transition from static HTML Web pages to a more dynamic Web that is more organised and is based on serving Web applications to users. Other improved functionality of Web 2.0 includes open communication with an emphasis on Web-based communities of users, and more open sharing of information. Over time Web 2.0 has been used more as a marketing term than a computer-science-based term. Blogs, wikis, and Web services are all seen as components of Web 2.0.' This definition hovers between a technical definition and a definition in terms of the social uses and practices afforded by applications served to users. The observation that 'Web 2.0' has over time become a marketing term is nothing less than a recommendation not to dump the term altogether. *Webopedia*, http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/W/Web_2_point_0.html
 15. Marieke Guy and Emma Tonkin, 'Tidying up Tags?' For practical reasons, Guy and Tonkin do not apply an ethnographic methodology themselves, since 'such studies take time and resources'.

erality became entrenched and conventionalised.¹⁶ Native speakers must have a ‘knowledge’ of their language, but since for most native speakers the grammar of their native language is not consciously available, and no single native speaker has a full grasp of his or her native language – even professional linguists still have not managed to deliver a full account of English, the world’s most studied language system. In order to study the grammar of a language, linguists therefore do not examine native speaker’s motivations, choices and decisions when they speak. They study the language system through the traces it leaves in the actual and possible utterances native speakers produce and understand. In order to discover the system that might emerge from countless individual tagging events, one had better study the traces of these events rather than the particular motivations and choices that led to the event.

If tags and tagging practices can be considered as ‘a largely user-driven adaptation of natural language for indexing purposes’, the characteristics of such a ‘sublanguage’ can be studied ‘as a corpus of interest to linguistics’ and not only ‘as a keyword corpus in need of filtering’, as has been done in most, if not all, studies of tagging systems.¹⁷ Assuming that for their tagging practices taggers tap on their common, everyday knowledge of language rather than being driven by the concerns of taxonomists, archivists and other professional indexers – and isn’t that the point of Web 2.0? – tags can be considered as utterances or speech acts. But since tags are devoid of syntactic, semantic and pragmatic context because of the limitations tagging systems impose on users, they seem to embody the paradoxical phrase Christian Metz once coined to characterise film: a language without grammar (*langue sans langue*).¹⁸ How to get out of this conundrum?

Tagging systems may deprive users of the means to express syntactic and semantic relationships, but that does not mean that tagging systems make the users’ semantic and syntactic knowledge inoperative. On the contrary, there is evidence that this knowledge directs tagging practices. A well-known strategy to circumvent the obligation to use single words as tags is the creation of compound words consisting of more terms or mixtures of languages (e.g., *hardrockcalling*, *macysfireworks*, *happybirthdayamerica*, *pyramidstage*, *bisousbacikussekisses*).¹⁹ Moreover, most users of Flickr and other sites with tagging systems follow the recommendation to use two or more tags in order to increase the retrievability of their data. Of course, users may have many incentives to tag their data with often many different and unrelated tags but it is not to be excluded that one of the incentives is the desire to contextualise tags in one way or another. But then again, precisely because users may have many motives for choosing tags – to attract as many other users as possible, to deceive a site’s watchdogs who guard against indecent, offensive, politically correct or copyrighted content, to advertise their services, or for sheer personal use (*mydog*), and so on – a ‘gram-

16. Ronald W. Langacker, *Cognitive Grammar*, pp. 216 ff; Adele E. Goldberg, *Constructions at Work*, pp. 63 ff.

17. Emma Tonkin, ‘Between Symbol and Language-In-Use’, Bich-Liên Doan, Jose Joemon and Massimo Melucci (eds.) *Proceedings of the 2nd International Workshop on Context-Based Information Retrieval*. Roskilde, Dk: Roskilde University, 2007, p. 116-117.

18. Christian Metz, ‘Cinéma: Langue ou Langage?’, p. 70.

19. Retrieved from *Flickr’s* ‘hot tags’ on July 6, 2008.

mar’ of ‘tag-elese’ – if there is such a thing – should not be ramified at the level of individual usage events but rather at a higher, aggregate level of these events.

The strongest indication that ‘ordinary’ taggers tap into the resources of everyday language are perhaps the very phenomena, that according to their critics, indicate that folksonomies require filtering devices: polysemy, homonymy, synonymy, different levels of categorisation, and the use of ‘non-dictionary’ expressions such as compound words. In natural languages, polysemy, homonymy, synonymy and ambiguities of all sorts are not deviant, but default. Unlike the terms in taxonomies, dictionaries, or encyclopedias, that are typically defined and sanctioned by expert (individual as well as collective) authorities, words in natural languages do not ‘have’ meanings but function as *cues* to meaning urging the language user to search an intricate and open-ended network of senses that may vary from novel interpretations through incipient sense to established conventional or ‘central’ meanings.²⁰ Syntactic, semantic and pragmatic context guide language users on their search for a suitable but always provisional and hypothetical interpretation for the cues in question, but when such contextual cues are prohibited, as in tagging systems, cues become incentives for a seemingly uncontrollable proliferation of meanings. However, in language usage lexical items themselves are not only cues to the semantic content but they usually also convey cues to syntactic information, semantic relations and possible pragmatic usage content. Could it be possible that this information is somehow preserved and recoverable at a higher aggregate level of tag usage events?

A Walk In The Clouds

Fortunately, the web itself provides the aggregate data that are relevant for a search for system in the chaos of tags. The photo – and now also video – hosting website Flickr, for instance, provides a so-called tag cloud in which the 150 all time most popular (i.e. most frequently used) tags are listed alphabetically with their relative frequency of use being represented by font size (the bigger the font, the more popular the tag). Flickr offers its users a ‘blind’ and ‘narrow’ tagging system, which means that users are completely free to choose tags (Flickr does not come up with recommendations), and users are allowed to only tag their own images or videos unless they have gotten explicit permission to tag photos or videos of other users from the owners of those photos or videos. It does not seem unreasonable to assume that Flickr’s tag cloud is a quite reliable representation of choices made by taggers when left to their own devices.

20. Ronald W. Langacker, *Cognitive Grammar*, p. 38-39; Jeffrey L. Elman, ‘An Alternative View of the Mental Lexicon’, *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 8.7 (July 2004): 306; Gunther Kress, *Literacy in the New Media Age*. London and New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 39; Vyvyan Evans, ‘Lexical Concepts, Cognitive Models and Meaning-Construction’, *Cognitive Linguistics* 17.4 (2006): 493.



Figure 1: Flickr tag cloud 2007.

The tag cloud, of course, does not provide an insight in the particular tagging practices of individual users. First of all, these 150 tags are only a tiny part of the huge amount of actually used tags. The tag cloud represents the relatively few tags that are used by (very) many users, but it leaves the many tags used by a smaller amount of users and the huge number of tags used by only one or two users out of the picture. The distribution of tags, that is, follows a power law according to which ‘the rich get richer’: the tag cloud itself, for one thing, provides the most popular tags with a higher visibility than then the massive amount of tags that didn’t make it into this cloud and might thus function as a kind of a recommendation system (a tagger who wants to increase the ‘visibility’ of his photos had better choose one of the all time popular tags than come up with a personal and idiosyncratic tag, for instance).²¹ Under the reign of a power law, devices like a tag cloud are bound to instigate positive feedback loops and the relative stability of Flickr’s tag cloud over a longer period of time seems to confirm this.

This, however, does not say very much about the meaningfulness of tags, since meaningfulness is a matter for the individual tagger or groups of taggers to decide: there is no reason to assume, for instance, that under the pressure of a power law a folksonomy will eventually converge on a relatively limited set of tags with consensually agreed upon meanings, since the power of a power law in environments like the web is precisely that it allows room for particular individual points of view or niche interests in the so-called ‘long tail’.²²

21. Adam Mathes, ‘Folksonomies’, p. 11; Marieke Guy and Emma Tonkin. ‘Tidying up Tags?’.

22. Mathes, for instance, suggests that examining power law distributions of tags ‘could give a better indication of whether a folksonomy converges on terms and foster consensus, or if as the user base grows the vocabulary grows at a more even rate, and the distribution of terms flattens, perhaps indicating less agreement.’ Mathes. ‘Folksonomies’, p. 11. Shirky, on the other hand, argues that the ‘market logic’ that dominates tagging practices ‘allows many distinct points of view to co-exist, because it allows individuals to preserve their point of view, even in the face of general disagreement’. Shirky, ‘Ontologies are overrated’. See also Chris Anderson, *The Long Tail: How Endless Choice Is Creating Unlimited Demand*. London: Random House Business Books, 2006.

The tags in the tag cloud, moreover, are selected merely on the basis of their frequency of use. The algorithms that sample and rank the tags on Flickr are blind to the content of the pictures tagged by these tags, as well as to the other tags with which they might co-occur: in this respect, the tags in the tag clouds are nothing but a bunch of de-contextualised clues. The only relationship between the tags in the tag cloud is one of co-occurrence in the tag cloud itself, that is, but not necessarily in any of the data tagged by them.²³

Although this may seem to make the tag cloud look like a random collection of tags that only share their high ranking in Flickr’s popularity pool, it also, paradoxically perhaps, makes the task of searching for some system in the cloud easier. First of all, since the 150 all time popular tags have been severed from the pictures for which they were used, the particular content of those pictures is of some marginal interest: the tags in the cloud do not refer to any picture or any item of their content in particular. The semantics of these tags can only be interpreted at the most abstract or general level (which is not something like a dictionary meaning but rather a very schematic or central or prototypical meaning). This also means that whatever patterns are found in Flickr’s tag cloud can also be found in other tagging systems, since the found patterns are not dependent on the particular nature, modality and content of the tagged items (although this is, at the current state of research, a hypothesis that needs to be empirically tested).

Second, the tag cloud might be representative in more than one sense. Apart from representing the ‘most popular’ tags – the metadata most users have ‘voted for’ – patterns in the tag cloud, the ‘short head’ of the power law that governs the quantitative distribution of Flickr’s tags, are more than likely similar to patterns further up in its ‘long tail’. There is, for instance, a power law distribution of tags *within* the ‘short head’ itself (see Figure 1): only a few tags have been used more than 3500000 times, a greater number of tags have been used between 1750000 and 3500000 times, whereas the vast majority of these 150 tags has been used less than 1750000 times. Since power laws are fractal – ‘which is to say that no matter how far you zoom in they still look like power laws’ which means ‘that the Long Tail is made of many mini-tails’²⁴ – it is not unreasonable to assume that relationships found between tags in the short head will be found among tags in the ‘mini-tails’ that build up the long tail (again a hypothesis in need of empirical investigation).

Tagging the tags

These assumptions made – for present purposes, the content of the tagged items is of marginal interest and under a power law the patterns found in one segment are ‘self-similar’ to patterns in any other segment – what pattern or patterns are there in Flickr’s tag cloud? A ranking on the basis of frequency of use does not yield more information than the tag cloud

23. It is not even clear that the ‘co-occurrence hypothesis’, according to which similar words are preferentially used for similar items, applies to the tag cloud, since the tag cloud itself gives no ‘cue’ to which of what kind of items the tags are attached. See Emma Tonkin, ‘Between Symbol and Language-In-Use’, p. 116.

24. Chris Anderson, *The Long Tail*, p. 139.

itself already provides, except maybe the working of a power law.²⁵ A better way to proceed is to try and classify the tags themselves. As was to be expected, for reasons already explained above, an overwhelming majority of 126 out of 145 tags consists of nouns, the remaining tags being distributed over adjectives (12), one verb (*hiking* – and one might question whether this progressive should not be classified as a modifier (adjective) or maybe even as a nominalization (noun)), one personal pronoun (*me*), one cipher (*07*), and some hard to classify tags such as *bw*, *la*, *dc*, *de* and *san*. The latter four are most likely components of proper names like *Los Angeles*, *Washington DC*, *San Francisco* and *Rio de Janeiro*, whereas the former probably is an abbreviation of *black-and-white*. The tag *new*, here classified as an adjective, is almost certainly also used as part of the proper name *New York* which makes it a component of a noun rather than an adjective.

A closer look at the noun tags learns that 44 out of 126 nouns (35%) are proper nouns that refer to continents, countries, regions, states or cities (USA states and cities by far outnumbering the rest of the world). Besides these 47 proper nouns there are some 15 tags such as *beach*, *sea*, *camping*, *river*, *mountain*, *zoo* that refer to locations as well, which brings the number of locative nouns up to about 62, which is almost half of the nouns in the tag cloud.

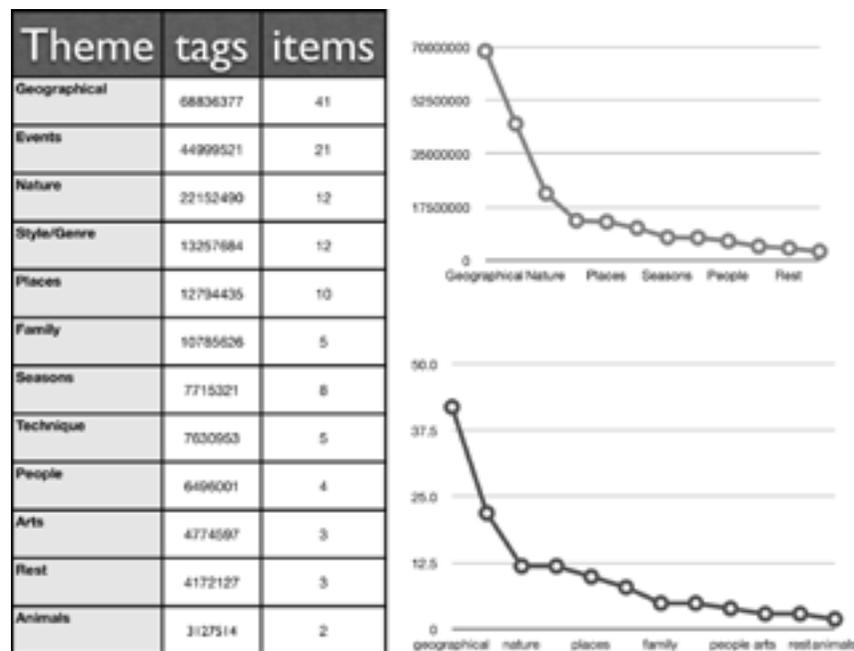


Figure 2: Table with tag categories.

25. In order to uncover the working of a power law one needs to have the exact figures of the frequency of use of tags, and plot these in a graph. Although the tag cloud itself does not provide these figures, they can be easily obtained by clicking on the tags. The page which opens displays the exact number of 'uploads' tagged with that term.

Apart from these locative tags there are also 15 out of 126 nouns (12 per cent) that refer to moments in time (e.g. *august*, *birthday*, *autumn*, *holiday*, *Christmas*). This relatively low amount of temporal tags can be partly explained by a technological feature of contemporary digital cameras that automatically register the time and date the picture was taken. These meta-data are automatically uploaded to Flickr together with other meta-data such as the type of camera the picture was taken with. Since these meta-data are displayed together with the tags added by users themselves every picture is automatically tagged with temporal information, which makes temporal tags provided by the users redundant. But more importantly, a look at a random sample of pictures tagged with temporal tags reveals that most of them show activities that are typical for the season, period or moments mentioned by the tags. Instead of referring to particular moments or periods in time, then, these tags metonymically refer to events that characterise the mentioned episodes. In that respect, temporal tags are often on a par with the 11 tags that explicitly refer to events or activities such as *festival*, *concert*, *trip*, or *travel*. However, the same goes for locative tags as well: these can also refer to a site as the subject matter of a photograph as well as to activities or events that took place at those sites. Like temporal tags, locative tags can also metonymically refer to activities and events.

The near absence of verbs seems to be largely compensated for either by nouns that refer directly to events or by temporal and locative nouns that metonymically refer to events. This is consistent with the fact that events are often metaphorically talked about as objects, as in *going to the concert*, *visiting a festival*, or *witnessing an explosion*.²⁶ Note that this polysemy of temporal and locative tags is a very common feature in natural language: *Christmas* can mean 'the most wonderful *time of the year*' but also the '*celebration of the birth of Christ*', the traditional '*family-get-together*' or whatever might be a typical activity for the speaker to undertake on the 25th of December.

Eleven of the 145 tags in the cloud are adjectives (7.5 per cent), seven of which are colour terms (that could also be classified as colour names and be counted as nouns, e.g. *blue*, *black*, *red*, *green*, *yellow*, *white*). Of the remaining adjectives one refers to a property of the picture (*geotagged*), one to a particular device with which the photo was taken (*macro*), another to a salient feature of a picture's content (*urban*), and, as already mentioned, one is rather to be considered as part of a proper name (*new* as component of *new york*). Except for the last one, all of the adjectives can be grouped as a cluster that pertains to the style or the genre to which the picture belongs.

Granted that at least a number of temporal and locative tags can be classified as events as well, some interesting patterns starts to emerge. First of all, as was to be expected in a set

26. See Georg Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980, pp. 30-31; Jeffrey M. Zacks and Barbara Tversky, 'Event Structure in Perception and Conception', *Psychological Bulletin* 127.1 (2001): 7. De-verbalization does not magically turn a process into a thing but it signals that the process is being cognitively construed and linguistically profiled as a 'bounded entity'. It might well be that the static nature of photos together with the syntactic limitations imposed by the tagging system encourage a non-processual representation of events. See Ronald W. Langacker, *Cognitive Grammar*, p. 17-118.

governed by a power law, there is a 'short head' within the 'short head' of Flickr's tags as well, consisting of clusters of temporal, locative, and event tags that together make up about 69 per cent of the tag cloud. The remaining 46 tags (31 per cent) in this short head's 'long tail' can be distributed over 8 more categories: *nature* (12), *style/genre* (12: e.g., *portrait, landscape, urban, night, color*), *family and friends* (4: *baby, kids, family, friends*), *technique* (5: *cameraphone, canon, nikon, macro, film*), *people* (4: *people, me, portrait, girl*), *arts* (3: *architecture, art, graffiti*), *animals* (3: *cat, cats, dog*) and *rest* (3: *new, de, san*). Second, and more interesting for the purposes of this research, the tags within the 'short head within the short head' pertain to times, places, and events. Intuitively this seems to make sense: whatever a photograph depicts, it has to have taken place or have been located at some place at some time. Time, place and events are the basic components of what in human experience constitutes a scene and these basic experiential components are reflected in the basic argument structure of language, in which time, place, and event constitute a 'nuclear' argument structure.²⁷

Tag-elese

In natural language, the 'argument roles' that fill slots in a semantic argument structure like *agent, patient, instrument, theme*, etc., typically correspond to the participant roles that are lexically expressed in sentences as subject, object, indirect object or prepositional phrases. In the construction of argument structures and the organisation of syntactic structures the verb is pivotal, because it projects the roles that are involved in the process it denotes.²⁸ However, since the limitations of the tagging system prohibit the expression of a core argument structure with corresponding syntactic participant roles in subject-verb-object-indirect structure, the system leaves taggers with no other option than to subject all argument roles to a process of nominalisation and to express them as nouns. Core arguments such as time, place, and process are then lexically expressed as the temporal, locative and event tags that jointly make up the 'short head' within the tag cloud, whereas argument roles as *agent, patient, instrument*, etc. are 'demoted' to so-called 'satellite arguments' like 'additional participants' in the tag cloud's long tail.²⁹ Since nouns do not take subjects, the argument role of *agent* cannot take the corresponding syntactic participant role of subject, and no longer capable of taking on the agentive role in process, it must adopt the argument role of *theme*, which is then 'fitted' into the role of one of the 'satellite arguments' such as 'additional participants'. These satellite argument roles are typically filled with tags from the clusters *family and friends, people, and animals*.

27. Ronald Langacker, *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar*. Vol. 2: Descriptive Applications. Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1991, pp. 294-295; Adele E. Goldberg, *Constructions: A Construction Grammar Approach to Argument Structure*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 39.

28. Adele E. Goldberg, *Constructions at Work*, pp. 39-40.

29. See Anna Siewierska, *Functional Grammar*, London and New York: Routledge, 1991, p. 55, p. 72. In this respect, tagging systems force taggers to adopt expressive strategies that are remarkably similar to those used by the creators and speakers of pidgin languages (as was also observed in passing by Marieke Guy and Emma Tonkin, 'Tidying Up Tags?'). See Jan Simons, 'Tag-elese Or The Language of Tags'.

But what about the remaining clusters like *style/genre, technique, nature, and arts*? These seem to be tags that are situated at what might be called the level of a meta-discourse on the photographic act itself. After all, whatever event or state-of-affairs a picture depicts, a picture's content is always the result of the single event that is presupposed by every photograph which is the act of making the photograph itself. This meta-event requires itself an argument structure with corresponding participant roles: an *agent* (the photographer), a *patient* (the photographed persons, animals, or scenes) or *theme* (a state-of-affairs), an *instrument* (the equipment with which the photograph was taken), *manner* (the particular style or genre), and, of course, the *time* and *place* of the photographic event itself. Some of these meta-arguments are strictly speaking not part of the tags in the tag cloud, but they do appear in the meta-data that are automatically 'captured' and 'rendered' by Flickr: the (account) name of the owner/producer of the photo, the camera with which the photo was taken and the date and time at which the picture was taken. But as is to be expected on a site dedicated to photography, users may consider aspects of the making of the photograph as important as the content of the picture – or rather, they may consider the particular techniques, stylistic features, technical equipment or photographic skills with which the picture was taken as the picture's actual content. For these photographers, subjects like 'nature', 'landscapes', 'people' (*girls*, not *boys* who are remarkably absent from the tag cloud), or 'urban' scenes are occasions for exercising and displaying their photographic skills rather than being of interest in themselves. These meta-argument roles are lexically expressed in tag clusters such as *technique, style/genre, nature, and art*. But since photographic techniques and skills can be exercised on any subject, there is nothing that prevents these meta-tags being juxtaposed to tags pertaining to a photograph's content matter.

ARGUMENT STRUCTURE:					
TIME PLACE AGENT <- EVENT -> PATIENT/THEME					
PARTICIPANT STRUCTURE:					
	TIME PLACE [TIME PLACE	SUBJECT NOUN [EVENT]	VERB NOUN [EVENT]	OBJECT/INDIRECT NOUN [OBLIQUE OBJECT]	OBJECT PP
TAG-STRUCTURE:					
META-TAGS:					
TIME/DATE + OWNER/PRODUCER + (EVENT) + CAMERA TAKING A PICTURE					
USER TAGS:					
TIME LOCATION + EVENT + PARTICIPANTS + INSTRUMENT + MANNER TEMPORAL EVENT FAMILY/FRIENDS TECHNIQUE STYLE/GENRE LOCATIVE PEOPLE ANIMALS					

Figure 3: Table with tag structure.

Flickr's tag cloud turns out to be governed by a remarkably stable structure, which is the argument structure familiar from the grammar of natural languages. Although this is not in itself surprising, since taggers, who are not professional or expert archivists, indexers or taxonomists have not much else to go by than their native knowledge of language, it is remarkable that this argument structure emerges in a system that deprives its users of the usual expressive means of a natural language. It is no less remarkable that this underlying argument

structure is not the result of a process of induction or abstraction from individual tagging practices of individual users. It is even highly unlikely that a full-fledged argument structure can be reconstructed from any particular set of tags attached to a unique photograph. Rather, the tag cloud displays properties that emerge from the aggregate interactions of literally millions of users, without any of them consciously applying this argument structure.

On the other hand, if it is true that power laws are fractal, this argument structure should at least partially be operative on every scale of the phenomenon it governs. This means that at least vestiges – or rudimentary parts – of the argument structure should be minimally recoverable in tagging practices at any point of the long tail. This certainly needs further investigation.

Tag-elese or the Purloined Language

If there is an order in tags, it is certainly not an incipient order of a ‘controlled vocabulary’ the proponents of folksonomies expect – or hope – to emerge, but neither are folksonomies as ‘feral’ as critics of folksonomies fear. The patterns that seem to govern tagging practices are remarkably similar to those that govern everyday language usage: somehow, users appear to be trying to contextualise tags in order to ‘pin’ down their meaning, and they do this with the same cognitive and linguistic resources they have at their disposal in their everyday use of language. These semantic, syntactic and pragmatic resources, however, are not designed to make meanings of lexical items converge into some consensually achieved or ‘democratically voted’ controlled vocabulary, but rather to help speakers and listeners to choose a particular interpretation of a linguistic utterance in a particular usage event. One might argue that the grammar of a language is designed not to abolish but rather to preserve polysemy, synonymy, homonymy and other sources of ambiguity, because these are among the properties that provide languages with their enormous and vital flexibility.

Since taggers tap into the same cognitive and linguistic resources that allow for the impressive flexibility and adaptability of language, it is very unlikely that tagging practices will eventually converge in something like a controlled vocabulary. Tag-elese is not a ‘language without a grammar’, but its grammar is largely concealed – or ‘repressed’ as a Freudian would say – by the very design of tagging systems and – it should be admitted – by the very purposes proponents of folksonomies had in mind for tagging practices. Nevertheless, as the ‘purloined letter’ in Poe’s famous story, the grammar of tag-elese has been staring us in the face all the time while we were looking for it at the wrong place.

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IMAGINARY PROPERTY FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

FLORIAN SCHNEIDER

What does 'imaginary property' mean?

'Imaginary property' is a concept that can be read in at least two directions: Property produced by imagination, or Images turning into property.

While the bourgeois conception of property has been characterised by anonymity and pure objectivity, today it seems to be the opposite way. In the age of immaterial production, digital reproduction, and networked distribution – property relations need to be made visible in order to be enforced. Property exists first of all as imagery and rapidly becomes a matter of imagination.

A contrary way of reading 'imaginary property' could also be understood as questioning of possession or ownership of imageness as such: It opens up to the question: 'What does it mean to own an image?'

So, what does it mean to own an image?

From invention, creation and distribution to recognition, exhibition and conservation, images are subject to an infinite variety of operations that are not only characterised by conflicting powers of producing, possessing and processing them. Ownership of images has turned into the challenge of implementing solutions that are executed in real time. It is a progressive appropriation, which is, as Etienne Balibar might say, 'defined in terms of an intrinsic relationship to its other'.

Imaginary property deals with the imagination of social relationships with others who could also use it, enjoy it, play it or play with it. Ownership has become a matter of communication and constant renegotiation, gained and performed on an increasingly precarious basis rather than grounded on a stable set of eternally valid laws which follow traditional ideas of property and personhood.

Does 'imaginary' mean it is faked or unreal?

Apparently, there is no way out of the imaginary. Not because the 'imaginary' is equal to the fictitious, faked or 'unreal'; rather than the opposite of 'real' imaginary relates to the indiscernibility of real and unreal, as Gilles Deleuze mentions once in his very few remarks on this peculiar terminology: 'The two terms don't become interchangeable, they remain distinct, but the distinction between them keeps changing round...' This could lead to a first and fundamental characterisation of imaginary property: As a set of exchanges it is based on the impossibility to discern anymore what is one's own and what not. Such indiscernibility certainly rests on the persuasive power of the digital image which promises to instantly provide lossless and cost free copies, while insisting on the identity of the copied content. But more

importantly, it introduces the urgency of a constant re-negotiation and exchange of meanings of ownership which remain distinct.

Isn't all property imaginary? Why should it matter all the sudden?

In a society after the spectacle, the networked world of customised channels of so-called 'social networking' – the fetishised character of non-things or absurdities (the means of im-material production) needs to be inscribed directly into the process of imagination (the labour power of the creative industries of late capitalism).

The actual results are massive expropriations and re-appropriations of both the actualized and actual production of images and imaginary values associated with them. This is what the hype of 'Web 2.0' is about, but it also characterises it as the response to the impact of pirate networks or file-sharing communities.

Global corporate networks desperately attempt to re-identify and reinforce the abstract nature of the value of exchange while being confronted with the overwhelming opulence of use value once the images are liberated from the fetters that arrested their freedom of movement, their capacity to circulate freely.

What is the problem with 'social networking'?

As soon as one uploads some film or footage to, for example, one of those predominant video portals one signs an agreement that basically consists of handing over the ownership (at least, if there is any, in legal terms) of these images to a corporate (or not yet-corporate) entity. The example of YouTube and Myspace – just to name the two most prominent examples – leaves no doubt: Obviously, 'sharing' is not a problem, it is even officially encouraged and essential part of the core corporate strategy.

The problem is a different one: The problem is multiplication. How can we imagine multiple forms of ownership that accommodate images that are multiplied rather than being shared, divided and fragmented?

What is at stake in 'imaginary property'?

The project 'imaginary property' sets out to examine the ways in which social relationships are configured, designed and performed in reference to the objects that are supposed to be owned, used and displayed as one's property.

What is at stake is not at all the relationship between the owner of some thing and the object that a person owns. The juridical forms do not determine the content even of what they make effective, as Bernard Edelman wrote. 'The relation between the expression of the content and the effectivity of the content is ideological and that is this relation itself becomes a mysterious power, 'the true basis of all property relations'.'

'Imaginary property' deals with the imagination, the practical critique and the re-design of ideological relationships. Relationships between myself and others who could also develop the will to use and enjoy it, modify or alter it, play it or play with it.

Does 'imaginary property' try to advocate for creative commons or piracy?

The sweet dreams about the commons, about sharing and caring, in an organic, unselfish, platonic and idealistic fashion, as well as the romanticism of the figure of the pirate, the digital small-time criminal or gentleman-thief – that is rather fiction and fantasy and smells like a sort of petit-bourgeois projection.

The project 'imaginary property' defies a vulgar Marxism or 'Proudhonism' which seems quite popular today. It is not about the 'abolishment of intellectual property' in an utopian manner, let alone coquetry with far too simple slogans like 'property is theft'. In the last instance both the advocates of theft and piracy as well as the defenders of a pre- or post-capitalist concept of the 'commons' are either entangled with fantasies about 'true' or 'fair' conceptions of property or just turn a blind eye on the social and political realities.

What do you suggest instead?

What is urgent today is a critical analysis of 'political economy of image production', 'embracing the totality of these property relations, considering not their legal aspect as relations of volition but their real form, that is, as relations of production.' (Karl Marx on Proudhon).

We have to turn the platonic world of image production upside down. If it is allowed to use a well-worn metaphor: We have to turn off the head, on which so-called 'intellectual' property is standing, and place it upon its feet. Instead of an utopianism which is hunting for a scientific or technological formula for the solution of the property question that is to be devised *a priori*, science needs to derive 'from a critical knowledge of the historical movement, a movement which itself produces the material conditions of emancipation' – just to paraphrase Marx once more.

If we understand imagination as a rule of production, what might characterise the images that are actually produced?

I suggest they be called 'control images'. In 'Counter-Music', a video installation for the European cultural capital Lille in 2004 Harun Farocki coined the term: 'Operative images, control images. Representations of traffic regulation, by car, train or metro, representations determining the height at which mobile phone network transmitters are fixed, and where the holes in the networks are. Images from thermo-cameras to discover heat loss from buildings. And digital models of the city, portrayed with fewer shapes of buildings or roofs...'

In one of his very few remarks on electronic images Gilles Deleuze noted: 'Not just the voices but sounds, lights, and movements are being constantly modulated. These parameters of the image are subjected to variations, repetitions, alternations, recycling, and so on... This corresponds to a transition from visibility to legibility. The legibility of images relates to the independence of their parameters and the divergence of series...'

What seems absolutely crucial here: The control image is an image that is characterised by its modulation; by the fact that it can be altered, variegated, halted, repeated, recycled or in short: it can be controlled not only by its producers, by its legal or legitimate owners, but by all its users and viewers.

Is it then possible to think of 'images beyond control'?

Good question! What Laura Mulvey called 'the possessive spectator' could in fact lead to the invention and creation of entirely new relationships between those who were formerly known as filmmakers, distributors, spectators.

Originally Mulvey referred to the 'remote control', a device to control the motion of the movie, but that marked only the very beginning of a process which has produced many different subjectivities and accelerates a variety of conflicts about possessing images.

Consequentially, soon we can probably see a wide range of projects which are not only illustrative, but pushing the concept of the control image towards its extremes and maybe even beyond it.

MEDIA PIRACY AND INDEPENDENT CINEMA IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

TILMAN BAUMGÄRTEL

Jo is a Malaysian student who smuggles Malaysian DVDs into England where he is studying economics. Being a film buff and would-be director, he saves the money he makes selling cheap Malaysian DVDs, in the hope that some day he will have enough to attend a film school in New York. Taking advantage of the fact that pirated DVDs often hit the streets before a movie's cinematic release, Jo has the latest titles before they hit the cinemas in the UK. As he is about to graduate, Jo decides to go big with his last shipment. He wants to smuggle 175 movies into the UK for a buyer, who will pay 50 pounds a DVD. This will cover the tuition for the film school of Jo's dreams, including the necessary means to live in style in New York. Unfortunately, the Malaysian police kick off a major operation on the very day Jo is scheduled to pick up his stock of DVDs, and his suppliers are among the victims of the raid. The British film pirates that depend on his wares are threatening to get even with one of his friends. Jo needs to get 175 DVDs with new films in the 24 hours before his plane leaves for the UK.

That is the story of *Ciplak* (2006), the exhilarating film debut of Khairil M. Bahar. Despite having been made without a budget worth mentioning, it is a feature length movie that both entertains and moves its viewers. *Ciplak* (Malay for 'pariah') is a very self-conscious piece of independent cinema full of clever ideas and endless cinematic innuendos, references and puns. Its wry, sarcastic humour is reminiscent of films such as Richard Linklater's early works *Slacker* (1991) and *Dazed and Confused* (1993). It makes good use of the very limited means in a way that resembles Kevin Smith's *Clerks* (1994), and at times manages to turn its material shortcomings into filmic virtuosity à la Robert Rodriguez's debut film *El Mariachi* (1993). A potential feel-good and popcorn movie at the same time as a cineaste's tour-de-force, *Ciplak* is a film that is smart, enjoyable and touching in a fashion that one stopped expecting from Hollywood mainstream movies a long time ago.

This movie is a good starting point to introduce this essay, because it brings together some of the topics I want to tackle here. Most obviously, it deals with the main subject matter of this essay: media piracy in Southeast Asia. Director Khairil M. Bahar writes on the website of the film: 'In a country such as Malaysia piracy isn't just common: it's indispensable. Everything from clothes and shoes to CDs and video games are available in bootleg form. Piracy has allowed the underprivileged to afford over-priced sneakers, exposed the ignorant to the wonders of non-top 40 music and increased the cinema vocabulary of an entire nation through pirated DVDs.'¹

At the same time, the film is also a wonderful example of the new batch of Southeast Asian independent films that have recently emerged. *Ciplak* talks about the way digital me-

1. <http://www.ciplakmovie.com>

dia are currently influencing the way films and (pop) culture are produced and distributed in Southeast Asia.² While *Ciplak* was a critical success in Malaysia, it did not do exceptionally well in its home market. Yet, its subject matter and its quirky way of storytelling should appeal to young urban audiences throughout the region – and probably in the rest of the world, too. That young hipsters in Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore or the Philippines – all countries that share a border with Malaysia - will most likely never get to see this film shows the deficiencies in the distribution of film (but presumably also of music, books, art, etc) in the region. The phenomenon of piracy speaks to these deficiencies.

This paper will look at media piracy in Southeast Asia, and it will outline some of its consequences for independent film production. In the first part of this essay I will look at the phenomenon of piracy as such and try and outline some observations about how piracy works. In the second part I will address some of the impact that piracy has on the makers and consumers of independent films. It does not seem too far-fetched to christen the Southeast Asian filmmakers who have begun their careers in the first decade of the 21st Century 'Generation Piracy'. Due to the prevalent media piracy in the region, these young filmmakers had access to world cinema in an unprecedented way. While it is still too early to assess the long-term impact of piracy on the contemporary cinema of Southeast Asia, films such as *Ciplak* speak to the fact that there is a growing influence of independent and alternative cinema on local cinema. I will discuss some of the early signs of the changes that this might lead to, while at the same time contrasting it with the way earlier generations of film makers from the region encountered international cinema. At the same time, I will put special emphasis on the fact that both piracy and the recent wave of independent films in the region are a result of the same technical conditions: the easy and cheap access to digital media from cameras to computers to the distribution network of the internet, peer-to-peer networks and video-sharing sites such as iFilms, YouTube *et al.*

The Socio-Economics of Piracy

To discuss the mechanisms of piracy is a tricky matter, since hard and fast data on the subject are difficult to obtain. Despite my research in 2006 into the piracy culture of the Philippines, that included interviews with some DVD dealers, there are many open questions regarding the Philippines, not to mention the rest of Southeast Asia. How do these films get on the pirate markets? Who picks the titles that get distributed? Who compiles the DVD collections of all the Oscar winning films from 1929 to 1965? Why are films by the German Marxist film directors Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet – that have never been published on DVD in Germany – available in a shop full of pirated DVDs right smack in the middle of Beijing's embassy area? Who brought the films of Harun Farocki, another German avant-garde film maker, whose films are not out on DVD in Germany, to Thailand to sell them at the night market in Patpong?

2. At the same time *Ciplak* has not been canonized in the same way as the films of directors such as more art-house-oriented directors such as Lav Diaz, Apichatpong Weerasethakul or Amir Muhammad and due to its whimsical nature it most likely will never receive the same type of cineastes' blessings.

In many respects, one has to consider the pirate market as a kind of black box. Research into this field is very difficult, as it is an illegal and therefore very secretive trade. The traders themselves who sell the disks know very little about the way the films are obtained and produced most of the time, and most of the people who do are not prepared to talk about it. There are numbers about the extent of piracy in Southeast Asia, either from local law enforcement agencies or international lobby groups, yet most of these numbers are self-serving and often the way they have been collected are either unclear or biased.³ The – mostly American – trade groups such as the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), the International Intellectual Property Association (IIPA) or the Business Software Association (BSA), who publish data on international piracy, are often financed by US media and software companies and therefore have a vested interest in making their alleged losses seem as dramatic as possible. Accordingly they try to paint the situation in the darkest colours. Other numbers stem from the police or organisations such as the Optical Media Board (OMB) of the Philippines, which has the task of fighting piracy. These organisations are often predominantly in the business of making their own work look efficient, or keeping their respective countries off international blacklists that might have consequences for their reputation as business locations. Therefore figures such as the following have to be taken with great caution.

According to the Business Software Alliance (BSA), software piracy in the Asia-Pacific region cost manufacturers about \$8 billion in 2004.⁴ Worldwide, losses due to software piracy were estimated at more than \$32 billion in that year. The BSA puts piracy rates in China at 90 percent and Russia at 87 percent. The IIPA puts the level of piracy in the Philippines at 85 percent, and the estimated trade losses at 33 million US dollars in 2004.⁵ According to a report from the website of the MPAA, the percentage of potential market for MPAA member studios lost to piracy in Thailand (the only Southeast Asian country mentioned) is 79 percent.⁶ On another 'fact sheet' on the same website, the MPAA office in Singapore gives this appraisal: 'In 2005, the MPAA's operations in the Asia-Pacific region investigated more than 34,000 cases of piracy and assisted law enforcement officials in conducting more than 10,500 raids. These activities resulted in the seizure of more than 34 million illegal optical discs, 55 factory optical disc production lines and 3,362 optical disc burners, as well as the initiation of more than 8,000 legal actions.'

Since the methodology that was used to arrive at these numbers is not explained in great detail on the website of the MPAA, it is safe to assume that the numbers from these insti-

3. For example, the losses of the media and software industry that arise from piracy are obtained by multiplying the alleged number of pirated DVDs, CDs and CD-Roms with the American price. Needless to say most of the people who buy pirated films, music albums or software packages would not be able to buy them for the regular charge.
4. Business Software Alliance: <http://w3.bsa.org/germany//piraterie/piraterie.cfm>
5. International Intellectual Property Association: <http://www.iipa.com/statistics.html>
6. Motion Picture Association of America: <http://www.mpa.org/piracy.asp> - in the same report, the profile of a pirate is described like this: 'The typical worldwide pirate is 16-24 years old, male and lives in an urban area!' See also Daniel Ten Kate: Pirates of the Thai Kingdom, Asian Sentinel, May 25, 2007.

tutions (that are frequently reiterated in the international press) are mere estimates. Yet, even if the frequency of piracy is substantially lower than the numbers quoted, it is still quite impressive and suggests that the problem deserves closer examination both as an economic and cultural phenomenon.⁷ I will however not address the ever-popular question of the moral and legal implications of piracy. While piracy is illegal in all Southeast Asian countries, it is also a fact of life in almost all of them.⁸ For the sake of this paper, I will consider it as something that is very much part of quotidian life, without passing any ethical judgment on it.

And what a part of daily life it is! Counterfeit goods are easily available on many street markets as well as in shopping malls: fake Nike sneakers or DVDs with anything from Hollywood movies to European art house films, illicit copies of Gucci bags or the latest albums of Western pop stars. I have found pirated copies of rare Japanese horror movies such as *Jigoku* next to digital gay art house films from the Philippines such as *Masahista*, William Burroughs' shorts next to Amir Muhammad's documentary *The Last Communist* (the latter of which has been banned in Malaysia). The neighbourhood of Quiapo in Manila, the centre for pirated DVDs in the Philippines, is jokingly referred to as 'the biggest film archive in Asia' due to the massive number of otherwise hard to get films available there. Even in the gift shop of the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh, pirated copies of films such as *The Killing Fields* or the French DVD edition of the Cambodian art house film *Rice People* are openly on display next to traditional weavings, postcards, silver trappings and guide books (which in many cases are pirated reprints of American or European books).

While in Europe and the USA, piracy is mostly seen as an online phenomenon that takes place via peer-to-peer networks the pirate culture in Southeast Asia is informed by the fact that in many countries here people do not have access to the Internet or do not even have a computer of their own. Therefore the predominant form of piracy in the region is the sale of counterfeit DVDs and VCDs. Most of them are recent Hollywood movies, often for sale on the streets before they even premiere in the theatres. Then there is pornography – loads of it, actually – that is illegal in many Asian countries.

And eventually, there are art house films and experimental films. Less common, but still available are movie classics from Chinese silents from the Shanghai of the 1930s to Godard's *Weekend*, from *Gone with the wind* to video art by Brian Eno. The majority of these films are not and never were available in regular shops, which predominantly carry mainstream movie fare. Just one example: Orson Welles' classic *Citizen Kane* was never legally available

7. Literature that prescribes to the notion of piracy as being a precarious international crime includes Naim 2005 and Phillips 2005. For some takes on piracy that are not informed by the perspective of the American copyright industry, see Lascia 2005 and Lessig 2004, for accounts that take Asian socio-culture into consideration see Alford 1995; Pang 2006 and Sarai Media Lab 2006. The website for the conference *Asian Edition*, that I organised in November 2006 at the University of the Philippines, contains most of the papers delivered there, as well as ample links to other online resources.

8. Even in Singapore, that prides itself to have stamped out piracy, pirated DVDs are still available.

in the Philippines (and presumably in other Southeast Asian countries), and one had to go to great lengths to see this movie. Now it is easy to find it on pirate markets. For a very long time, being a film fan in Southeast Asia meant either to limit oneself to the US-American and local offerings in the cinemas and on video. Or it meant to pay a fortune for mail-ordering videos from abroad. Or it meant to have a well-organised circle of friends that would swap and copy the latest movies.

Those days are over, for good. Examples of rare films that people have discovered on the pirate markets in Manila include a complete retrospective of the works of Rainer Werner Fassbinder on three DVDs and one of *The Cremaster Cycle* films by American video artist Matthew Barney. On the other hand, sourcing local films is quite a feat in many Southeast Asian countries. Yet, there have been instances, where local films that have been banned or censored and therefore cannot be shown in regular cinemas appear on the pirate markets. I will return to this point later.

So the pirates don't just deliver the latest blockbusters and blue movies. Some are ambitious enough to come up with their own boxed-sets. A staple of pirate markets all over Southeast Asia are the collections of all the *Star War*-films, complete collections of popular Korea soap operas such as *Jewel of the Palace*, and well-presented selections of films by directors such as William Wyler and Kenji Mizoguchi. Many of these collections have a nerdy tendency towards completeness – all the films with Jackie Chan, all the films by Akira Kurosawa. Sometimes they are even sold in lovingly hand-crafted boxes.

More recently, the pirates have started to create their own film selections. The so called '8-in1-collections' (that squeeze 8 feature length movies on one DVD) contain 'themed' collections: all the recent horror films involving snakes such as *Anaconda* and *Snakes on a Plane* (apparently a favourite in India), films on World War II (with weird combinations such as *The Pianist* and *Saving Private Ryan*, *The Downfall* and *Pearl Harbour* on one disk) or overviews of recent Bollywood films.

Yet, the cover design betrays the fact that the people who produce these DVDs are not professional designers and writers. Often local graphic artists – using pictures they obtained from the Internet – design these covers and provide the blurb. The practice of using pictures from the web can sometimes lead to side-splitting results: Recently a version of Akira Kurosawa's adaptation of Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot* (1951) was sold in Manila with a cover from Lars Van Trier's independent digital movie *The Idiots* (1998). On the covers of some disks one can find pictures, which are not from the movie in the box, or which have been dramatically enhanced. They show guns on pictures of films that do not have guns, or suggest sexually explicit scenes that are not in the movie. Out of sloppiness, many different films have the same credits on the box: for instance, a widely available, pirated version of *On the Wings of Desire* by German art house director Wim Wenders lists Vin Diesel as one of the actors! The covers might also include lists of special features (such as bonus material, subtitles in Spanish, Cantonese or Arabic) that are not included on the disk. The plot summaries on the back of the box are typically taken from the Internet Movie Database, and are often reproduced in hilarious versions full of typos or poor English.

The English subtitles of pirated DVDs that come from China usually range from Chinese-flavoured to completely outlandish, and are sometimes in direct contrast to the actual dialogue.⁹ The account of DVD covers can read like this representative example: 'The global film is included completely, broadcast the new feeling superstrongly'. On the box of another DVD sampler it says: 'Unique Color Sensual Desire Cinema'. The copyright notice (!) on the same box reads: 'The copyright owner of the video disc in this DVD only permits Your Excellency to run the family to show, owner keeps the copyright all one's life relevantly in the right, not listing exhaustively, 'the private family shows the use' not including using, exhibiting in the place such as a club, station, bar, theatre etc, for instance without permission, forbid hiring out, export or distributing, copy issue, alter right, will bear civil and criminal responsibility.'¹⁰

The production quality of these disks varies greatly. The 'cam rips' of the late 1990s are on their way out.¹¹ The majority of even the latest films available on the pirate market are usually from 'screeners' or other digital sources. Often they contain bonus material and other extras, including trailers for other films from the same pirate corporation! Even beer commercials have been spotted on some disks.

The manufacturing quality ranges from films that do not play at all to those on par with legitimate DVDs. In Thailand many of the more off-beat films seem to have been reproduced on an ordinary home computer with the covers made with cheap colour copiers or printed out on computer printers with the artwork coming from websites such as *cdcovers.cc*. The majority of the releases available in Southeast Asia however seem to come out of professional disk pressing plants, complete with titles printed on the disks and covers out of the printing press. There have been reports indicating that the same disk pressing plants that produce regular DVDs during their business hours also manufacture pirated disks during illegal night shifts.

Some customers of piracy markets in Southeast Asia have become very aware of issues of quality. For example, there are a couple of forums on the Internet where buyers of pirated movies from the Philippines exchange tips on where to find rare films and how to distinguish quality DVDs from bad product. In one forum called *TheQ*,¹² buyers frequently bragged about their latest discovery. Since *TheQ* has recently disappeared from the Internet, I can only quote from my memory here, but there were a lot of posts along these lines: '*Found Day for night* by Truffaut in Quiapo in the Muslim Barter Center at Stall No. 16. Ask for Benjie!'

9. See Laikwan Pang, *Cultural Control and Globalization in Asia: Copyright, Piracy and Cinema*, New York: Routledge, 2006.

10. There is even an online-repository on the Internet, that collects especially flawed covers of pirated DVDs: 'Crappy Bootleg Covers'.

11. 'Cam rips' are bootlegged versions of films that have been filmed in a theatre with a digital video camera during the regular screening of a film. They are typically of poor audio quality, often one can hear the audience cough or laughing and you can even see the silhouettes of people who head for the restroom or concession stand.

12. Q stands for Quiapo, the neighbourhood in Manila with the biggest black market.

Other forums provide more general advice on how to distinguish bad DVD copies of a movie from good ones. These expert customers are capable of identifying well-made copies of films from the design of the cover and the occasional manufacturer's name. One poster in the *Pinoy DVD* blog explained crucial differences in manufacturing quality, and pointed out the quality of the releases from a company that identifies itself with the label 'Superbit' on the cover.¹³ Other participants of the forums provided detailed technical analysis of different DVD versions of the same film, and compared them in terms of picture and sound quality. These tests were obviously conducted with laboratory equipment and software used by professional video studios.

There are notable differences between the 'pirate cultures' of different Southeast Asian countries, both in terms what is produced and what is available in the respective nations. I have discussed the culture of piracy in the Philippines extensively elsewhere,¹⁴ so I would just like to point out a recent development that I was not able to cover in this essay. The whole piracy landscape in the Philippines has been completely changed with the advent of the '8-in-1' sets. DVDs with only one film on them are on their way out and, already, are no longer available at all in certain markets. Since these collections usually focus on popular American mainstream fare, this also means that art house and classic films are much harder to find now than even one year ago.

A majority of 'quality' and art house films come from China, as well as an increasing number of classic American, European and Japanese titles. A company from Shenzhen by the name of Bo Ying is particularly prolific in producing very sophisticated DVDs – often using as masters disks from the American Criterion Collection, which specialises in top-notch editions of classic films in flawless transfers and with original bonus material. Yet a visit to the website of Bo Ying leads to an 'Anti-Piracy Statement'! Emails to both Bo Ying and to the Criterion Collection regarding the copyright situation of these DVDs were not answered. Yet it is safe to assume that Bo Ying did not obtain the rights to these films, since the Criterion Collection points out on their website, that they only distribute their films in the United States. Yet, these Bo Ying titles are easily available in regular stores in Singapore, which prides itself of having gotten rid of piracy in the last couple of years.

Piracy as 'globalisation from below'

It is unquestionable that media piracy has brought an unprecedented access to international cinema to Southeast Asia, a region that has only very limited infrastructure for the distribution of art house cinema. Apart from a number of festivals there is little opportunity to get

13. Posting to PinoyDVD forum, June, 2002.

14. See Tilman Baumgärtel, 'The Culture of Piracy in the Philippines', in Shin Dong Kim and Joel David: *Cinema in / on Asia*, Gwanju 2006 (Asian Culture Forum). Available online at: <http://www.asian-edition.org/piracyinthephilippines.pdf>

legal access to non-Hollywood films. There are few art house cinemas,¹⁵ the regular stores carry predominantly American mainstream films, and mail ordering from abroad is prohibitive expensive. It is therefore safe to say, that piracy has added to the film literacy and even the quality of media education in the region. I only have to look at the rapid transformation that all the media studies departments that I know in Manila went through in the last two or three years. While previously the film collection often consisted of some shelves full of dusty VHS tapes (sometimes even LaserDisks!) that often came from the private collections of a professor, more recently the quality of the film libraries has improved dramatically. There are a quickly increasing number of brand-new DVDs on the shelves of many media studies departments, and many professors have started to use top-notch DVD versions of rare and offbeat films in class. This not only exposes students to a much wider variety of movies, but also enables teachers to screen more uncommon, contemporary, independent and cult films, and teach classes that would not have been possible five years ago due to the lack of films. Needless to say, all of these films come from the pirate market. In the second part of the paper I will discuss how this new variety has impacted the surge of independent films from Southeast Asia.

Yet, before I look in greater detail at this topic, I should point out, that these DVDs are not being produced to educate previously underprivileged film students in Southeast Asia. The cornucopia of blessings that has opened over the region is a very peculiar result of the globalisation of both markets and cultures that has started to take place in the last 20 years. The deregulation of many national markets in the wake of the demise of the Soviet Union and their Eastern European satellite countries was one of the prerequisites that paved the way for the kind of globalised media piracy that we see today, where American movies are available on the streets of Manila, Delhi, Beijing and much more remote corners in Asia before they even premiered in the United States. In addition, the Post-1978 reforms of Deng Xiaoping, that allowed for private enterprise in the people's republic of China, and the developing economic openness of formerly socialist countries such as Vietnam and Cambodia played their role in furnishing pan-Asian piracy.

The free movement of capital and data is not only a hallmark of economic globalisation, but also of global piracy. The process of economic 'liberalisation' around the world, the recent process of privatisation and business deregulation all across the globe has played its part in facilitating piracy. At the same time – and also in the name of a neo-liberal curbing of the power of the state – many countries have cut back on law enforcement and reduced border patrols, which obviously was another advantage to the operations of international pirates.

15. While there are a number of art house cinemas in cities such as Singapore, Bangkok and others, there is nothing that even remotely resembles the situation in most countries in Europe and the larger cities in the US. Cultural institutions such as the German Goethe Institute, the Alliance Francaise, the British Council or the Spanish Instituto Cervantes, a number of universities and some film festivals such as Cinemanila in Manila or the World Film Festival in Bangkok screen art house films occasionally, but the cinemas of Southeast Asia are still dominated by Hollywood and local commercial movies.

This process worked in tandem with technological developments such as the proliferation of the Internet and comparatively cheap access to powerful computers, disk burners and scanners. While economic liberalisation provided the means for distributing and paying for illicit goods, these new digital technology supported their production. Moisés Naím points out the importance of new communication and distribution technologies for the pirate business in his book *Illicit*: 'With communication technologies that allow such tasks as warehouse management and shipment tracking to be done remotely, the trader and the goods need never be in the same place at the same time. This flexibility is a crucial advantage that illicit trade has over governments, and is a defining aspect of the problem.' Other new technologies used by smugglers and pirates include the use of clandestine telecommunication systems and of encryption that are often very far ahead of what the respective governments have at their disposal.

In many respects, piracy therefore is the illicit underbelly of globalisation. It is a globalisation from below, where the participants are not multi-national corporations, but illegal outfits. Flexible, non-hierarchical, speedy, highly efficient and organised beyond national boundaries, these illegal traders are in many respects quite representative of globalised businesses. They gleefully take advantage of the newly deregulated foreign exchange transactions, the financial offshore havens in obscure venues such as Tuvalu or the Cook Islands, or the benefits of the Internet – from the anonymity and convenience of free web mail accounts to running online shops.

The pirate market is paradoxical in the sense that it is the most radically 'free' market capitalism, yet at the same time also a corrective of certain traits of capitalism. On one level it is a no-holds-barred competition, without any rules or regulations, where the fastest and most ruthless is usually the most successful. At the same time, it has undone some of the inadequacies of the legitimate market. The pirates were flexible and perceptive enough to detect a potential market that nobody had noticed before. They discovered that there was an audience for art house and avant-garde films in Southeast Asia, and were quick to exploit it.

While in most of Southeast Asia one of the benefits of piracy is that films are made available in countries where they would otherwise not find distribution, in more autocratic countries they have a much more important and libertarian function: They provide an alternative to the regular cinemas and shops as a distribution channel for films that the authorities don't want to be seen – in other words they provide a way around censorship. The most extensive example of this is obviously China, where only 20 international films get an official permission to be shown per year, yet every American blockbuster and much more is available at every street corner on pirated DVD.

Similarly, in other countries, DVDs can provide an important distribution channel for banned films. In the Philippines, as the result of a political intrigue, a television documentary on the former president Joseph Estrada was denied a rating by the Optical Media Board and therefore could not be aired. The film was available immediately on the black market. One of the best sellers on the pirate market were the so-called 'Hello Garci' tapes, illegal recordings, that seemed to prove that the present president Gloria Arroyo had manipulated the

last election to her advantage. To some extent the pirate market can therefore work as an oppositional public sphere and create a counter public – not out of political or aesthetic considerations of course, but rather because of opportunism: to cash in on the controversy and the ‘free marketing’ that usually is the result of censorship.

‘Damaged in a sense’: Digital Piracy, digital independent films

This finally leads us to the vexed question how this whole onslaught of foreign films has influenced Southeast Asian independent film. Before we consider some statements by the filmmakers themselves, let me briefly reiterate the structural parallels that piracy and the new independent cinema of Southeast Asia - that is a predominantly digital cinema – have. Both rely on the recent proliferation of cheap digital media: digital cameras, the Internet that is used to send movies as files around the globe, inexpensive and fast disk burners that allow for the mass production of DVDs and VCDs. Other ‘tools of the trade’ include scanners and the graphics software that allows for the design of the covers or promotional material, the cheap printers that allow for their output on paper. The creative, do-it-yourself aspects of digital media, which have been hailed by many media educators and computer evangelists, therefore also allow for the mass production of illegal media.

Let’s look again at *Ciplak* as a typical example of a no budget indie film. Director Khairil M. Bahar writes on the website for the movie: ‘The film was made for less than 10,000 Malaysian ringgit,¹⁶ shot on a single Canon XM2 miniDV camera and edited on a home PC... The movie was shot on weekends between October and December 2005. Everybody working on the movie did so free of charge... Given the non-existence of a budget, we tried to beg, borrow and steal as much as we could to get the movie made. When I bought the camera it came with ten free miniDV tapes, which I used to shoot the film (although it wasn’t enough) so we saved quite a bit on tapes. I had my old tripod from when I was 15 and Ariff had a monopod so that we could be more mobile. Our lighting rig was a borrowed Ikea lamp and a cheap Styrofoam board. Our boom mic was a borrowed stereo directional microphone (which broke down on us)... All the sets and locations were obtained without a single penny spent. Most of the locations were houses or apartments where the cast lived... The only thing I really spent money on for this production was food.’

While the budget of 10,000 Malaysian ringgit is extremely low even for local standards, these production methods are not uncommon among many independent filmmakers in Southeast Asia. It is therefore the easy availability and the simplicity of use of digital media that facilitates not only the proliferation of media piracy, but also the production of independent films.

In some ways, the pirate market in Asia today has a function similar to the French or the German film clubs of the 1950s and 1960s. Both movements screened classical films that had often been blacklisted or simply forgotten during the Second World War, and both started their own magazines initiating the research and criticism of *auteurs* canonical today.

16. This equates to approximately 3000 USD – T.B.

In the process, they bred a new generation of filmmakers that were highly conscious of film history and aesthetics. Film movements such as the Nouvelle Vague in France or the Neuer Deutscher Film in Germany are a direct outcome of this grassroots cineastes movement. Today the pirate market seems to have taken on the task of confronting the audience in the region with classical and off-beat films. That is not to suggest that pirated films have taken on the role of the more institutionalised entities of ‘film appreciation’, but they certainly are in the process of laying the ground for a more informed discourse on world cinema and provide material for cinephilia in the region.

The effects of this process need to be studied in greater detail, yet there are already the first signs of the impact of the proliferation of off-beat and art house films in the region. A number of film makers have openly acknowledged their indebtedness to pirated movies for them becoming film makers. Malaysia’s Amir Muhammad reminisces in an interview about the influences of his generation of independent film maker: ‘I think we all grew up watching Malaysian cinema to various degrees, but we are also of the generation that was very much exposed to cinema made in other countries. Malaysia always was exposed in that sense, but because we came of age with the pirated VHS in the 80s and the VCD in the 90s, I think our range of influences (is) wider. (If it were not for these pirated things then we would have been stuck with what was brought here, which is extremely limiting. And probably you would have got the sense that to make a movie you had to make a movie like what you see in the cinema. Perhaps you can say that we (were) damaged in a sense as we were exposed to the hype of independent movies, which you can’t deny started in America in the early 90s. So we then got the romantic idea of doing it our own way’.¹⁷

Other filmmakers join him in pointing out the influence that pirated DVDs had an impact on their development. The young Philippine director Raya Martin writes about his first interview at the Festival du Cannes’ Cinéfondation: ‘Here I was, in front of producers and distributors of films I was only familiar with from pirated DVDs, talking about my approach to filmmaking.’¹⁸ And fellow Filipino John Torres points out in an interview, that ‘the video pirates have brought us a lot of good films into our country.’¹⁹

It is evident upon reading the biographies of other South East Asian independent filmmakers that it was often the exposure to avant-garde and art house films from the West that initiated their interest in making their own films. Kidlak Tahimik, arguably the first independent director in the region, started to work on his first film *The Perfumed Nightmare* (1977) after he encountered Werner Herzog and his films in Germany. Raymond Red and other Philippine independent filmmakers, that followed Tahimik in the 1980s, were among the regulars at the workshops and film screenings that the Goethe Institute of Manila used to organize

17. Benjamin McKay, ‘A Conversation with Amir Muhammad’, *Criticine* (October 13, 2005), http://criticine.com/interview_print.php?id=18

18. Raya Martin, ‘Journal Entry No.1: Anticipations of Light’, *Criticine* (October 5, 2005), http://criticine.com/feature_print.php?id=19

19. Alexis A. Tioseco, ‘A Conversation with John Torres’, *Criticine* (April 20, 2006), http://criticine.com/interview_print.php?id=22.

in late 1970s and early 1980s. There they encountered films by directors such as Herzog, Harun Farocki, Werner Schroeter and Rosa von Praunheim and other German directors of the Neue Deutscher Film.

More recently, internationally renowned Thai directors such as Pen-Ek Ratanaruang and Apichatpong Weerasethakul have described their filmic eureka moment during their first encounter with foreign art films. Pen-Ek relates in an interview: 'Since I was in New York, I was always going to see films. And actually, I discovered cinema there, because before that I had no interest in cinema, in film. And even when I was in New York I was watching normal films, all these Hollywood films, and then one day I went to see *8 ½*, just because of the poster... (A)t the end of the film I was completely blown away. I didn't understand shit, I didn't understand at all "what is this?" you know, but... it was so sexy to me. It was so attractive. That was the first film in my life that actually sort of gave me the idea that — this guy can make films? This is film? Then I started to become interested in Fellini, so I'd see more films by him. And then that lead to Bergman and Godard. And you know, the usual stuff, Truffaut, and Fassbinder. And, so I discovered this art cinema that I found really to my taste...' ²⁰ In a similar vein, Apichatpong points to the experience of American experimental films by directors such as Stan Brakhage and Jonas Mekas during his studies in Chicago as one of the reasons why he became a filmmaker: 'I went to Chicago and discovered experimental cinema. It was something that made me think, "Oh, this is what I always wanted to do but I didn't know how to explain it."' ²¹

These filmmakers still had to travel abroad to encounter foreign avant-garde films. However less than ten years after the formative experiences described by Pen-Ek and Apichatpong, it was entirely possible to find the very same films that had made such a lasting impression on them in the pirate markets of Bangkok, Manila, Kuala Lumpur or Jakarta. Filmmakers such as John Torres are among the first filmmakers who have been exposed to this influx of films that have become suddenly available in their home countries, and his fast and daring work with hand-held digital camera and found footage seems to speak of this experience. The same goes for the trendy and self-conscious film making of Khairil M. Bahar, saturated as it is with film history and movie references.

None of this is, of course, meant to suggest that the filmmakers I mentioned are relying on the ideas and approaches of Western directors in their work. Tahimik, Red, Apichatpong, Pen-ek, Torres and Bahar have respectively carved out filmic styles very much their own, which in fact differ quite substantially from the films that inspired them to become filmmakers in the first place. Yet it appears as if the encounter with films outside the mainstream of Hollywood or the film industries of their respective home countries was the needed impetus to develop these personal styles or even to become filmmakers. Now that international art house and avant-garde films have become relatively easy to obtain in the region, more

young filmmakers will be able to access and be inspired by such material. Arguably, we will see the full consequences of this assault of film history – brought about by the pirates – only in the generation of filmmakers succeeding that represented by Amir Muhammad or John Torres.

20. Alexis A. Tioseco, 'A Conversation with Pen-Ek Ratanaruang', Criticine (October 18, 2005), http://www.criticine.com/interview_print.php?id=19

21. Jonathan Marlow, 'Blissfully ours: A Talk with Apichahtpong Weerasethakul', GreenCine (February 14, 2005), <http://www.greencine.com/article?action=view&articleID=194>

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VIDEO SOCIAL COMPLEX PARASITICAL MEDIA

MATTHEW MITCHEM

The producer plays the contents, the parasite, the position. The one who plays the position will always beat the one who plays the contents. The latter is simple and naïve; the former is complex and mediated. The parasite always beats the producer.

- Michel Serres, *The Parasite*

Introduction

Works distributed on the Internet are 'always already' in the complex parasitical machine constituting internetworked informational arrangements. 'The same machine can be both technical and social', write Deleuze and Guattari,¹ certainly video on the Internet is a component in an apparatus that has been approached technically, legally, commercially and socially. I propose that a mutation of this media-machine through an intensification of parasitical interaction is already at hand, and the media sphere (including 'old' media) continually adapts in reaction to user-generated content. Rather than the 'new' media overcoming the 'old', or the 'old' simply swallowing the 'new', the media space in general increases in complexity as new forms of production and consumption become commonplace. The videos presented on YouTube, along with user-generated content in general, 'intersects' the 'flows' of 'old' media systems while the 'new' media 'intercepts' commercial broadcasts.² Parasitical producers will collaboratively navigate the increasingly complex media space where the tide of appropriation turns both ways.

This paper is written from the perspective of a viewer-user of web-based video and the US media. I will proceed by way of a brief overview of the YouTube distribution platform to a look at commercial television, principally the appropriation of YouTube content traditional media. I continue with a discussion of non-commercial cooperative filmmaking, particularly the Fan Film phenomenon, to provide an example for the collaborative activity that already occurs by way of the Internet. I propose that the independent and non-commercial media producers 'to

1. 'The same machine can be both technical and social, but only when viewed from different perspectives: for example, the clock as a technical machine for measuring uniform time, and as a social machine for reproducing canonic hours for assuring order in the city'. Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix, 'Desiring-Production', in Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (trans) Michel Foucault (pref) *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983, p 14.
2. 'Saying that this system includes the telephone, the telegraph, television, the highway system, maritime pathways and shipping lanes, the orbits of satellites, the circulation of messages and raw materials, of language and foodstuffs, money and philosophical theory, is a way of speaking clearly and calmly. And looking to see who or what intercepts these different flows is also a way of speaking clearly and calmly'. Serres, Michel. *The Parasite*. trans. Lawrence R. Schehr intro, Cary Wolf. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007, p 11.

come' will be those who navigate the horizons opened up in the increasingly complex media geography of the 21st century.

'You'

Video on the Internet has, since the launch of YouTube, become as ubiquitous as any other on-line content. *Time Magazine's* coronation of 'You' as person of the year on the 13th of December, 2006 was rooted in a recognition of 'user generated content' as the driving force behind the popularity of 'web 2.0'.³ YouTube quickly became one of the most substantial indications of the significance of the Internet; at least as far as the 'old' media of magazines, newspapers and television were concerned. The availability of video on the Internet has transformed the strategies of corporate broadcasters, which adapt user-generated content to fill airtime. Just as blogs altered the distribution models of traditional print media, commercial media adapted to user-generated content in response to YouTube's popularity.

These distribution models in many ways mimic traditional media, allowing the individual user to play at being a broadcaster; or at least, that's the party line.⁴ 'You' are a star; with the possibility of 5 minutes of fame on the evening cable news broadcasts. 'You' are a source of information and entertainment. 'You' are a media product that an advertiser may mark. 'You' are content. Time-Warner's celebration of 'You' is a signal that 'You' have been integrated.

YouTube

Three former employees of PayPal, Steve Chen, Chad Hurley, and Jawed Karim designed and launched YouTube, registering the domain name in February of 2005. The first video on YouTube, 'Me at the Zoo', shot by Yakov Lapitsky and featuring YouTube co-founder Jawed Karim, was uploaded on the 23rd of April, 2005. The short clip, a mere eighteen seconds in length, captures Karim's brief monologue before an elephant enclosure, 'Alright, so here we are in front of the ah... elephants... the cool thing about these guys is that they have really, really really long... um trunks, and that's pretty much all tha...' [cuts off].⁵ The format of YouTube clips, beginning with 'Me at the Zoo' are of a poor resolution, 320 X 240 pixel dimensions in a Flash codex, and have become a standard for web video. For the most part the content of

3. Lev Grossman, 'Times Person of The Year: You', *Time Magazine*, 13 December, 2006, also available at <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1569514,00.html>. 'Web 2.0 is, of course, a piece of jargon, nobody even knows what it means. If Web 2.0 for you is blogs and wikis, then that is people to people. But that was what the Web was supposed to be all along'. See also Time Berners-Lee in 'developerWorks Interview: Tim Berners-Lee', *IBM developerWorks*, August 22, 2006. <http://www.ibm.com/developerworks/podcast/dwi/cm-int082206txt.html>
4. 'Until about five minutes ago, remember, almost all video-entertainment content was produced and distributed by Hollywood. Period. That time is over. There was a time when advertisers could count on mass audiences for what Hollywood thought we should be watching on TV. That time is all but over. There was a time when broadband penetration was too slight and bandwidth costs too prohibitive for video to be watched online. That time is sooooo over'. Bob Garfield, 'YouTube vs. Boob Tube', *Wired*, December, 2006, <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/14.12/youtube.html>
5. Jawed Karim and Yakov Lapitsky, 'Me at the Zoo', 23 April, 2005, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNQXAC9IVRw>

YouTube displays simple production, consisting of point, shoot and uploaded posts, remaining comparable to Karim's initial video.

The oft-described 'nerd culture' of the Internet was one of the first communities to recognize YouTube, which appeared for the first time on Slashdot.org in August of 2005.⁶ Among the early videos uploaded to YouTube *Where in the Hell is Matt?*, posted in 2005, featured Matt Harding dancing in his global travels to the 'world music' of Deep Forest's *Sweet Lullaby*.⁷ Unlike the capture and upload content littering YouTube, *Where in the Hell is Matt?* is composed of a series of local shots and transition edits. Jawed Karim said about the piece, 'I think it demonstrates really well what YouTube is all about',⁸ making no mention of the *Stride Gum* message in the video's information section, an early advertising mark accompanying the piece. YouTube's content continued to grow as more users joined and shared their personal videos, with Harding's video becoming one of the first to be widely mimicked by the site's community.⁹ These various versions of *Where in the Hell is Matt?* are indicative of the personalisation and remix culture that YouTube has fostered among users.

The YouTube audience didn't extend past a niche market of computer culture until Jon Stewart's appearance on CNN's 'debate' show *Crossfire* (October, 2004) was uploaded to the site on the 16th January, 2006.¹⁰ The popular recognition of YouTube, particularly by cable and broadcast television, may largely be attributed to the posting of this 'old' media well after its original broadcast on the since-cancelled *Crossfire*.¹¹ It was largely the 'record and playback' capacities of the site in relation to a piece of information that warranted commercial media's attention. YouTube provided a quantifiable audience of users who desired to view the Stewart interview independently of CNN's broadcast, an audience greater than *Crossfire's* cable viewership. The site was being positioned as a filter by users to share media without waiting through the noise of CNN and their advertisers. Where traditional media is organised around a broadcast schedule, YouTube is navigated by a search function. It was when the traditional

6. 'YouTube: From Concept to Hyper-growth', 23 October, 2006, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nssfmTo7SZg>. YouTube has since been featured on Slashdot 36,000+ times since, as of 2008.
7. Matt Harding, '*Where in the Hell WAS Matt?*', 24 June, 2006, (re-uploaded from 2005) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7WmMcqP670s>. Harding's original post is now entitled *Where in the Hell WAS Matt?* after he uploaded another version of the video over the original *Where in the Hell is Matt?* The new *Where in the Hell is Matt?* is Harding's remix of the original video.
8. Jawed Karim. YouTube: *From Concept to Hyper-growth*, *YouTube.com*, 23 October, 2006, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nssfmTo7SZg>
9. *Where in the Hell is Matt?* Video Responses, YouTube.com, http://www.youtube.com/video_response_view_all?v=BNF_P281Uu4. There were 197 responses listed at the time of this writing, and many other versions not listed as responses to the video throughout YouTube.
10. *Jon Stewart on Crossfire*, 16 January, 2006, Atvartist, <http://youtube.com/watch?v=aFQFB5YpDZE>
11. CNN host Tucker Carlson's contract with the network was not renewed after his exchange with Jon Stewart. 'I guess I come down more firmly in the Jon Stewart camp,' Jonathan Klein told the Associated Press. 'CNN lets 'Crossfire' host Carlson go', USA Today, January 6, 2006, http://www.usatoday.com/life/television/news/2005-01-05-carlson_x.htm

media imagined a competitor arising that it moved to exploit the video appearing on the World Wide Web, and ‘justify their appropriation on a large scale’.¹²

Following the purchase of YouTube by Google^{13, 14} the site has increasingly become a target of censors, critics¹⁵ and lawsuits. Banning of the site by nations such as the People’s Republic of China,¹⁶ and institutions including Brigham Young University¹⁷ and the US Department of Defense,¹⁸ have been widely reported. Viacom has sued YouTube in a billion dollar copyright infringement lawsuit.¹⁹ But Google, has also introduced a copyright filter, announced in late 2007, to protect the interests of copyright holders, stirring criticism from the very ‘remix culture’ YouTube has popularised.²⁰ Users and producers navigate such restrictions by moving to less restrictive video sharing networks, or posting their content to a number of different hosting services, or developing and deploying their own sites built around platforms such as Plumi²¹ coupled with Plone.²²

Though YouTube remains the major source of video on the World Wide Web, sites appear everyday to host and display video content. Audience specific YouTube clones have emerged, for example; GodTube.com aims to provide a space for users to deliver videos that ‘share the message and love of Christ’.²³ GodTube embraces a strict content policy in order to maintain itself as ‘a family-friendly site’. More interesting, ChannelMe.tv provides a YouTube style format for the development of custom .tv domains specifically for hosting video content, allowing users to easily configure their own media distribution network. These various sites, as alternatives to YouTube, are more or less built upon the same model and interface (with some

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12. ‘In general, the introduction of innovations always tends to be delayed beyond the time scientifically necessary, until the moment when the market forecasts justify their exploitation on a large scale’, in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Robert Hurley, trans. Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983, p 234.
 13. *Google buys YouTube for \$1.65bn*, *BBC News*, 10 October, 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/6034577.stm>
 14. ‘A Message from Chad and Steve’, 9 October, 2006, http://youtube.com/watch?v=QCVxQ_3Ejkg.
 15. Tom Zeller, ‘A Slippery Slope of Censorship at YouTube’, *The New York Times*, 9 October, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/09/technology/09link.html>
 16. Steven Schwankert, ‘YouTube blocked in China; Flickr, Blogspot restored’, *InfoWorld*, 18 October, 2007, http://www.infoworld.com/article/07/10/18/YouTube-blocked-in-China_1.html
 17. Kate McNeil, ‘BYU blocks campus access to YouTube’, *Daily Herald*, 16 February, 2007, <http://www.heraldextra.com/content/view/210588/3>
 18. Alan Sipress and Sam Diaz, ‘A Casualty of War: MySpace’, *Washington Post*, May 15, 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/05/14/AR2007051400112.html>.
 19. Clark, Andrew. ‘Viacom sues YouTube for copyright abuse over television and film clips’, *The Guardian*. May 2, 2007, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2007/may/02/broadcasting.digitalmedia>
 20. von Lohmann, Fred, ‘YouTube’s Copyright Filter: New Hurdle for Fair Use?’, *Electronic Frontier Foundation*. 15 October, 2007, <http://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2007/10/youtubes-copyright-filter-new-hurdle-fair-use>
 21. Plumi. <http://plumi.org>
 22. Plone. <http://plone.org>
 23. *GodTube FAQs*, GodTube, <http://godtube.com/faqs.php>

offering more or less tools, more or less filtering). Each of these ‘alternatives’ to YouTube has a distinct (but similar) user agreement that the would-be video poster should study.

The New made Old

Commercial media cannot ignore on-line video as a major source of video content and audience in the early 21st century. YouTube is among the top five destinations on the World Wide Web. Much of the content presented on YouTube and other video sharing sites consists of simple captures and repostings from older broadcast media or individual user-produced clips. The former use of YouTube seems to be what Karim had in mind though it was in the later, reposting of video from cable and broadcast television that may be credited with the recognition and response from ‘old’ media.

Major media broadcasters are turning to the video-sharing format to augment their own broadcasts and to at least appear more ‘interactive’. Since at least 1990, with *American’s Funniest Home Video*,²⁴ the institutional media has been considering and deploying formats for collecting and broadcasting viewer submitted material. Web technology, popularised on YouTube, simply hastens the process of submitting user-generated video to the networks. For example, with i-Report²⁵ CNN receives witness submitted video, such as the contributions from witnesses of the Katrina Disaster that struck New Orleans. CNN has since made user-contributed footage a part of its broadcast strategy through its i-Report platform.²⁶

The ubiquity of ‘You’ as a major source of media content was politically intensified in the course of the US national Presidential contest in 2008 with the CNN/YouTube Democratic Presidential debate (featuring a melting snowman presenting a question on global warming).²⁷ The campaigns of Democratic candidate Senator Barack Obama and Republican Congressman Ron Paul made on-line organising a major component in their respective bids for the US Presidency. Where Obama’s campaign demonstrated a net-savvy unheard of in politics until 2008, raising millions of dollars from small on-line donations, the less successful Paul campaign sprung from his supporters largely using available social networking platforms. That is, whereas Obama’s organisers were prepared with their constituency management system, the Paul campaign’s network was initially organised and developed organically by his supporters.

Supporter-composed videos for several Presidential campaigns received attention from traditional media outlets as early as March 2007 with the ‘Vote Different’ upload to YouTube. The video appropriates the 1984 Apple Super Bowl spot to juxtapose Barack Obama’s candidacy

24. ABC, ‘America’s Funniest Home Video’. ABC.com, <http://abc.go.com/primetime/afv/index?pn=about>

25. CNN, i-Report, *CNN.com* <http://ireport.com>

26. Inside Cable News, CNN Katrina, 17 August, 2006. <http://insidecable.blogspot.com/2006/08/17/cnn-katrina-coverage-plans>

27. CNN, ‘CNN/YouTube Democratic debate: Complete video’, *CNN.com*. 24 July, 2007, <http://www.cnn.com/2007/POLITICS/07/24/youtube.debate.video/index.html>

to an Orwellian-cum-Clintonian world of monotonous political repetition.²⁸ 'I Got a Crush... On Obama' followed in June²⁹ receiving a great deal of play, especially on Cable broadcasts. Indeed during the primary races for the Democratic nomination videos of an explicitly political theme were loaded daily. Many users became practitioners of polemical editing over the course of a few weeks. 'Thus, video is less a critical method than a critical *practice*; its mere existence is its attempt at critique'.³⁰ An implicit critique in this practice is that anyone with a computer and free time can produce a polemical ad. That is, amateurs' collectively limitless time and limited resources can outpace a professional pundit class at their own vocation. Furthermore, CNN, MSNBC and Fox News have responded in establishing 'correspondent' desks to report on events occurring on the Internet and World Wide Web. The Internet has become a space where 'news worthy' events take place for the cable networks.

The ascendance of YouTube at the forefront of video sharing has overshadowed other outlets for video online including the services of site's owning parent, Google Video. YouTube alone receives around 64 million unique visitors a month³¹ and is the third most visited site in the United States after Google and Yahoo.³² Online videos have become featured content across television news. However, YouTube style videos have also been broadly appropriated for replay on cable broadcast in general. Google's own network, Current TV, is an example of user-generated content being excessively aired by a television station. Current TV is a cable television network that relies on user-submitted footage in a similar way that MTV used the music video as promotional-commercial content in the early days of that network. Current.com (Current TV's website) receives fewer than 500,000 unique visitors monthly³³ despite compensation for works that are aired. This showing may indicate a limit of viewer and contributor interest in user-produced media replayed to traditional cable audience. While CNN, Current TV and others, are able to integrate YouTube style videos into their own programming, these ventures are little more than exercises in appropriation of user-generated content by commercial media outlets.

Fan Film

One may certainly find examples of sophisticated production emerging in Internet distributed video. Fan Films represent a more developed sense of video production and narrative complexity than the fragmented clips hosted by YouTube. For example, the project *Essence of the Force* exhibits *Star Wars* style special effects including CGI.³⁴ *Wounds of Sand*, an hour-long piece reminiscent of classic Hollywood war films, incorporates period footage into

28. 'Vote Different', *YouTube.com*, 5 March, 1007. ParkRindge47, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6h3G-IMZxjo>

29. Obama Girl, 'I Got a Crush... On Obama', *YouTube.com*, barelypolitical, 13 June, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKsoXHYICqU>

30. Alexander Galloway, *Protocol: how control exists after decentralization*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2004, p 210.

31. Quantcast, *YouTube.com*, <http://www.quantcast.com/youtube.com>

32. Quantcast, Top US Sites, <http://www.quantcast.com/top-sites>

33. Quantcast, *Current.com*, <http://www.quantcast.com/current.com>

34. *Essence of the Force* (dir. Pat Kirby, 2007) http://www.atomfilms.com/film/essence_force.jsp.

the narrative.³⁵ Fan Films are similar to early attempts at cinema as creative experiments collaborative love.

The teams that collaborate and organise responsibilities in complex and sophisticated production distinguish a Fan Film from YouTube content in general. As Lovink writes, 'for many of the new media artworks, collaboration is an absolute must because the individual artist simply does not have all the skills to do the visuals, 3D, sound, editing, and performance and manage the whole process in terms of human resource and finance'.³⁶ The collaborators who work on a Fan Film from the script to the special effects, sound, filming and final editing, may never physically meet, they may speak different languages, and they rarely if ever receive compensation for their efforts. The production of a Fan Film at times may rival the quality and complexity of commercial studios. In many ways Fan Films stands apart from YouTube clips in that they are the artifacts of cooperation, whereas the majority of on-line videos are from single-users with limited editing, production or organisation.

Fans of the science fiction genre in general have a particularly long, and at times productive, history with filmmaking since at least the 1970s.³⁷ These film projects were quickly shared on the World Wide Web beginning in the late 1990s. *Fanfilms.com*, a site showcasing amateur films set in the *Star Wars* universe, was a registered domain name in 2000 well before YouTube launched.³⁸ A similar site, *Fanfilms.net*, provides links to projects outside of the *Star Wars* community including other genres such as action, fantasy, and horror pictures.³⁹ Since the YouTube standardisation of on-line video formats many Fan Films are hosted on similar sites such as *AtomFilms.com*. The science fiction industry has largely allowed, and in some cases encouraged, enthusiasts to produce and share such features providing they are not for-profit distribution. Commercial filmmakers have occasionally encouraged⁴⁰ Fan Films, having recognised a use-value in the phenomenon in the wake of the popularity of on-line video.

The science fiction industry has appropriated the talents of amateur filmmakers, analogous to the adaptation of user-generated content by broadcast and cable television. In an attempt to extend the *Battlestar Galactica* franchise into the Fan Film community the Sci-fi Network released alterable footage and effects to the public in March of 2007.⁴¹ In 2008, the Zack Snyder's cinematic adaptation of the graphic novel, *The Watchmen*,

35. *Wounds of Sand* (dir. Robert Towne, 2007) <http://fanfilms.net/index.php?cid=191&fid=1206>.

36. Geert Lovink, *The Principle of Notworking: Concepts in Critical Internet Culture*, Instituut voor Interactieve Media: Hogeschool van Amsterdam, 2005, p 15.

37. M.E. Russell, 'The Fan Films Strike Back', *Daily Standard*, 14 May, 2004, <http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/004/083mvybq.asp>

38. Domain Tools, Whois Record for *Fanfilms.net* (Fan Films), <http://whois.domaintools.com/fanfilms.com>

39. *Fanfilms.net*, registered in 2002, <http://fanfilms.net>

40. 'The Official 2008 Fan Film Challenge'. *Atom Films*, <http://www.atomfilms.com/2008/starwars/challenge/index.jsp>

41. SciFi Network, 'Battlestar Fan Film Tools Here', *SciFi.com*. 6 March, 2007, <http://www.scifi.com/scifiwire/index.php?category=2&id=40419>. The toolkit has since been removed from *SciFi.com*.

solicited fan-generated fictional commercials for use in background shots for the final production on YouTube.⁴² In this sense, like CNN's i-Report, the entertainment industry becomes parasitical on the talents of a content generating audience.

The Fan Film, like 'You', is a source of content in an intensified internet networked culture. The impetus for these projects has long been the communal love for the genre, the fan's wish to take part in their adored mythos, rather than a creative desire for film making as such.⁴³ That is the, 'production is at once desiring-production and social production'.⁴⁴ This 'desire' has been recognized and utilised by commercial science fiction employing technical developments popularised by YouTube. The production, though limited to a relatively few hobbyists the science fiction community, is now part of the regime of the user-content exploitation characteristic of the early 21st century media-machine.

Conclusion

To me the great hope is that now these little 8mm video recorders and stuff have come out, some... just people who normally wouldn't make movies are going to be making them, and - you know - suddenly, one day, some little fat girl in Ohio is going to be the new Mozart - you know - and? make a beautiful film with her little father's camera...corder - and for once the so-called professionalism about movies will be destroyed. Forever. And it will really become an art form... That's my opinion.

-Francis Ford Coppola, *Hearts of Darkness*

I have attempted to describe two distinct movements in peer-produced and web-distributed video content, the Fan Film production and YouTube style clips. Traditional media outlets have seized on-line video content for rebroadcast. At the same time the video remix culture, popularised by YouTube, involves the practice of acquiring and reediting commercial broadcast images. However, it is in the method of the Fan Film that I see the possibilities of video production organised on the Internet as an alternative to the YouTube user model and traditional broadcast, though both will certainly be a part of intensified parasitical production. Like the Fan Films, peer production will continue to use YouTube and video sharing services to at least distribute and announce their works.

YouTube's popularity can largely be attributed to a parasitical appropriation and delivery of a traditional broadcast (the Jon Stewart appearance on *Crossfire*). Traditional media outlets have responded in kind adopting YouTube and YouTube-like content in their managerial strategies and through their own video-submission web sites. This is a symbiotic relationship not without tensions expressed in the realm of legal copyright regimes and in terms of

cultural, commercial and national censorship. YouTube has become a part of 'old' media complete with its own regulations. And the Web has become a 'space' where correspondents are stationed. User-generated content has become a territory observed and marked out by 'old' media, 'the territory is not primary in relation to the qualitative mark; is it the mark that makes the territory'. Not only are web-distributed and user-produced videos a component of the media space in general; they are components of early 21st century American political and social geography.

I posit that the emerging field of contestation is in production itself rather than distribution. A practice played out by producers that parasitically navigate the position in-between the 'new' and the 'old' media. Distribution sites, like YouTube, will be part of this collaborative practice but not the sole position from which amateur filmmakers, producers, and activists operate. Nor will the principle objective be popularity on YouTube, or returns at the box-office, or the appeasement of advertisers, though recognition and attention may certainly come to a handful of creators. This social-desiring-production emerges when and if the skills and techniques, such as those demonstrated by Fan Film enthusiasts, are applied to creating new myths, novel images, and original stories, rather than a repetition of 'old' media modalities. The playing of positions I suggest may become an art form itself.

When the creative impulse of independent and amateur creators intersects with the technical capacities of filmmakers, editors, graphic artists, etc, organised in experimental collaborations. Virtuosos may emerge from the internet networked machine cultivating a multitude of 'mediatised' commons. In this sense, by proliferating on-line video distribution, YouTube may have increased the chances that a new form of cooperative media peer-production might arise. A production style characterised by playing various positions between 'old' and 'new' media, between 'copyright' and unlicensed creativity, rather than product oriented commercial-production. It will be removed from, or act without regard for, the professional-legal regimes that are institutionally constitutive to old media, but not limited to, and in spite of, the distribution model established and habituated by YouTube. I can imagine this would surpass Coppola's hope⁴⁵ that the becoming-art of film won't emerge from a lone child in Midwest America. Rather amateur storytellers, filmmakers and visual artists coordinating and assisting each another using both on and offline tools, without direction from a supervisory studio, in organised networks of creative virtuosos and manoeuvre the media as position.

42. Snyder, Zack, 'Watchmen – Vedit Advertising Contest – Zack Snyder Intro', *YouTube.com*, 21 April, 2008, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZQPva9fGbbk>

43. Star Wars Revelations: FAQs, http://panicstruckpro.com/revelations/revelations_faq.html.

44. 'The schizoanalytic argument is simple: desire is a machine, a synthesis of machines, a machinic arrangement –desiring-machines. The order of desire is the order of production; all production is at once desiring-production and social production'. p 296, in Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix. 'Psychoanalysis and Capitalism', *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

45. *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse*, (dir. Bahr, Fax. and Hickenlooper, George, footage, Elenor Coppola, Paramount Pictures, 1991).

AFFINITY VIDEO

PETER WESTENBERG

This article is a speculative journey through desires and considerations connected to on-line services for video. In writing it I have tried to stay close to my own practice as a videomaker. I choose to work with open source tools that support a free and participatory web environment, leaving the definition of these terms open for further discussion. From that angle I formulated some personal expectations that will serve as a backbone for this text. Although they might seem obvious at first glance, even on this basic level many existing platforms leave a lot to be desired. First of all a platform for video should facilitate exchange of – and access to – video files. It should provide tools and solutions for sharing work in collaborative processes. A platform should respect rights of users and let users retain control over their own video-material. A web platform should allow participation in the system.

As an artist I work with video within social contexts: I often collaborate with groups of people in artistic projects that investigate the notion of publicness. These projects can take the shape of explorations, guided tours or laboratory like spaces. A few years back I produced a series of weekly web streams with the inhabitants of a housing block. The shows we broadcasted varied from experimental documentaries to art performances, from a demonstration by the local Emotion Freedom Therapist to kids who organised their own Idols election, taking care of their own streaming.¹ On the broadcasting side, we worked with Quicktime broadcaster. On the receiving side numerous different software programs existed on a multitude of different types of computers in the neighborhood. The incompatibility issues were countless: missing plug-ins, flaky bandwidth, uninstallable media players and so on. It became clear that the software and hardware we used to stream with, and the bits, processor power, screen resolutions and connection speeds on the receiving end, were as much part of the 'video work' as the content of the broadcasts. I became interested in working with open standards and started to work with open source software because it seemed to me that in situations like these, the core of the problems is often rooted in conflicting commercial software, pervaded with patents, temporary licenses, non-open standards and corporate codecs. In stead of continuing to react ad hoc to the problems of the moment, it made more sense to me to start using software which proposes long term sustainable solutions, even when this means that on the short term some of the work might become less comfortable.

1. <http://www.worldwidewestwijk.nl>.
World Wide Westwijk was part of 'Uit + Thuis Videomagazijn', a public workspace for video in a residential area in the Dutch city Vlaardingen which I ran for two years in the framework of the temporary cultural zone 'De Strip' initiated by artist Jeanne Van Heeswijk.

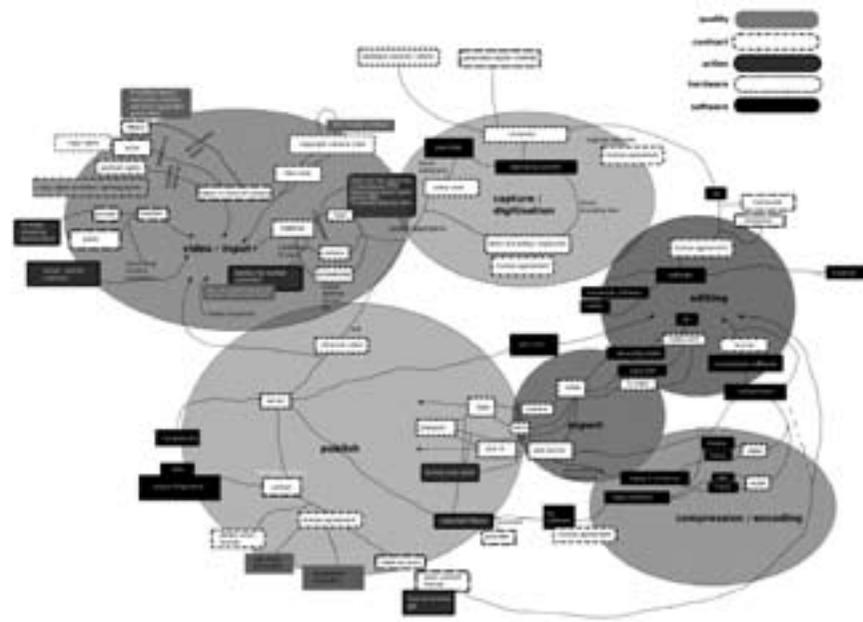


Figure 1: Workflow sketch.

To gain insight in how using non-proprietary software changes my practice, I am mapping my working process in a schema that lists all stages of work required for a video project; from shooting to publishing online. The aim of this drawing is not only to map existing routes, but also to try to imagine new avenues; to invent an infrastructure based on free software, open standards and protocols.

A workflow consists of a chain of small tricks, techniques, tools, actions, movements. Once we have found our favourite way of working and repetitively execute these separate steps, we are beginning to embody them, fusing them into one comfortable fluent process that no longer feels artificial. But this comfort of 'knowing how things work' poses the risk of rendering us insensitive for other perspectives, for other ways of doing things.

When academic writers apply brackets, text mark ups and other types of annotations to refer to external sources, meanings and connotations, they break up the fluency of reading. The act of interrupting a comfortable stream of information helps us to remind that words are never neutral. Can we find ways to do a similar thing to our workflows? Can we re-validate inefficiencies, glitches and detours as valuable 'stumbling blocks' which help us to remind that using software is neither natural nor a neutral act?

Let's zoom into the part of the workflow that deals with putting video online. But first let me list the tools I use when working on a video-project: I work on a Linux Ubuntu operating system. To capture video I use the software Kino, for basic edits Kino and also Kdenlive, for complex editing I turn to Cinelerra. Editing sound is done with Audacity and Ardour, coding

digital video with FFmpeg and Mencoder. VLC and Mplayer are my favorite mediaplayers. Icecast, DVgrab, ffmpeg2theora and Oggvorbis are piped together on the command line for streaming video.² I use the open formats Ogg/Vorbis for audio and Theora for video.³

Exchange and access to video files

When you exchange files with others through the web you need to agree on a common protocol. A 'protocol' can be understood as a 'type of controlling logic that operates outside institutional, governmental and corporate power'⁴. Decentralised systems built on protocols which have to be accepted by all the participants, a protocol is formal and has to be internalized by all users / machines. If there is no central authority in a system, control manifests itself in the protocol. The contradiction at the heart of a protocol is that it has to standardise in order to liberate. To put it more extremely: 'It has to be fascist and unilateral to be utopian'⁵.

When we exchange with friends, colleagues and like-minded our protocols of exchange are not only technical but also social: HTML, IP, P2P, HTTP, FTP, IEEE1394, mix with Trust, Friendship, Affinity, Communitality. How do we recognise our friends online? By comparing our profiles? By following hyperlinks, are friends those who invite us to be part of their 'community'?

Commercial services for video apply an elementary principle of magic, a basic skill known to every magician: they draw attention to something else than what they are actually doing. Their words and appearances suggest approachability, they welcome us to a community. We are promised new friends; we are being spoken to in the language of social softwares. But we have to remember that the core activity of all commercial companies, no matter what type of services they offer, is making money. In order to determine what type of platform we are dealing with we have to ask a few questions: Who runs the service and what is its true aim? Who controls the rules of the game? Who benefits most from the existence of the platform?

When I join an online service, I am asked to agree with its policies and conditions. The Terms of Use (or Terms of Service) document specifies the conditions for use of the website and the services it offers, comparable to a contract between house-owner and tenant. Next to this, Terms of Use documents often also specify how users are expected to behave among themselves. Nothing wrong with members of the same household or users arranging their communal life or web behaviour in a document. But does a landlord telling you what you can

2. A good starting point for tips on working with open source tools is: Flossmanuals.net <http://en.flossmanuals.net/TheoraCookbook/FfmpegStreaming>

3. For specifications of open source codecs for audio and video see: www.xiph.org

4. Alexander Galloway, *Protocol: How Control Exists After Decentralisation*, Cambridge, Ma., The MIT Press, 2004.

5. Galloway, Protocol, 2004.

and cannot do fit the picture of a '(virtual) environment in which people can work together and can form (virtual) communities'?⁶

Terms of Use documents, license agreements, marriage certificates, open content licenses, leases, and other contracts for use or cohabitation do not guarantee happy lives, friendship, love, success. They arrange forms of control or giving up control. When working on a collective project, such as the development of a piece of software, or the making of a film, collaboration⁷ is often a productive and fruitful necessity. When we work together with people we do not like, it is a good idea to describe our exchange protocol in a document.

An easy way to optimise exchange of files is to publish work under an open content license. Copyleft licenses such as the General Public License and the Free Arts License (Licence Art Libre) enable our worst enemies to use our work and allows us to benefit from their work. By accepting reciprocity as a social procedure for regulating data transmissions, the term 'sharing' gains new meaning. In stead of utilising 'real world', nostalgic, familiar and friendly connotations of the word, as is often done by commercial video 'sharing' services, open content licenses infuse the act of sharing with an understanding of the characteristics of relationships in network environments. I will sign any contract that reads: You are allowed freedoms as long as you pass on those freedoms to others.⁸

I expect an online video service to give me access to the videofiles. Let's try to be a bit more precise in what we mean with 'access'. In order to be able to work with online video files I will need physical access, in the shape of a direct link to the file. I will need legal access: I need permission of the right holder(s) for copying, downloading, remixing etc. Having visual access, being able to see the files in a preview, index thumbnails or otherwise, would help greatly.

Generally speaking commercial services are not keen on providing direct access/links to files, more likely they will offer code to embed the video, or have you watch it through their own web interface. Avoiding responsibility for possible copyright infringements or other forms of potential abuse by users is less of an issue for platforms that require uploaded files to be under open content licenses.⁹ Open content files found on Archive.org, Lulu.tv, TheoraSea.

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6. From Wikipedia: 'Social software can be defined as software which enables the online interactions between people, which facilitates virtual relationships or creates virtual environments in which people can collaborate or built virtual communities'. http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sociale_software
 7. Collaboration carries a connotation of working with the enemy, as Florian Schneider remarks in his text on the subject. 'It means working together with an agency with which one is not immediately connected'. <http://summit.kein.org/node/190>
 8. From the GPL 3.0: 'To protect your rights, we need to prevent others from denying you these rights or asking you to surrender the rights. Therefore, you have certain responsibilities if you distribute copies of the software, or if you modify it: responsibilities to respect the freedom of others'. <http://www.gnu.org/licenses/gpl-3.0.txt>
 9. Lawrence Liang, *A Guide To Open Content Licences*, Rotterdam: Piet Zwart Institute, 2004. [Inhttp://pzwart.wdka.hro.nl/mdr/research/liang/open_content_guide](http://pzwart.wdka.hro.nl/mdr/research/liang/open_content_guide)

org and Blip.tv¹⁰ are downloadable and point to the licenses that specify the rights granted for further use.

An easy way to find legally accessible files is offered by CCsearch; a search engine developed by Creative Commons which looks specifically for CC licensed files which can legally be used, remixed, altered, sampled, copied.¹¹ Open content licenses do not protect my exclusive rights to the object, but they protect the rights of the object to be freely used and multiplied by everybody. Everybody means: including me. A digital object deserves to be copied, changed and redistributed, whether people like each other or not. Attaching an open content license protects me from applying warm notions of human relationships as if they were reliable protocols for exchange, which they are not.

Most online services offer video's in a Flash Video format. If you do not want to equip your computer with proprietary software this can be tricky: FLV is not open and therefore not fully supported by open source software. Several existing initiatives aim to improve this situation: Web videos can be coded in Ogg/Theora, a format that can be played in browsers using the Java applet Cortado. By embedding this applet in a website, viewers can access the video without the need for a locally installed media player supporting the correct formats on their computers.¹² The Gnu project Gnash is another promising alternative: an open source Flash player under heavy development which can be compiled for most operating systems and architectures.¹³

Sharing the work process

One of my favourite ways to exchange work in process is by relaying Edit decision List. EDLs are lightweight text files, in which the decisions made during an editing process are saved. When several people working together all have access to the same source videos and use the same software, the EDL is the only thing they need to exchange to know of each other's edits. The structure of EDLs such as the one exported by the video editing software Kino, can be easily understood and rewritten with a simple text editor.



Figure 2: A screenshot of a project in Kino.

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10. Recently Blip.tv was voted best online video platform recently by the magazine PC World, leaving YouTube and other big companies way behind. <http://www.pcworld.com/article/id,136101-page,1/article.html>
 11. The Creative Commons search engine can be found at: <http://search.creativecommons.org>
 12. More info on Cortado: <http://www.flumotion.net/cortado>
 13. More info on Gnash: <http://www.gnu.org/software/gnash>

```

<?xml version="1.0"?>
<smil xmlns="http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema#language">
  <body>
    <seq>
      <video src="werk/hasselt/Video/7.dv" clipBegin="00:00:00.000" clipEnd="00:00:05.160"/>
    </seq>
    <seq>
      <video src="werk/hasselt/Video/6.dv" clipBegin="00:00:00.000" clipEnd="00:00:07.840"/>
    </seq>
    <seq>
      <video src="werk/hasselt/Video/10.dv" clipBegin="00:00:00.000" clipEnd="00:00:05.400"/>
    </seq>
  </body>
</smil>

```

Figure 3: The same Kino project saved as a SMIL formatted XML.

This is all great when working with a few colleagues, but it might be more exciting to integrate the distributive potential of the web in the decision making and production phase of a film project. Co-authorship on synopsis and scenario. Exchange of ideas, sketches, try outs. Remote filming. Distributed editing and decision making processes. That potential lies, for instance, in combining Content Managing Systems with scripts and the EDL output of video editing software.¹⁴ Using a CMS to produce bins, clips, edits and sequences, instead of an editing software that runs locally, replaces the authoritarian scheme of the responsible editor-in-chief with a more diverse, versatile and accessible (I won't say democratic) approach towards film making. Imagine also the inclusion of wiki-power for collective scripting¹⁵ and the management capacities of Version Control Systems¹⁶ for helping decide between concurring edits, commenting to commits and negotiating final versions.

Control over your own video

To what extent do I keep control over my own work when I upload it to an online web service? To find out more I have to return to the Terms of Use document. Here we find who owns the material on the site and who will be allowed to use it under which conditions. In most cases the uploading party remains the formal owner of the work, s/he signs a license granting the platform certain rights; among others enabling them to show and view the work. This goes for all platforms, commercial or not, but each platform specifies conditions differently. In some cases granting rights to the platform is very close to donating your rights of ownership

14. Echo Chamber Project is a collaborative documentary in development about the behaviour of American media in the days before the invasion of Iraq. It is experimenting with connecting the SMIL and XML generating functions of the CMS Drupal to Apple's Final Cut Pro's XML format. See: <http://www.echochamberproject.com/collaborativefilmmaking>. Based on the Echo Chamber flowchart, Deptford.tv is currently developing a system involving only Free software: using the XML output of Open Source timeline editor Cinelerra. <http://deptford.tv>
15. An example of a movie project using wiki's for distributed scriptwriting is A Swarm of Angels. <http://aswarmofangels.com>
16. Version control systems are software programs that keep track of all work and all changes in a set of files, and allow several (potentially widely-separated) developers to collaborate. Examples of well known Version Control Systems are: CVS: Concurrent Versioning System: an open-source version control system. SVN stands for Subversion; a version control system which is used to maintain current and historical versions of files such as source code, web pages, and documentation. GIT is a distributed version control system focused on speed, effectivity and real-world usability on large projects.

to the platform. Quoted from the Terms of Use of Facebook:¹⁷ 'By posting User Content to any part of the Site, you automatically grant (...) to the Company an irrevocable, perpetual, non-exclusive, transferable, fully paid, worldwide license (with the right to sublicense) to use, copy, publicly perform, publicly display, reformat, translate, excerpt (in whole or in part) and distribute such User Content for any purpose on or in connection with the Site or the promotion thereof, to prepare derivative works of, or incorporate into other works, such User Content, and to grant and authorise sublicenses of the foregoing.'

Suppose I agree to such a license, and I click the Yes button, at that moment I also agree to a short sentence which can easily be overseen: 'YouTube (or any other service) reserves the right to amend these Terms of Service at any time and without notice, and it is your responsibility to review these Terms of Service for any changes.' The Terms will also inform me that when major changes will be made to the document, the platform will notify me.

You rent a flat. The lease contract specifies that the landlord can change the contract at any time without notice. It is your responsibility to check back regularly to see if you still agree with the contract. If you do not agree with it, you have no way to influence its content and your only option is to end the arrangement. Which other contract specifying that sort of conditions would you click 'I agree' to? Marriage? Service provider? Telephone? Mortgage? Online ordering? Oh yes, one other thing: ... How often do I have to re-read the Terms to see changes occur? How do I spot changes in these very elaborate documents? How do I distinguish minor changes from major changes? And why have I never been notified of such a major change?

In response to these questions, Alexandre Dulaunoy and Michael Noll developed GooDiff¹⁸: a system which records the history of changes made to legal documents of big companies including: Google, Yahoo, Ebay and Six Apart. GooDiff scans documents from services such as: Gmail, del.icio.us, Flickr, YouTube and Facebook. This tool allows us to see all changes that were made to the Terms of Use document of YouTube since GooDiff was launched in 2006. Within a year, more than 300 changes were made to this document, replacing literally every single word in the document to which I had eagerly clicked 'Yes I agree'. GooDiff paints a radically different image of the service than is suggested by YouTube itself. No longer can I believe its cosy, friendly, social words and (inter)face. YouTube turns out to be a two faced monster, showing an active policy of rewriting contracts, taking full commercial benefit of web 2.0 potential.

Participate in the system

Last on my shortlist of expectations is that I would like the platform to enable me to participate in its system. If a platform gives the impression of being a social tool, that suggestion should be supported and ratified by how its machinery operates and should not be contradicted by its legal and technical structure. Opening the source code is a way to give users an opportu-

17. Quoted from the version of the Terms of Use available from the Facebook website at time of writing. <http://www.facebook.com/terms.php>

18. Homepage GooDiff: <http://www.goodiff.org>. Read how the project was started on Michael Noll's blog, <http://www.michael-noll.com/blog/2006/03/18/goodiff-project-upnrunning>

nity to verify that structure. Permitting others to develop new projects upon the source code and allowing changes and contributions to that code is a convincing participatory methodology which can be very beneficial to the project itself: the history of the open source movement shows that developers feel challenged to improve interesting and valuable code.

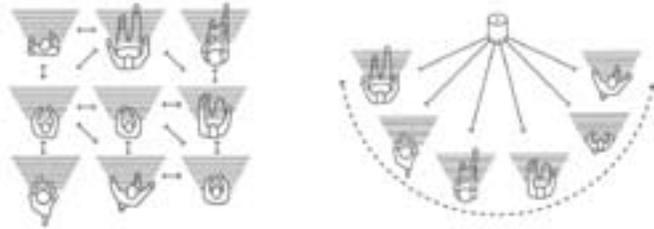


Figure 4: Left: P2P exchange, Right: Central control system. Illustrations by Pierre Huyghebaert.

Applying exchange protocols such as P2P, seems an obvious way to structurally letting participants have a share in distributive platforms. The schematic representation of a P2P network indicates that data lives in between its nodes, it is received and made available by the nodes. Switching off one node does not make data inaccessible, increasing the amount of active nodes certainly makes exchange faster. The responsibility for powering the exchange operations lies with the participating nodes. In a server / client model power and authority are not distributed, but centralised in the server.

Let's freely adapt some Foucauldian¹⁹ notions of control to a central server video service: Who owns the server, possesses control (the company defines the conditions). The user of the network is monitored but does not have capabilities to oversee the system. (User uploads merchandise for company to trade with) S/he is the object of information (company collects user profiles), but is not a partner in communication (corporate censorship). The server functions as a panopticon from which processes are being monitored and directed. Websites such as YouTube thrive on a conscious and permanent state of visibility in which users engage themselves, (flagging, commenting) confirming the automatic functioning of power. Of course I am comparing two completely different entities: A prison model is not a server

19. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, 1977, New York: Random House, pp. 195-228: 'He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication. (...) Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary. (...) In view of this, Bentham laid down the principle that power should be visible and unverifiable. Visible: the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon. Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so'. Also available from: <http://foucault.info/documents/disciplineAndPunish/foucault.disciplineAndPunish.panOpticism.html>

system, and YouTube is not a jail. But the resemblance between the diagram of a central server and the panopticon are too obvious to ignore. Now this makes me wonder: Is my desire to participate in a system sufficient? Aren't prisoners participating in the very system by which they are detained?

When reflecting on the censoring aspects of television, Pierre Bourdieu remarks that television producers and spectators are engaging in a symbolic, non physical form of violence that can exist thanks to the silent approval of those who are undergoing it and those who exercise it, but only when neither of the parties are consciously contributing.²⁰ According to Bourdieu, the price for performing on television is that you allow yourself to be censored. Among others, this has to do with three aspects of the television system: subjects are fixed, the conditions of communication are predetermined and the time you get to speak is limited. Let's draw an analogy with YouTube. Recently YouTube has put a limit on the uploaded clips. The uploaded content is framed by 'community guidelines' and can be flagged as 'inappropriate' by the 'community'. The conditions for communications are defined by the company.

Silently approving to a not very sympathetic system is definitely not what I am looking for. I have to be clearer in my desire: the system I want to engage in should itself be participatory. Before embarking on a 'participatory' project I have to learn to be more critical: if my participation is not answered by offering me for example a voice in the structure of the system, or a share in its benefices or revenues, my commitment is probably not valued as participation, but perceived as a gift. I should refuse to work with parties that make their systems look open and accessible when in fact they are fishing for input of clients without having to pay for it.

That is why I do not like using the term 'sharing' platform when talking about a YouTube type of service. To me, the term 'sharing' implies more than watching videos through a corporate website. It suggests taking a political standpoint by translating intentions of sharing to all aspects of your system, applying corresponding standards, protocols, terms and conditions. Our world is not a binary one. Relations and power structures are usually not transparent and clearly identifiable, which makes operating with clean hands virtually impossible. In preparing this article I have signed quite a few Terms of Use documents which I do not agree to at all. Despite the fact that our practices as cultural workers are embedded in a diffuse reality, I think it is worth while taking up the challenge of critically assessing systems we engage in, attempting to influence them for the better and to support the development of sustainable alternatives.

This article frames in a long term practice based research on the use of FLOSS tools for design and artistic purposes by Constant; a Brussels based organisation for Art and Media. The weblogs Open Source Video and Open Source Publish offer good starting points for further reading on this subject. <http://www.constantvzw.org>

20. Pierre Bourdieu, *Sur la télévision*, Paris: Liber - Raisons d'Agir, 1996, pp. 17.

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(UN)REAL-TIME MEDIA- 'GOT LIVE IF YOU WANT IT'

DAVID GARCIA

(Un) real-time media are what happens when the temporality of television (the paradigmatic 'live' medium) collides with the 'timeless time' of the database. At this intersection, time (and thus history) is simultaneously denied and intensified. It is the world anticipated in 1994 by Manuel Castells when he introduced the term *timeless time*: 'not just a relativization of time according to social contexts. It is a mixing of tenses to create a forever universe (...)'.¹

For the Record

At 20.10 hours- 29th of May - 2008 a new barrier in the history of 'real-time media'- was broken when Channel 4 (a UK national broadcaster) staged a live television ad for Honda involving a stunt in which a team of champion skydivers had only three minutes twenty seconds to spell out each the of the letters H-O-N-D-A in a set of challenging formations over Madrid.

The brilliantly executed broadcast was not only shot live but was also a virtuoso piece of live editing between multiple camera sources (on the wing of the plane, inside the plane, on the helmets of the divers, on a plane flying alongside the drop plane and from the ground). On the day everything including the weather had to be picture perfect, and it was. The result is currently archived on YouTube.¹

The idea for the ad was developed by Channel 4's strategic sales team, lead by Mike Parker, and a team from Honda's own creative division was inspired by Honda's strap line 'If its difficult its worth doing'.

In a press briefing, Andy Barnes, sales director of Channel 4 breathlessly claimed 'this concept breaks the perceived confines of television advertising'. But despite its claim to be new and revolutionary the success (at least in terms of exposure) of the Honda live ad is based on the fact that the ad not only extends but also closely follows the distinctive logic of a medium that (until the arrival of broadband internet) can be distinguished by being the pre-eminently 'live medium'.

Watching the jump on YouTube would be an entirely different experience if we were not continually reminded that it was originally a 'live' broadcast. As a media event its whole point lies in the intensification of video's forensic immediacy, reflecting what Zizek claims is the key feature of the twentieth century our 'passion for the real.'

1. <http://youtube.com/watch?v=hA3GL1mGfCQ>

If the Honda ad had been transmitted only on television, we would still be operating at the outer limits of 'real-time media'. But once archived on the net (YouTube) the temporalities of database and video converge to create a new set of temporal conditions and possibilities. Unlike film, even archived video looks 'live.' Whatever the content, the appearance of video, its core aesthetic is never nostalgic. Try running the camcorder footage from nearly two decades ago, of the Police attacks on Rodney King or the artist Paul Garrin, to be confronted with curious quality of *temporal closeness* imparted by video. This quality is generally rejected for the production of any up-market television series. There is a general sentiment in the industry that even when viewed of on TV, video tends to look cheap; it's for soaps. But the same quality of immediacy is seized on by artists, behavioural ethnographers, who when the hardware became more affordable in the 1960s, immediately recognised that the medium's power lay more as a tool of observation than as a means of representation.

The Video Observatory

The quality of immediacy is there from the outset. From its earliest beginnings with the BBC broadcasts from Alexandra Palace in 1936, television programs were necessarily live. Throughout the early decades there was no other technical possibility, until the introduction of magnetic 'video tape' in the early 1950s. The current dominance of 'reality TV,' of which the Honda ad is merely the latest and most extreme iteration, is evidence that video's characteristic immediacy remains as much a part of the medium's DNA as ever. Television was the earliest 'real-time' medium, even audio recording cannot allow both maker and the subject to see, on a monitor, in real-time, a faithful facsimile of what is before the camera. In contrast to the distancing effect of film, the video camera collapses the space between data capture, data management and data delivery.

In the 1960's Sony introduced the 'industrial standard' video recorders. These machines were the first relatively affordable and easy to use video standard. What had been until then the exclusive domain of the TV industry suddenly became widely available. Although never a commercial success this format immediately became a vital tool for three distinct classes of practitioner; artists, political activists and scientists.

One of the important characteristics of the medium was that it provided one of the most powerful instruments yet devised for the close scrutiny of human behaviour. Like a mirror, we can use video to observe our behaviour and that of others in real time. But unlike a mirror, video enables us to instantly and endlessly rewind and analyse our reactions and role-playing and even different relationships to time itself. The artist Dan Graham was one of the most important artists to explore the political and the psychological implications of the video moment. During the mid-1970s Graham explored the ways in which a new dimension in reflexivity effected human behaviour in a number of key works, *Time Delay Rooms* (1974) and *Yesterday/Today* (1975 Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum) *Present Continuous Past* shown in the John Gibson Gallery New York. In all of these works he used a video but stretched and looped the magnetic tape to distort the time in which the viewer saw himself or herself on screen using delays of anything from a few seconds to a full day.

But it was not only in the arts that video was of critical importance. The introduction of video

for certain areas of behavioural science is often overlooked. Researchers (particularly in the field of Developmental Psychology) have stated that video's introduction has been of comparable importance to the telescope for astronomy, or the microscope for life sciences. Video remains the basic research tool for almost all-close and systematic observation of human, non-verbal behaviour.

Since then presence of video has proliferated to become the all-seeing eye of the control society. Like Bentham's *Panopticon*, the fact that we do not know whether someone is watching means that we are likely to moderate our behaviour on the assumption that we are being observed.

Many artists have created works that have exploited the ubiquity of security cameras, but one of the most vivid recent examples comes from the English media arts collective Mongrel with their *Video Sniffin'* project in which the collective teaches a group of kids in South End on Sea, how to capture the video images from security cameras in small local shops. The kids used the situation to do a variety of impromptu performances in front of the cameras and playing edited versions back to the astonished proprietors who had been unaware of how easy it was to capture and manipulate footage from their cameras.

Appropriating (Un)reality

But beyond live video projects, where are the works by 'critical makers' more fully engaged with the implications of the collision of temporalities described earlier? Is there anyone systematically identifying and testing the specific boundaries, which the new conditions have brought into being? Where are the generative juxtapositions of these media temporalities that go beyond being able to watch home movies and yesterday's TV programs today?

There may be more radical examples but from what I have seen the most compelling, creative and above all systematic exploration of live media and the database technologies come from a group of developers, working at Amsterdam's De Balie, a centre for culture. Working quietly and below the radar for a number of years, this team lead by Eric Kluitenberg has combined the expertise of network built up over years of hosting numerous experimental media events such as Netcongestion and the Next 5 Minutes. The team has brilliantly exploited the unique opportunities, which an institution like De Balie offers to create a new kind of media lab.

The power of an institutional foundation is that it creates the time and the resources for a genuinely iterative process to unfold. It is a process in which the team return again and again to the same core question: what are the consequences for public discourse when live video web transmission of public discussions are combined with advanced (open source) database technology? Time and again the Balie team returns to this question, refining and developing a powerful toolbox which is being continuous state of development. The fact that the toolbox is created on MMBase, means that we can all potentially contribute to this development process.

To discover the outcomes of these developments the interested reader should begin by visiting De Balie's website and video archive of previously transmitted live video streams. What

makes this experience different is that can be viewed on a media player specially designed by artist Reza Tahami, on which relevant links (internal and external) are available on the same screen. This system not only allows publics to intervene in the discussions both remotely and during the event but by adding the links to relevant sites, the interventions can be informed by the broadest available context. Reza Tahami is the quiet man of Dutch media art and it is time that he received more recognition for his important work in the development of advanced media players for his own artworks <http://www.videotrack.nl/>, as well as his work with De Balie team.

The most experimental of the platforms originated by De Balie team is *Cool Media Hot Talk Show* – a system designed to enable publics to intervene before and during and after the live event. In this project we see what arises when data capture, data delivery and data management are successfully compressed into the same interface allowing something close to real-time reflection to take place. The *Cool Media Hot Talk Show* began as platform for exploring media art but (following of a Digital Pioneer's funding award) it is now being used by the Dutch national political party, Groen Links (Green Left) as a means for broadening participation in a series of public debates that form the key to the development of the party's new policy framework. Practice-based research, action research, reflexive interventions in real-time, if ever we are looking for a strategy for remaining tactical, here it is!

PIXELATE OR PERISH NETWORKING DEVELOPERS AND VIDEO ACTIVISTS AT TRANSMISSION ASIA-PACIFIC

ANDREW LOWENTHAL

Independent, grassroots online initiatives find themselves in a strange place these days. As the first (or was it the second?) wave of online projects like Indymedia wane in the face of the 'web 2.0', 'mallification' and 'net-sploitation' it can often feel as though the days' activists, at least those closely linked to social movements, took a cutting edge role in shaping the web are far gone.

In 1999 a free software application called 'Active' formed the basis for a major publishing revolution, being used to run the first Indymedia site in Seattle, and was then used to set dozens more. Nine years ago there were few spaces ordinary users could publish online without significant technical knowledge. Autonomous networks promoting independence, privacy and free collaboration these days however seem vastly overwhelmed and outgunned by agile commercial forces more able to engage the desires of web users. Interestingly it was the model of decentralised production and collaboration that gave grassroots initiatives their advantage and agility, they now seem near static and lost.

What to do given this state of affairs? Now that 'You' (according to Time) - or is it 'We'? - have apparently taken over the web? Has 'the end of history' arrived for the net? With activist development of cutting edge online spaces seemingly sidelined or flailing, where to? It's beginning to feel like a new round of press consolidation has truly taken hold now that Big Capital has rediscovered the web in earnest after the dotcom crash.

Grassroots activists, who at one point led the way in re-imagining and re-inventing the media and the net, have failed to make their mark in developing the next generation of tools. In any case, if Big Capital is giving the people what they want why fetishise a kind of cottage industry development?

Are activist spaces destined to go the way of print, radio and TV, where the major players take hold and the alternatives become just that, alternative, pushed to the margins, destined for decades of struggle to take a modicum of space? Are we simply seeing 'Amalgamation and Capital' in the netscape? If the Wild West of the net is over is the only future consolidation amid the online video and social networking gold rush? Is this history already written? Or could the spectre of a global recession scuttle these plans?

Transmission

One project with the aim of challenging the centralisation and commercialisation of online video is the Transmission network. Begun in June 2006 at a four day meeting in Rome,

Transmission is a network of video activists, programmers and web producers using online video distribution for social justice and media democracy. The network aims to build the necessary tools, standards, documentation and social networks to make independent online distribution possible.

Practically the Transmission network is engaged in a range of projects. These include producing a shared metadata standard to enable searching and aggregation across participating projects, a customised version of the Miro video podcast application, freely licensed documentation of FOSS video tools, research into FOSS video codecs and a few more. The network is fairly informally organised and operates as a space for collaborations to form between groups and individuals and for communication around key issues.

Four gatherings around these themes have been held to date, in Rome, London, Amsterdam, and most recently in Sukabumi, about 3 hours out of Jakarta, Indonesia.

Whilst I certainly don't posit Transmission as the Rebel Alliance fighting the Web 2.0 Death Star, it hopefully illustrates one set of strategies, that are linked to broader social movements, being used to push for a free and open internet.

Transmission Asia-Pacific

Transmission Asia-Pacific (TXAP) was a five day camp in May 2008 of 55 video activists and web developers on the edge of the Gede Parango National Park in West Java. The gathering aimed to bring together video activists with web developers and project organisers in order to improve the state of independent online video distribution and to skill up participants in the use of free software tools and digital distribution strategies.

The event was organised by the Melbourne-based EngageMedia; a video sharing site focussed on social justice and environmental issues in the Asia-Pacific, as well as being a free software, training and networking project, in collaboration with Jakarta's Ruangrupa, a media art organisation whose projects include the biannual 'OK.Video' festival at the National Gallery of Indonesia.

The core aim of the meeting was to bring together video makers and developers working on social justice issues in the Asia-Pacific region. The hope was that video makers would gain an understanding of the potential and role of free software and the process of development, and that developers would better understand the needs of video makers and thus produce better tools. It seemed to us that independent production and distribution required that these two groups come together to better understand one another.

The five days covered around 50 sessions including workshops on open source content management systems, using and developing open source video codecs, co-ordinating content sharing between festivals in the region, online/offline distribution (particularly in relation to the low-bandwidth situations many people in the region find themselves in), video compression with FOSS tools, copyright/left, a look at the Indonesian video art/activist scene, co-ordinating online video coverage of the G8 meeting in Japan, video making and distribution

under repressive regimes and project sustainability.

The 5 days also saw nightly screenings or participants work covering a retrospective on People's Power in Indonesia post 1998, counter-globalisation movements, environment and climate change, sexuality and gender and political repression and human rights.

Why a meeting in Asia?

There has been an explosion of access to consumer grade video tools globally over the past 5 years, particularly in Asia when it seems most of these tools are manufactured. There are a plethora of projects using video to advance a variety of social and political goals in the region as well as a variety of commercial online video spaces serving the region. Fertile ground exists for a series of networks, partnerships and independent spaces emerge.

TX-AP brought together approximately 40 projects from 15 countries around the region. These ranged from Japanese video sharing spaces to Indian tech development projects, Indonesia community video initiatives to Malaysian video news sites. The aim was to forge cross-border networks as organically as possible.

In many ways the Asia-Pacific is a space where 'Amalgamation and Capital' in the online sphere is yet to consolidate itself as forcefully as it has in the US and Europe. Here there remain perhaps more conflicts, ambiguity and more emergent possibilities.

More practically, given the repressive nature of many governments in the region online video holds a particular potency. Thailand, Burma and Nepal among others have blocked net communications, and particularly video, recently during times of social unrest. Video last year from the uprising in Burma was particularly important in mobilising solidarity internationally.

That said there are few specifically activist video projects in the region resulting in a heavy reliance on commercial spaces. Whilst the commercial spaces certainly help to get content out there, and are used in both subversive and non-subversive forms, a litany of instances have emerged over the past few years of the large players (Google, Yahoo etc.) co-operating directly with authorities to censor material or even dox in dissidents. Spaces willing to protect users' anonymity and keep content online despite the pressures of governments or companies are very much needed.

Structure and Process

The structure of the event was made highly participatory with workshops organised and run by the attendees themselves. This was a very deliberate choice, being a mechanism to foster a sense of ownership over the space by enabling participants to direct the content of the meeting as much as possible. Coming from a philosophy of open source development it would seem that models of participation, and ultimately ownership, are what make a projects successful or not. If the aim is to challenge proprietary video spaces and tools with a base of traditionally resource-poor organisations, the collaborative potential of these networks to work with highly sophisticated technologies is of great importance. The production methods carry particular social values (democracy, participation) but they are also highly practical.

For the most part this worked, as well perhaps as can be expected in transplanting, or maybe transmitting, a particular cultural model of social interaction to a group of people coming from a variety of different contexts; some privileged in their access to technology, others not, all with varied styles of organising and understanding the problems at hand. What goes on in organised spaces however, no matter how informal or participatory they might hope to be, is never the sum of an event, but one part of the conversation. Temporary and transient spaces and interactions often hold just as much sway over how an event is made. It's more likely here in fact that the real cultural and philosophical exchanges develop.

Conclusion

Transmission Asia-Pacific was a small, but hopefully significant step forward in fostering new networks of free collaboration and independent production and distribution. New models of autonomous communication and self-sustaining production are desperately needed at this point lest we be left pining for a pre-industrial internet, before Capital discovered how easy it was for other people to make your content for you for free, and called it web 2.0.

How can we move to a space where independent production is not an 'alternative' but remains a key part of the equation? How do we ensure these spaces are not marginalised the same way independent initiatives in print, TV and radio were in so many places throughout the 20th century? Is there something inherently different in the architecture of the web that inoculates it against this fate? Popular opinion suggests it does, but only popular action will ensure it does.

APPENDICES

VIDEO VORTEX I IN BRUSSELS

Location: Argos, Brussels
Fri 05.10.2007 11:00 - 19:00

Information on Video Vortex I, the conference held in Brussels, Belgium, on 5 October 2007, can be found on the Argos website www.argosarts.org.

Over the past years the moving image has claimed an increasingly prominent place on the internet. Thanks to a wide range of technologies and web applications it has become possible, not only to record and distribute video, but to edit and remix it on-line as well. With this world of possibilities within reach of a multitude of social actors, the potential of video as a personal means of expression has arrived at a totally new dimension. How is this potential being used? How do artists and activists react to the popularity of YouTube and other 'user-generated-content' websites? What is the impact of the availability of massive on-line images and sound databases on aesthetics and narrativity? How is Cinema, as an art form and experience, influenced by the development of widely spreading internet practices? What does YouTube tell us about the state of art in visual culture? And how does the participation culture of video-sharing and vlogging reach some degree of autonomy and diversity, escaping the laws of the mass media and the strong grip of media conglomerates?

This Video Vortex conference is the first in a series of international events, aimed at critical research and reflection surrounding the production and distribution of on-line video content, at the instigation of the Institute of Network Cultures (INC).

SPEAKERS: Johan Grimonprez, Peter Horvath, Lev Manovich, Ana Kronschnabl & Tomas Rawlings, Adrian Miles, Simon Ruschmeyer, Keith Sanborn, Peter Westenberg.

Introduced by Geert Lovink. Moderated by Sabine Niederer. Curated by Stoffel Debuysere.

Co-production with the Institute of Network Cultures, Amsterdam.

The Conference will be followed by a selection of exceptional, witty and provoking Internet videos, compiled for the occasion by international and local guests.

In the context of the conference we asked some people to compose a program of Internet video works, as a source of inspiration and reference.

This programme is part of OPEN ARCHIVE #1 and Cinema in Transition, Argos Brussels.

VIDEO VORTEX II IN AMSTERDAM

Location: SMCS 11, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
18-19 January 2008

The conference Video Vortex II was held in Amsterdam, the Netherlands on January 18-19, 2008. The website www.networkcultures.org/videovortex serves as an archive where you can find the conference video and audio documentation, the two-day program and news on follow-up events.

*

In response to the increasing potential for video to become a significant form of personal media on the Internet, this conference examined the key issues that are emerging around the independent production and distribution of online video content. What are artists and activists responses to the popularity of 'user-generated content' websites? Is corporate backlash imminent?

After years of talk about digital conversions and crossmedia platforms we are now witnessing the merger of the Internet and television at a pace that no one predicted. For the baby boom generation, that currently forms the film and television establishment, the media organisations and conglomerates, this unfolds as a complete nightmare. Not only because of copyright issues but increasingly due to the shift of audience to vlogging and video-sharing websites as part of the development of a broader participatory culture.

The Video Vortex conference aimed to contextualize these latest developments through presenting continuities and discontinuities in the artistic, activist and mainstream perspective of the last few decades. Unlike the way online video presents itself as the latest and greatest, there are long threads to be woven into the history of visual art, cinema and documentary production. The rise of the database as the dominant form of storing and accessing cultural artifacts has a rich tradition that still needs to be explored. The conference aimed to raise the following questions:

How are people utilising the potential to independently produce and distribute independent video content on the Internet?

What are the alternatives to the proprietary standards currently being developed?

What are the commercial objectives that mass media is imposing on user-generated content and video-sharing databases?

What is the underlying economics of online video in the age of unlimited uploads?

How autonomous are vloggers within the broader domain of mass media?

How are cinema, television and video art being affected by the development of a ubiquitous online video practice?

What type of aesthetic and narrative issues does the database pose for online video practice?

The closing session on Saturday evening explored the way VJs and media artists are accessing and using online archives. Under the banner of Video Slamming, this evening was all about the new ways of watching, using, and playing with moving images, such as scratching, sampling, mixing, (meta)tagging and recommending.

Friday January 18, PostCS11

09.30 **Doors open, coffee and tea**

10.00 **Welcome**

10.15 - 12.30 **Opening Session**

Moderator: Geert Lovink

Tom Sherman

Rosemary Comella

Florian Schneider

YouTube made 2006 the year of Internet video. The video content is produced bottom-up, with an emphasis on participation, sharing and community networking. But inevitably, like Flickr being consumed by Yahoo, Google purchased YouTube. What is the future for the production and distribution of independent online video content? How can a participatory culture achieve a certain degree of autonomy and diversity outside mass media? What is the artistic potential of video databases and online filmmaking?

13.30 - 15.30 **Online Video Aesthetics**

Moderator: Patricia Pisters

Andreas Treske

Tal Sterngast

Stefaan Decostere

Helen Kambouri

Looking at the videos on YouTube, what aesthetics do we find? Is there a homogeneous style that mainly builds on eyewitness tv, candid camera formats and webcam diaries? And now that music videos and commercials increasingly resemble video art, can we define how artistic practices influence the look of online footage? Is YouTube a medium and platform in itself for art works, or is it merely used as a promotional device?

15.45 - 17.45 **Alternative Platforms and Software**

Moderator: Seth Keen

Matthew Mitchem

Valentin Spirik

Philine von Guretzky

Jay Dedman

Tatiana de la O

This session will investigate developments in the field of open source software in creating alternatives to proprietary software like Windows Media Player. Through investigating Peer2-Peer alternatives and open licenses, both users and programmers aim to create a truly distributed network, in which content can freely float around without having to use centralized servers and sign strings of user agreements.

Saturday January 19, PostCS11

10.00 - 12.00 **Cinema and Narrativity**

Moderator: Sonja de Leeuw

Thomas Elsaesser

Dan Oki

Jan Simons

Do fragmented video databases lead to new narratives and genres? Does a database like YouTube evoke new media skills or rather contemporary conditions such as ADD? Against the latter, scholars have put the ability of users to reassemble short stories into larger new narratives. The bricolage is assembled by the end-user, not the producer. Does this add up to a new cinematic experience?

13.00 - 15.00 **Curating Online Video**

Moderator: Vera Tollmann

Thomas Thiel

Sarah Cook

Patrick Lichty

Emma Quinn

From 16mm film and video to the Internet and back, artists have always used the moving image to produce critical and innovative work. This session will explore early examples of Internet video and investigate how artists and curators have responded to the YouTube challenge. Online video databases seemingly are the ideal artist portfolio online, with unlimited uploads and a massive audience. MySpace is inhabited by bands and musicians, but why don't video artists and filmmakers occupy YouTube? On the other hand, where would this leave the curator?

15.15 - 17.15 **Participatory Culture**

Moderator: Monique van Dusseldorp

Tilman Baumgärtel

Ana Peraica

Dominick Chen

Web 2.0 promises new levels of participatory culture in which all users are producers, sharing their homemade content with their networks of friends. In this utopian approach, the user has

the potential to overcome centralized top-down media and create dialogue. To which extent can this be considered citizen journalism? Is the increased user participation a sign of a new socio-political culture or is it a mere special effect of technological change?

20.00 - 00.00 **Evening program: Video Slamming**

Much like poetry slamming the use of short video fragments has become a dominant mode in visual culture. Where are the video files found and how are they used and played with? Is 'video slamming' the new way of watching audiovisual files? This evening session is all about the new ways of watching, using, and playing with moving images, such as scratching, sampling, mixing, (meta)tagging and recommending.

With performances by: Emile Zile, Rosa Menkman and Tatiana de la O.

For more information: www.networkcultures.org/videovortex

Video Vortex Exhibitions

The Netherlands Media Art Institute in Amsterdam organized two Video Vortex exhibitions, curated by Annet Dekker.

Video Vortex 1

20 October - 2 December 2007

With work by: Beatrice Valentine Amrhein, Giselle Beiguelman, Susan Collins, Jonathan Harris & Sepandar Kamvar, Graham Harwood, MW2MW, Sonic()ject*

During the opening on Friday October 19: FLOSS Manuals party with Adam Hyde
<http://nl.flossmanuals.net>

Be a curator for a day at www.curatorforoneday.nl

Video Vortex 2

8 December 2007 – 3 February 2008

With work by: Jaap de Jonge, Charlotte Leouzon & Johan Gimonprez, Nancy Mauro-Flude, Park 4DTV, Rabotnik, Sonic()bject, Martin Takken and Volkskrant Oog.

The exhibition also featured several temporary workspaces: FLOSS by Derek Holzer, Vlogging by Seth Keen, Suggested Fields by Govcom.org and Visitors Studio by Furtherfield.

The Video Vortex exhibitions were powered by Beamsystems, VSBfonds, Amsterdams Fonds voor de Kunst. More information: www.montevideo.nl

VIDEO VORTEX III IN ANKARA

Location: Bilkent University, Ankara

10-11 October 2008

On October 10-11 2008, Bilkent University Department of Communication and Design, in cooperation with the Institute of Network Cultures, organizes the 3rd Video Vortex event in Ankara, Turkey. Video Vortex 3 Ankara Edition features a two-day international conference, an evening program, live performances and a new media art exhibition. More information is available at <http://std.comd.bilkent.edu.tr/videovortex/>

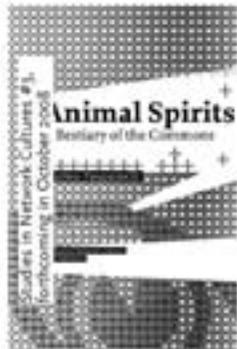
Video Vortex 3 Ankara Edition is an extension of the Video Vortex project by the Institute of Network Cultures in Amsterdam. Video Vortex Ankara is a follow-up to the Amsterdam conference, held in January 2008, and the Brussels conference, held in October 2007. It aims to continue and deepen the debates, while bringing together a wide range of scholars, artists and curators as well as lawyers, producers and engineers.

Themes of Video Vortex 3 Ankara Edition are: Navigating the database, p2p, art online, visual art, innovative art, participatory culture, social networking, political economy, collaboration and new production models, censorship, YouTube, collective memory, cinematic and online aesthetics.

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STUDIES IN NETWORK CULTURES

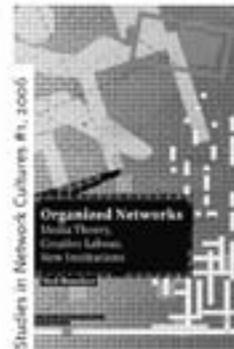
Studies in Network Cultures is a book series that investigates concepts and practices special to network cultures. Network cultures can be understood as social-technical formations under construction. They rapidly assemble, and can just as quickly disappear, creating a sense of spontaneity, transience and even uncertainty. How to conduct research within such a shifting environment is a key interest to this series. Studies in Network Cultures are edited by Geert Lovink, and published by NAI Publishers, Rotterdam and the Institute of Network Cultures in Amsterdam.



Animal Spirits: A Bestiary of the Commons by Matteo Pasquinelli. Animal Spirits is a conceptual 'book of beasts', revealing the irrational forces at work behind the digital economy and cultural production. Against the disembodied theories of postmodernism, Pasquinelli finds in the 'animal body' a concrete ground to reverse the capitalist exploitation of collective imagery. ISBN 978-90-5662-663-1 €19,50



Delusive Spaces: Essays on Culture, Media and Technology by Eric Kluitenberg. With this book Kluitenberg insists upon a cultural reading of media and technology, and argues that in order to reach the desired critical position it is necessary to understand the much larger histories of the linkages of culture and technology and to situate 'new media' cultural practices carefully within the local contexts they emerged from. ISBN 978-90-5662-617-4 €19,50



Organized Networks: Media Theory, Creative Labour, New Institutions by Ned Rossiter. The celebration of network cultures as open, decentralized, and horizontal all too easily forgets the political dimensions of labour and life in informational times. Organized Networks sets out to destroy these myths by tracking the antagonisms that lurk within Internet governance debates, the exploitation of labour in the creative industries, and the aesthetics of global finance capital. ISBN 90-5662-526-8 €19,50

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Tilman Baumgärtel currently teaches at the College of Mass Communication of the University of the Philippines in Manila. He has contributed to German and international reviews, newspapers and magazines, and his writing has appeared in *Die Tageszeitung*, *Die Zeit*, *Die Woche*, *Intelligent Agent*, *Telepolis*, *Kunstforum International* et al. He studied German Literature, History and Media Studies at the Heinrich-Heine-University in Düsseldorf and the State University of New York. His PhD thesis was a monograph of the German avant-garde film director Harun Farocki. His research focuses on digital culture, media art and independent cinema. In 2006, he organized the conference Asian Edition on media piracy and intellectual property in South East Asia (<http://www.asian-edition.org>). His latest book *Kino-Sine: Philippine-German Cinema Relations* (2007) is available for download at <http://www.goethe.de/kinosine>.

Jean Burgess is Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation, Queensland University of Technology, Australia. Jean's research is concerned with cultural participation and user-led innovation in relation to new media technologies, focusing on digital photography, online video and digital storytelling. As part of her research, Jean has regularly worked as a facilitator in digital storytelling projects, working with a range of partner organisations. With Joshua Green, she is the author of *YouTube: Online Video and the Politics of Participatory Culture* (2008).

Dominick Chen has been active as a JSPS fellow at the University of Tokyo and researcher at NTT InterCommunication Center since 2004, to direct ICC's open video archive HIVE, while he has worked as one of the founding members of Creative Commons Japan since March 2006. Chen was a member of the International Advisory Board of Ars Electronica 2007 (dot-Sub) and 2008 (nicovideo), Digital Community. In May 2007 and 2008, he taught the Making Art Different course on new media and digital politics at Arts Initiative Tokyo. Since 2001, he has written various media theories focusing on the notion of 'media plasticity' in magazines such as *InterCommunication*, *BT*, *Eureka*, *10+1*, *ARTIT* and *Tokyo Art Beat Review*. To further pursue his research in 'media prochronism', he has recently founded a web start-up in Tokyo, Dividual Inc. <http://dividual.jp>

Sarah Cook is a curator and cofounder of CRUMB, an online resource for curators of new media art. She completed her Doctorate in 2004 at the University of Sunderland and is currently a post doctoral fellow, working with Eyebeam in New York (2008). Sarah has curated exhibitions and commissioned new media projects for the Edith Russ Haus for Media Art (Germany), The Banff Centre for the Arts (Canada), BALTIC, AV Festival, Cornerhouse (all UK), and held curatorial research positions at The Walker Art Center (USA), and the National Gallery of Canada. <http://www.sarahcook.info>, <http://www.crumbweb.org>, <http://www.eyebam.org>

Sean Cubitt is Director of the Program in Media and Communications at the University of Melbourne and Honorary Professor of the University of Dundee. His publications include *Timeshift: On Video Culture* (1991), *Videography: Video Media as Art and Culture* (1993), *Digital Aesthetics* (1998), *Simulation and Social Theory* (2001), *The Cinema Effect* (2004) and *EcoMedia* (2005). He is the series editor for Leonardo Books at MIT Press. His current research is on public screens and the transformation of public space, as well as on genealogies of digital light.

Stefaan Decostere was amongst a handful of truly innovative directors working in television, creating new forms for increasingly complex ideas. Because his documentaries approach themes from several perspectives and offer an opportunity for reflection, they force the viewer to take an active stance. His *Travelogue Series* (1990-1994), for example, is addressed to the ways in which we show ourselves the world, in television, museums, the city, exhibitions, world fairs, theme parks, to the ways in which these systems organize fragments to create a seemingly coherent whole, and to power structures – particularly colonialism – which underpin these forms of display. In addition, Decostere builds installations and works as publisher doing research, and as coach and initiator of workshops on experimental media. Decostere's production, the installation arena *Warum 2.0*, premiered in February 2008 at the *Artefact Festival* in Leuven. <http://www.cargoweb.org>

Thomas Elsaesser is Professor in the Department of Media and Culture and Director of Research Film and Television at the University of Amsterdam. His essays on European cinema, film history and media archaeology, American cinema and contemporary media theory have been translated into over 15 languages. Authored books include *Fassbinder's Germany: History, Identity, Subject* (1996), *Weimar Cinema and After* (2000), *Metropolis* (2000), *Studying Contemporary American Film* (2002, with Warren Buckland), *Filmgeschichte und Frühes Kino* (2002), *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood* (2005), *Terror und Trauma* (2007) and *Filmtheorie zur Einführung* (2007, with Malte Hagener).

David Garcia is Dean of Chelsea College of Art & Design in London. As an artist, critic and educator he makes installations, videos and television programs. He also curates exhibitions and writes about new media and Internet culture. He is co-founder of Time Based Arts Amsterdam and founder of *The Next 5 Minute*, a series of international conferences on tactical media. He is currently involved in (Un)common Ground, a research program examining the evolving role of art and design as a catalyst for interdisciplinary collaboration, involving a combination of case studies, expert meetings, public events and publications.

Alexandra Juhasz is Professor of Media Studies at Pitzer College in California. She teaches video production and film and video theory. She has a PhD in Cinema Studies from NYU and has taught courses at a wide range of universities on women and film, feminist film, and women's documentary. She has made over fifteen educational documentaries on feminist and lesbian issues from AIDS, women's films, teen pregnancy, including the features *SCALE* (2008), *Video Remains* (2005), *Dear Gabe* (2002) and *Women of Vision* (1998), as well as producing the acclaimed narrative feature, *The Watermelon Woman* (1996). She published several books, including *AIDS TV: Identity, Community and Alternative Video* (Duke Univer-

sity Press, 1996), and *F is for Phony: Fake Documentary and Truth's Undoing*, edited with Jess Lerner, University of MN Press 2008. Juhasz is currently completing her first 'book' on the web, titled *Media Praxis: A Radical Web-Site Integrating Theory, Practice and Politics*.

Pavlos Hatzopoulos holds a PhD in International Relations from the London School of Economics. He is the editor of the bilingual (Greek-English) online journal *Re-public* (<http://www.re-public.gr>) and is a research fellow at the Center for Gender Studies at Panteion University in Athens, working on a 3-year research project on Gender, Migration, and Intercultural interaction. He has published articles on space/time, urban social movements, has co-edited the volume *Religion in International Relations: The Return from Exile* (2003) and wrote the book *The Balkans beyond Nationalism and Identity* (2007).

Nelli Kambouri is doing research on discourses of migration, racism and the notion of hospitality. She completed her PhD in 2005 at the London School of Economics and she has been employed as a research fellow at the KEKMOKOP Institute and the Center for Gender studies at Panteion University in Athens. She is also teaching a course on gender, migration and social movements at the University of Athens. She has published articles on space/time, social movement strategies; a book on migrant domestic workers in Greece and has edited a special issue of online journal *Re-public* entitled 'Gendering Border Crossings'.

Minke Kampman finished Graphic Design at the ArtEZ (Arnhem) and started a pre-master year Media & Culture at the University of Amsterdam. She is currently graduating from the MA New Media. Kampman did an internship at Mediamatic (Amsterdam) as a production assistant, performs regularly a live VJ act with Mariska de Groot under the name VIADUKTAPE and is webshop manager at Supershirt (<http://www.supershirt.net>).

Seth Keen is a lecturer in the Media Department at the School of Applied Communication at RMIT University in Melbourne. Seth holds a Masters of Arts (by Thesis) from University of Technology Sydney, which examined the effect the Internet is having on moving-image narratives. He is in candidature on a project-based PhD (Communication) at RMIT University, which examines online video practice. Keen worked for twelve years in the field of film and television. He has written, directed and produced a number of primetime television documentaries and short drama films, and has had several experimental videos screened and exhibited in international festivals. He is currently developing online video projects as part of his research.

Sarah Késenne holds a Master in Art History and Film Studies at the universities of Gent, Bologna and Antwerp. She currently teaches art and media theory at the PHL University College and the University of Technology Delft. She lives in Brussels where she organizes the SIC Documentary Master class, together with a collective of documentary filmmakers (<http://www.soundimageculture.org>). She has written on African cinema, music, video art and short films.

Marsha Kinder is a Professor of Critical Studies in the University of Southern California's School of Cinematic Arts. In 1997 she founded the *Labyrinth Project*, a research initiative on

interactive narrative, producing award-winning database documentaries in collaboration with independent filmmakers and writers, which have been exhibited at museums and festivals worldwide. Kinder is producing online courseware on Russian Modernism, and a large-scale installation: *Home-Grown History*. Other works combine science and cultural history: *Three Winters in the Sun: Einstein in California, A Tale of Two MAO Genes, and Interacting with Autism*. As a cultural theorist, Kinder has published over a hundred essays and ten books and has served on the editorial board of *Film Quarterly* since 1977. In recognition of her transdisciplinary work, she was named a University Professor. From 2005 to 2007, she was USC's Associate Vice Provost for Research Advancement in the Humanities.

Patricia Lange is an Anthropologist and Postdoctoral Fellow in the School of Cinematic Arts at the University of Southern California. Her research interests include studying online communication, technical identity negotiation, video sharing practices, and mediated experience of place. As part of the MacArthur-funded study on Digital Youth and Informal Learning, she is currently analyzing the semiotics of video creation, sharing, and production on YouTube and among video bloggers. Of particular interest is investigating how people use interactive video to communicate and support social networks. She has published works in journals such as: *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *Social Science Computer Review*, *Anthropology of Work Review*, and *Discourse Studies*. On YouTube, she hosts an experimental research video blog. <http://www.youtube.com/AnthroVlog>

Elizabeth Losh is the Writing Director of the Humanities Core Course at U.C. Irvine and teaches courses about communication and digital rhetoric. Her first book, *Virtualpolitik: An Electronic History of Government Media-Making in a Time of War, Scandal, Disaster, Miscommunication, and Mistakes*, will be coming out from MIT Press in 2009. She has published articles about national digital libraries, government websites, state-funded online learning efforts, videogames for the military and emergency first-responders, political blogging, and congressional hearings on the Internet. She is currently working on a new book about educational institutions: *Early Adopters: The Instructional Technology Movement and the Myth of the Digital Generation*

Geert Lovink, the founding director of the Institute of Network Cultures, is a Dutch-Australian media theorist and critic. He holds a PhD from the University of Melbourne and worked at the Centre for Critical and Cultural Studies, University of Queensland, in 2003. In 2004, Lovink was appointed as Research Professor at the Hogeschool van Amsterdam and Associate Professor at University of Amsterdam. He is the founder of Internet projects such as *nettime* and *fibreculture*. His recent book titles are *Dark Fiber* (2002), *Uncanny Networks* (2002) and *My First Recession* (2003). In 2005-06 he was a fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg Berlin, Institute for Advanced Study, where he finished his third volume on critical Internet culture titled *Zero Comments* (2007). Geert's weblog: www.networkcultures.org/geert

Andrew Lowenthal is a media and technology activist and co-founder of EngageMedia, a video sharing site focused on social justice and environmental issues in Southeast Asia. EngageMedia also produce Plumi, a free software video sharing platform, and undertake a range of training and networking initiatives. <http://www.engagemedia.org>

Lev Manovich is a Visual Arts Professor at the University of California, where he lectures on media art and theory. His theoretical work, which includes the seminal book *The Language of New Media* (2003), is considered to be hugely influential in the transitional zone between old and new media, between audiovisual art and digital culture. In his own art practice he focuses, among other things, on the potential of digital cinema, such as in *Little Movies* (1997), one of the first video projects for the web, and the DVD *Soft Cinema* (2005), an exploration of the 'database-cinema' concept. <http://www.manovich.net>

Adrian Miles lectures on the theory and practice of hypermedia and web based video at RMIT University in Melbourne. His research and applied projects using networked interactive video have been presented internationally. His current research focuses on the idea of linked and 'porous' video (softvideo) online and the relation of Deleuze's cinema philosophy to online interactive video.

Matthew Mitchem is a PhD student in the Media and Communication division of the European Graduate School. His research interests are in contemporary philosophy, new media and critical Internet studies. In 2005 he co-produced a documentary entitled *A Cold Day in DC*, about the people and events surrounding the protests to George W. Bush's second inauguration. Since 2006 he has been the principle administrator of *multitude.tv* (<http://www.multitude.tv>), a website aimed at facilitating a community of digital media artists, activist, critics and scholars in collaborative video productions. <http://www.mitchem.org>

Sabine Niederer works as the manager of the Institute of Network Cultures, a new media research centre in Amsterdam (www.networkcultures.org). She is a PhD student in new media at the University of Amsterdam, and part of the Digital Methods Initiative (dmi.mediastudies.nl). She is a freelance curator of new media art, and publishes regularly on art and digital culture. www.niederer.info

Ana Peraica is a freelance curator and theorist, and author of the book *Sub/verzije* (2007) and an editor of *Žena Na Raskrižju Ideologija* (2007). Her essays have been published in readers such as *East Art Map* (2004), *New Feminism*, *Worlds of Feminism*, *Queer and Networking Conditions* (2008), and magazines such as *Springerin* and *Pavilion*. In 2008 Peraica curated *Victim's Symptom* (<http://victims.labforculture.org>) for the Lab for Culture/ ECF. She is a member of *Leonardo*, participating in the workgroup 'Artists and Scientists in Times of War', member of IKT and participating CEI initiatives for curators. She teaches Media Arts, Propaganda System in Arts and Visual Culture at Cultural Studies, University of Rijeka.

Birgit Richard is Professor of New Media at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität in Frankfurt am Main. Her fields of research and teaching involve image cultures (youth-art-gender), images of death, audiovisual media design, and aesthetics of current youth cultures. Richard is founder of the *Youth Culture Archive*, a collection of objects from contemporary youth cultures. Authored publications include: *Todesbilder: Kunst Subkultur Medien* (1995), *Sheroes: Genderspiele im virtuellen Raum* (2004), *Coolhunters: Jugendkulturen zwischen Medien und Markt* (2005, co-edited with Neumann-Braun), *Schönheit der Uniformität* (2005, co-edited with Gabriele Mentges), *Ich-Armeen: Täuschen- Tarnen- Drill* (2006) and

Hülle und Container: Medizinische Weiblichkeitsbilder im Internet (2007, with Jutta Zarem-ba). www.birgitrichard.de

Keith Sanborn is a media artist, theorist and translator based in New York. His work has been shown in solo exhibitions and has been included in the *Whitney Biennial*, *OVNI* (Barcelona), *Video Vortex*, *International Film Festival Rotterdam*, *European Media Art Festival* (Osnabrück) and *Oberhausen*. His theoretical writings have appeared in publications ranging from *Artforum* and *Kunst nach Ground Zero* to catalogues for *MOMA* (New York) and *Exit Art*. He has translated Guy Debord, René Viénet, Gil Wolman, Georges Bataille and Napoleon and has curated for *Oberhausen*, *Artists Space*, and the *Pacific Film Archive* among others. Sanborn teaches at Princeton University and at Bard College.

Florian Schneider is a filmmaker, based in Munich. He was one of the initiators of the campaign *Kein Mensch ist illegal* (No one is illegal) at *HybridWorkspace/Documenta X* (1997) and subsequent projects such as the *Noborder network* and the online-platform *Kein.org*. He has published widely about subjects at the crossing between mainstream and independent media, art and activism, theory and technology. He directed several award-winning documentaries and programs for the German-French television station *Arte* about migration and activism. He developed and co-organized events such as *Makeworld* (Munich 2001), *Neuro-Networking Europe* (Munich, 2004) and *Borderline Academy* (Tarifa, 2005). Schneider developed and curated the multimedia performance project *Dictionary of War* and *Summit* – non-aligned initiatives in education culture (with Irit Rogoff). He is working on *Imaginary Property*, a series of texts, films and video installations researching the question ‘what does it mean to own an image?’, and since 2006 he is part of the PhD program *Research Architecture* at Goldsmiths College, London. He teaches at the art academy *KIT* of *NTNU Trondheim* and is advising researcher at the *Jan van Eyck Academie Maastricht*.

Tom Sherman is an artist and writer. He works in video, radio and live performance, and writes all manner of texts. He has exhibited widely, including shows at the *National Gallery of Canada*, the *Vancouver Art Gallery*, the *Museum of Modern Art*, *Wiener Konzerthaus*, and *Ars Electronica*. He represented Canada at the *Venice Biennale*. He was awarded the *Bell Canada Award* for excellence in video art. In addition he performs and records with the group *Nerve Theory*. Sherman wrote the book *Before and After the I-Bomb: An Artist in the Information Environment* (2002) and he is a professor in the *Department of Transmedia* at *Syracuse University* in New York.

Jan Simons is Associate Professor in *New Media* at the *University of Amsterdam*. He has published on cinema, photography, new media theory, and game theory. His research focuses on the processes of convergence and divergence brought about by new media. His latest book is *Playing the Waves: Lars von Trier's Game Cinema* (Amsterdam University Press, 2007).

Thomas Thiel studied *Cultural Sciences* and *Aesthetical Practice* in Germany and France. He has (co-)organised several independent art projects, exhibitions and lecture series concerning contemporary art and new media. Since 2004 he has worked as a curator for the

ZKM: Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe (<http://www.zkm.de>). He curated several video exhibitions, such as *video/text*, and *Screening War - on the Representation of War in Video Art and video/economy*. With Gerhard Johann Lischka he produced the DVD edition *art_clips.ch.at.de* and he co-curated the media art exhibition *MindFrame: Media Study at Buffalo 1973-1990* with Woody Vasulka and Peter Weibel. In 2007 his video/film program *Freedom of Expression* was shown at *Telemar/Oi Futuro* (Rio de Janeiro) and at the *Goethe Institut* (Salvador da Bahia). In 2008, Thiel curated *Vertrautes Terrain: Contemporary Art in/about Germany*, with Gregor Jansen (<http://www.vertrautes-terrain.de>).

Vera Tollmann works as an independent curator and writes about contemporary art and Internet culture, most recently about YouTube. Vera studied *Cultural Studies* in *Hildesheim* and *Liverpool* and worked as editorial assistant for *Springerin* in Vienna, the *Federal Cultural Foundation* in Halle and as curatorial assistant for *Transmediale* in Berlin. She was a researcher for the Amsterdam edition of *Video Vortex*. Recent exhibitions and screenings were *Your Latest Trick* (Berlin, 2007), *Nachvollziehungsangebote* (with Sophie Goltz; Vienna, 2007), *Katastrophenalarm* (with Sophie Goltz, Christine Heidemann, Anne Kersten, Ingo Vetter; Berlin, 2008), and *Talkmasters* (Karlsruhe, 2008). Vera lives in Berlin.

Andreas Treske graduated from *Munich Film Academy* (HFF) in 1992. He is Assistant Professor at *Bilkent University* in *Ankara, Turkey*. He holds a Chair in the *Department of Communication and Design* and is an editor, filmmaker, and media artist. From 1992 till 1998 Treske taught courses on film, digital postproduction, and multimedia at *Munich Film Academy*, and did extensive research on applied aesthetics for cinema. Since 1998 he is teaching courses in new media, video production, and visual communication design at *Bilkent University*. Treske worked on several multimedia exhibitions and interactive installations in *Turkey*, *Portugal* and *Croatia*. In 2005 his feature length documentary *Takim Boyle Tutulur* (international title: *Love is Soccer*) was released in over 50 Turkish cinemas.

Peter Westenberg is an artist, film and video maker and a member of the Brussels' media collective *Constant*. As a fervent user of free software, he examines, among others, the requirements and conditions for collaboration and exchange in public spaces and on the web. His short films, explorative walks and video-projects focus on multiple-authorship, network aesthetics and collective representation. Westenberg curated video events for *TENT* (Rotterdam) and has taught at *ARtEZ* and the *Piet Zwart Institute* in the Netherlands. His works are shown at festivals and exhibitions including *Argos*, *Viper*, *Witte de With*, *IFFR* and *Netherlands Film Festival*. Until 2004, Westenberg coordinated the *Uit + Thuis Videomagazijn*, a public video workspace producing performative and documentary neighbourhood projects in *Vlaardingen*. His project *Routes + Routines* (2008) investigates publicness as an amalgam of social, technical and legal protocols.

