
26. Ibid.
32. This descent-into-hell allegory for below-the-line production is from http://hollywoodjuice.blogspot.com (accessed April 19, 2008).
35. Peggy Archer is a pseudonym used to protect the identity of one of the most popular below-the-line bloggers/claimants on the Totally Unauthorized Web site, http://filmhacks.wordpress.com.
39. This concept of the varying value of self-selling in both open and closed labor systems is developed more broadly by Keith M. MacDonald, The Sociology of Professions (London: Sage, 1993), 184–85.
40. Viral marketing will continue to rein in marketing, even as it spurs new production approaches.

Jean Burgess

USER-CREATED CONTENT AND EVERYDAY CULTURAL PRACTICE

Lessons from YouTube

The first decade of the twenty-first century has seen a steady increase in the prevalence, visibility, and perceived significance of user-created (or user-generated) content on the Web. One of the ideas attached to these developments has been that the proliferation of user-created content—that is, media content produced by amateurs, outside of the traditional creative industries, as represented by blogs, Wikipedia, citizen journalism, and user-created video—promises to disrupt the modern relations of cultural production that have structured the broadcast era and to unsettle the expertise of established media and knowledge professions. Creativity is now seen by many policymakers and educators as normatively part of everyday life for ordinary citizens (especially young people) in contemporary capitalist societies, and in reality user-created content is a significant source of our shared cultural experience.1 The implications extend beyond self-expression: user-led content creation and collaboration are increasingly understood as engines of economic and social value creation and, at the same time, sources of profound economic disruption in the commercial industries, while public service broadcasters, cultural institutions, and government departments are embracing user-created content and co-creation as part of their service missions.2

The media hype around the revolutionary potential of the
growth in user-created content reached fever pitch between 2004 and 2007. Early on it focused on blogging and later on photo sharing and "folksonomies," with Flickr as the poster child for Web 2.0, moving onto the battles over the legitimacy of knowledge in Wikipedia, before focusing obsessively for a time on YouTube following its unprecedented growth and acquisition by Google in 2006. By the end of 2006 Time magazine was announcing that its Person of the Year was "You," and the magazine ran a large number of articles celebrating the entrepreneurs, TV personalities, and "ordinary" content creators associated with Web 2.0, calling the phenomenon of collective production on the Web a "revolution." A view countered by cultural pessimists such as Andrew Keen, who called the whole thing a morally and intellectually dangerous "cult."

However, these early dominant discourses around the democratization of media technologies (whether celebratory or alarmist) did nothing to disturb the existing roles and relationships of the cultural industries but merely reassigned the roles—consumers were transformed into DIY producers, and audiences had apparently activated themselves as citizen journalists or publishers. It has been television's mass audience in particular that has been reimagined in such radical terms, a view starkly illustrated by Clay Shirky's characterization of the "passive" inactivity of television watching as a waste of "cognitive surplus," which in a post-broadcast age can be put to productive use in knowledge work, such as the creation or editing of Wikipedia entries.

The crude inversion of industrial roles in the discourses surrounding ideas of a participatory media "revolution" emanating from the media and technology industries themselves should not come as a surprise: more significant is the fact that the technological determinism that underpins it is common to both the most celebratory and the most alarmist accounts of the implications of user-created content. Especially in the early stages of a new media form's emergence, when the media as a whole are attempting to pin down what it is "for" and what its social implications might be, as Steve Woolgar has argued, "even the hype about the hype is part of the hype." That is, the countering arguments to the celebration of a participatory turn in digital media culture (often played out in exactly the same media sites) usually operate within the same frame of debate as the original arguments that they mean to question. For example, if the hype suggests that news blogs represent a new and more democratic form of journalism, then the counterehype will argue that blogs are untrustworthy or biased information sources. But in the early days of academic research and media commentary on blogging, it was less common to find a critique of the shared assumptions underlying these debates. Such a critique might have pointed out that the majority of blogging activities never had anything much to do with journalism in the first place—in fact, the main reasons for keeping a blog given by bloggers surveyed in 2006 were "creative expression and sharing personal experiences." Following such logic, it is unlikely that the reality of how online video is used and experienced, via YouTube, for example, will match the rhetoric that imagines the masses of formerly passive television audiences transforming themselves into full-blown producers of online video.

Because of the openness of the debates around the implications of user-created content and digital culture, the role of the humanities and social sciences in this context requires a double scrutiny of discourse—it is not enough to go around "debunking" the hype because, for one thing, hyperbole is a constitutive force in the field of study. In questioning the hyperbole around the earlier idea of virtuality, Woolgar begins from twin realities: first, the growth of Information Communication Technologies (ICT); second, the discourse around ICT, resulting in a widespread assumption that the growth of ICT should be understood "as the imperative for radical change." These realities mean that it is impossible for scholars and critics to disregard the preexisting terms of public debates while still hoping to participate in the public discussion. In Woolgar's case, the existing frames concerned the social impacts of ICT in the late 1990s; in the case of YouTube, they concern the implications of amateur creativity and user-created content. In the case of user-created content, online video, and television, an updated vocabulary is required, one that is capable of dealing with the altered roles of audiences and producers, derived from the evidence, without falling into the trap of endlessly creating buzzwords and thus simply mirroring the dominant celebratory discourse around Web 2.0.

This chapter argues that cultural and media studies' heritage in understanding the activity and productivity of audiences—particularly television audiences—makes the field peculiarly able to offer important insights into these questions around the cultural implications of user-created content. A return to the key ideas of cultural consumption as a...
set of everyday cultural practices asks us to view the cultural implications of YouTube not only in terms of the democratization of cultural production, but also in terms of the visibility and connectedness of everyday cultural practice, including the practices of television audiences. This new visibility and publicness also invite renewed engagements with the audience on behalf of media and cultural studies scholarship and, in particular, hold potential for evidence-based models of audience practices, cultural citizenship, and media literacy. In the discussion that follows, I set out the debates about the changing role of audiences in relation to user-created content as they appear in new media and cultural studies. The discussion moves beyond the simple dichotomies drawn between active producers and passive audiences and instead calls on empirical evidence in order to examine the practices that are most ordinary and widespread. Building on the knowledge of television’s role in facilitating public life and the everyday, affective practices through which it is experienced and used, I focus on the way in which YouTube operates as a site of community, creativity, cultural citizenship, and an archive of popular cultural memory.

The View from Media and Cultural Studies

The premise of the “passive” audience at the mercy of a dominant broadcast media industry is fundamental to some of the most influential discussions of how user-created content represents broader social and cultural transformations. In his acclaimed book The Wealth of Networks, Yochai Benkler examines the widespread shift from an industrialized manufacturing economy to a decentralized information economy, constituted via the Internet, within which amateur and volunteer contributions are of primary importance. When it comes to the media, however, Benkler’s enthusiasm about the political possibilities of these new networks of social production relies—to some extent—on an imagined opposition between a preindustrial folk culture and the alienation of twentieth-century mass popular culture, which, largely thanks to tv, displaced folk culture and transformed individuals and communities from “coproducers and replicators to passive consumers.” Benkler discusses the emergence of user-led content production networks as a new folk culture that can contribute to the cultural element of liberal democracy, which he calls “cultural freedom,” in comparison to the enslavement of the broadcast era: “By comparison to the highly choreographed cultural production system of the industrial information economy, the emergence of a new folk culture and of a wider practice of active personal engagement in the telling and retelling of basic cultural themes and emerging concerns and attachments offers new avenues for freedom. It makes culture more participatory, and renders it more legible to all its inhabitants.” In an essay in the technophilic magazine Wired, science fiction author and cultural commentator William Gibson went so far as to proclaim the death of the audience: “Today’s audience isn’t listening at all. It’s participating. Indeed, ‘audience’ is as antiquated a term as ‘record; the one archaically passive, the other archaically physical. The record, not the remix, is the anomaly today. The remix is the very nature of the digital.” The key concepts of media and cultural studies work on television and its audiences could provide an alternative viewpoint to this disdain for audiencehood, one able to avoid the active-passive binary and its inversion in the post-broadcast era of Benkler’s, Gibson’s, and others’ perspectives. Indeed, even in technologists’ own explanations of what Web 2.0 is and how it works, the idea of a linear chain connecting those who produce and those who consume content is profoundly disrupted. The term Web 2.0 was coined by Tim O’Reilly to describe a design agenda for the future of the World Wide Web, but it now functions discursively as both an imprecise buzzword and a description of the actual features of some of the most talked about social media platforms built around user-created or contributed content, including Flickr and YouTube. From the point of view of software development, it refers to the evolution of the World Wide Web from a network of static Web sites serving content to audiences toward an integrated computing platform serving interoperable, dynamic Web applications to productive users. So far, this sounds very familiar. But the term also implies some quite complex shifts in the way producers and users are understood. There are several key areas in which the Web 2.0 model implies the need to reimagine the relations of cultural production in regard to digital media. The first of these is the shift from separate domains of content production, distribution, and consumption to a convergence of all three, resulting in the hybrid mode of engagement that Axel Bruns calls “produsage,” defined as “the collaborative and continuous building and extending of existing content in pursuit of further improvement.” In this model, the users of a given Web service take on leadership roles,
and are reimagined as a source, and not an end point, for both content and the ongoing improvement of the platform or service; designers and developers to some extent work with the understanding that emergent communities of practice will significantly shape the culture of the network—and even determine what the Web service or online community is "for." This convergence of the formerly discrete points along a linear value chain is most clearly exemplified by Wikipedia, whose users, at least in theory, are simultaneously the producers, users, editors, and consumers of the content. What was previously somewhat dismissively called user-generated content is now as essential to the success of any social media platform as its design, and the activities it encompasses include not only content creation, but also editing, annotation, commenting, repurposing, and redistribution. But perhaps the most culturally significant layer of the Web 2.0 model is most clearly represented by social media platforms like Flickr: the convergence of user-created content and social software to produce hybrid spaces where everyday creativity, intimacy, and friendship meet public visibility and connectivity. It is this characteristic of the new networks of cultural production that has the most profound implications for cultural participation, at least in potential, because this shift opens up new and diverse spaces for individuals to engage with a variety of aesthetic experiences at the same time as their participation contributes to the creation of those spaces, their communities, and even publics.

YouTube, perhaps more dramatically and visibly than any other platform to emerge so far, is produced by these convergences between market and nonmarket, personal and public cultural activity. Further, much of the user-created content that generates YouTube's value is utterly mundane in its origins and in its modes of circulation and linked via processes of remediation to a continuous history of everyday cultural practice that I have discussed elsewhere as "vernacular creativity." User-created content, I argue, is often very ordinary indeed, and "the ordinary" is core business for cultural studies.

The British cultural studies concern with taking ordinary people's lived experiences and cultural practices seriously is particularly marked in work on television audiences.24 The strand of audience and reception studies known as the active audience tradition in particular was reflected in an interest in fans as visible proof of such activity in the 1980s and 1990s.25 The areas of contemporary humanities scholarship that have been most engaged in attempting to understand how the growth of user-created content and its attendant decentralization of distribution and evaluation are affecting the media and television industries often operate with fandom as a core concept, with both productive and problematic results. Approaching the reconfiguration of producer-consumer relationships through the lens of the productive media consumer, Henry Jenkins's work on "convergence culture" exposes fan and game cultures as neither entirely autonomous of the mass media and cultural industries nor passively dependent on or absorbed into them.26 Jenkins demonstrates that these fields of cultural practice reconfigure the relations between production and consumption, industries and audiences, as well as old and new media. While for the most part the copyright holders still fiercely protect their intellectual property, in convergence culture there is also an increased awareness within industry of the benefits of dialogue and interactivity between the producers of popular culture and their audiences.

Work that seeks to understand the changing power relationships between the formally constituted media industries (like television) and the fans who co-create the value of media properties is extremely important. However, these discussions tend to skew our view of user-created video toward fan videos and look suspiciously like the Fantastin of which cultural studies has long been accused—that is, repeatedly focusing on the most spectacular or potentially revolutionary examples of popular culture rather than the most ordinary and widely experienced.27 While the semiotic creativity and textual productivity of fans were arguably ordinary because of their embeddedness in the everyday lives of the fans themselves, they were nevertheless positioned as extraordinary by the interpretive lens of cultural and media studies, and in any case, fans were, and remain today, a minority of television audiences. Despite the popular hyperbole surrounding democratization and the extraordinary revolutionary potential of everyday content creation, textual productivity is not so extraordinary these days, even if it is not universally shared. While the vanguard status of fan communities continues to be recognized, the productiveness of consumer-citizens is now an ordinary part of the mainstream cultural public sphere. If not a radical and creative transformation from passive audience to active producer, then what does the nature of ordinary participation in social media platforms like YouTube look like?
YOUTUBE'S COMMON CULTURE

YouTube is a platform for video sharing that is used by many different participants, often with competing ideas of how online video should be used, including mainstream media companies, independent producers, vloggers, and musicians, as well as fans. For the purposes of this chapter, I am going to concentrate on the insights of a recent study, which I conducted with Joshua Green, of YouTube's most popular content for rethinking the active-passive and market-nonmarket divides in much of the dominant discourses on participatory culture. The study aimed to develop an understanding of the forms and practices associated with the dominant or most popular uses of YouTube, which we refer to as YouTube's "common culture." It relied in the first instance on a large-scale content survey, drawing on a sample of 4,522 videos from four of YouTube's categories of popularity—Most Viewed, Most "Favorited," Most Responded, Most Discussed—gathered in the second half of 2007. The coding scheme involved two primary categories: the apparent industrial origin of the video (whether it was user-created or the product of a traditional media company) and the apparent identity of the uploader (whether a traditional media company, a small-to-medium enterprise or independent producer, a government organization, cultural institution or the like, or an amateur user). We concentrated on the four categories of popularity noted above because we hypothesized—correctly, as it turns out—that comparing across them would give us a sense of the way different kinds of video content were made popular by audiences in different ways. The results of the study show that the activities associated with everyday audience practice and vernacular creativity, now remediated via online social networks—personal vlogging, quoting from television, or bedroom lip-synching—can be read through theories of personal media use as much as through the transformation of passive consumers into active producers.

Approximately half of the content in the sample was coded as "traditional media content," and approximately half as "user-created content." However, around two-thirds of the total number of videos in the sample was contributed by uploaders coded as "users"—uploaders represented as individuals not associated with media companies, production companies, or organizations of any kind. The videos coded as user-created content in the sample are diverse and exhibit what Henry Jenkins has identified as a "vaudeville aesthetic"—featuring short clips characterized by trickery and humor, an explicit awareness of an audience of peers, and a fascination with the technologies of digital video. However, by far the largest genre category in the sample was that of the video blog or "vlog" entry—videos based around a talking head, straight-to-camera presentation, and a quotidian setting. The dominance of the vlog entry as a particularly YouTube-centric form emphasizes the everyday locatedness and investment in interpersonal communication, rather than producerlessness, that we identify as part of the "YouTubeness" of YouTube.

And even some of the most spectacularly popular viral videos share the vlog entry's genealogy in the privatized spaces of everyday personal media use. For example, one of the most popular user-created videos of all time is a bedroom lip-synch video—a form with a very long history in the tradition of bedroom cultures but now publicized via the online networks of participatory media. In the video, titled simply as the "Hey" clip, Lital Mizel and her friend Adi Frimerman lip-synch, dance, play air guitar, and generally goof around to The Pixies' song "Hey." It had had several million views by mid-2006, remains one of the most popular videos on the Web site, and had received more than 24 million views by October 2008.

Demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of the rules of the vernacular genre on which she was drawing—the bedroom dance video—as well as a self-deprecating awareness of its status as a vernacular form, Mizel explained the motivation and meaning behind the video: "We just turned on the camera and danced funny... . I keep asking people why do you like it, and they say, 'Because it's reality.' You see it's homemade, that we're so spontaneous and natural—dancing, having fun. It makes people remember when they were young and danced in front of the mirror." 45

The "Hey" clip, along with the thousands of others like it, is both an example and a witty and self-aware celebration of the long traditions of the bedroom cultures of young people, particularly girls. Public media production and performance add new dimensions to these circuits of "private media use." The unexpected fame that came with the popularity of the clip is a result of its recognizability as everyday cultural practice and the sheer exuberance of the performances depicted within it: the precision of the editing of multiple versions of the lip-synch performance; and, arguably, its status as one of the first such uses of YouTube.
The genre of the bedroom musical performance or dance is now deeply embedded in YouTube’s popular culture.28

The video “Guitar” is an equally ordinary example.29 The video depicts 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, his face obscured by a baseball cap—is a South Korean guitarist named Jeong-Hyun Lim.30 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.

Most of the responses 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 nine hundred direct video responses to the “Guitar” video, a keyword search for “canon rock” in YouTube returns more than thirteen thousand 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.31 These video responses frequently emulate the original mise-en-scène—with the performer seated on a bed, backlit by light from a window, and looking down rather than at the camera. 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 painstakingly edited together by YouTube user “impeto” to make a complete new version of the performance.32 This video has received views in excess of 5 million as of November 2008, a level of popularity that amplifies and is amplified by the original “Guitar” video. In itself, “Ultimate Canon Rock” is an act of iterative vernacular creativity that has emerged as much out of the conversational dynamics of YouTube as a social network as it has 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 practices of media use that sit behind user-contributed television content can likewise be situated within long traditions of personal media use and audience practice. YouTube is used for sharing and repurposing television content, but these sharing and repurposing practices are disarticulated from both the hypercreative practices of fandom and from peer-to-peer file sharing (or, in industry discourse, “piracy”). They are mostly very mundane, rather than featuring the spectacularly creative “remix” aesthetic that is often assumed in celebratory accounts to characterize user-created video; and because of the technical constraints of YouTube at the time the study was conducted (the short maximum duration of videos and the low resolution), the use of YouTube to illegally distribute whole television episodes or films is not a dominant one in YouTube’s common culture. For more prevalent in our sample were short clips—effectively, quotations from television, uploaded and circulating in similar ways to user-created content. These clips were drawn primarily from television news—documenting and preserving shared moments in public life, like the 2007–2008 U.S. presidential campaign, natural events such as earthquakes, or “gotcha” moments featuring celebrities and politicians. There were a large number of very short clips from television sports, capturing magical moments like winning soccer goals, along with montages or single clips from favorite sitcoms or serials, and an equally large number of music videos, often added to users’ profiles as markers of cultural taste and identity. What these uses point us to is the extent to which participation in YouTube is often a logical and newly visible extension of ordinary television audience practices akin to saying “Wow, did you see that?” or “I love this show/video/joke.”

The prevalence of these clips and quotes points us toward thinking about how media content is used, rather than how it is received. Indeed, because of YouTube’s flat architecture and one-size-fits-all approach to the re-presentation of content within the Web site, it makes little sense to separate the ways in which YouTube participants contribute self-created video from the ways in which they contribute and engage with video that originally came from television. It is a lack of recognition of this convergence of everyday audience practice with user-led content creation in newly visible and connected public networks that creates so much confusion around the political economy of digital media production. The stubborn misrecognition of audiences as the end of a value chain, rather than co-creators of value, is
clearly illustrated by the still ongoing legal action taken by media conglomerate Viacom against Google, in which Viacom accused YouTube of unduly profiting from the television giant’s labor by allowing unauthorized copies of its content to be uploaded and viewed on the service.29 “YouTube and Google retain all of the revenue generated from [users uploading videos],” the company claimed, “without extending fair compensation to the people who have expended all of the effort and cost to create it.”30 Because it is rooted in the idea of YouTube as a distribution platform that delivers content produced elsewhere to consumers, whose viewing practices expose them to advertising, the action has almost nothing to do with how people actually use media content, either before or after it has been uploaded to YouTube.

But unless it can be clearly demonstrated that there is a high level of originality and creativity applied to mainstream media content, thereby making available the fair-use argument (at least in the United States), the ordinary uploading of favorite clips or music videos to public networks seems indefensible. The fair-use argument is often based on either an assessment of originality and transformation in the work itself or of explicitly civic and educational purposes for its use. So an unintended consequence of moves against the corporate lockdown of YouTube, by or on behalf of copyright owners, is that critiques of copyright end up fetishizing forms of user-created content with a strong authorial or creative orientation—like fanvids, political parody, and anime music videos—implying that the value of user-created content is measured by the extent of its creativity.31 Indeed the assumptions underlying the Viacom suit are that nontransformative uses of copyrighted material simply constitute illegal file sharing—mere piracy.

I would argue instead that it is important to understand the uploading of clips and quotes from television or music videos as an ordinary audience practice which, because of its new visibility (via publication to the YouTube network), produces new forms of social and cultural value that cannot simply be attributed back to the original producer. Disassociating the ordinary practices that result in user-created content from the logics of production altogether takes us into different territory. Centering the discussion on how ordinary people use online media platforms and media content—whatever its original source—to connect with one another invites us to reframe the politics of participatory culture around issues of access, representation, participation, and citizenship rather than the more industry-oriented issues of authorship, intellectual property, and labor.

**User-Created Content**
and sharing intimate moments and choices, it is possible to promote increased public discourse about formerly uncomfortable, distasteful, or difficult topics in ways that other media and other methods have not. 39

The sharing of short television clips and quotes, identified in the sample of traditional media content in our study, also constitutes a mode of participation in the kinds of publics Lange identifies. Such practices illustrate what Hartley calls “redaction”—practices of editing and republishing through which individual consumer-citizens engage with the world as members of particular communities. Sporting moments, like soccer goals, provide particularly vibrant examples. While at first glance these clips might represent a parasitic relationship to a particular sport or sport team, the discussions that take place in the comments sections of these videos frequently spill over into discussions of other matters of shared concern, most obviously nationality. So too the uploading of Filipino or Turkish soap opera episodes for the enjoyment of audiences located in various countries can be seen as acts of cultural citizenship identified akin to the media-sharing practices of diasporic communities identified by Cunningham and Sinclair. 40 The collective activities of amateur and pro-am archivists and curators also produce significant public value out of YouTube’s basic affordances, supporting what is for many people the primary use of YouTube: to seek out vintage music videos, children’s television shows, advertisements, and even weather forecasts. 41— the kinds of television that are least likely to be collected and canonized by the commercial television industry itself but that are most representative of the affective relationships audiences have with television as everyday experience.

YouTube is generating public and civic value as an unintended and often unsupervised consequence of the collective practices of its users. But it is questionable to what extent the unintentionally produced cultural, civic, and social value of YouTube is truly being valued or safeguarded, especially by the company itself. Of course, even through YouTube is experienced as a public space, it isn’t really public at all, but a private enterprise generating public value as a side effect of the active participation of consumer-citizens. YouTube highlights the ascendancy in digital culture of market-led platforms that enable civic participation and engagement to flourish while at the same time deriving from attempting to derive commercial value from them.

The political questions that arise from this reality can too easily be sidetracked into neo-Marxist debates around “free labor”—an argument that if value is being created, then someone’s labor must be exploited. 42 There are important political problems with the corporatization of amateur and audience media use, but they look different with cultural participation, rather than exploitation, in the frame. For example, copyright—widely considered to be a barrier to creativity—looks different when we think of YouTube as a shared cultural resource and a popular archive than it does when we think of it as a platform for individual creativity or political commentary (although it is that too, of course). The need to answer to advertisers and a large number of national governments likewise is beginning to influence the extent to which YouTube is available as a truly shared resource to citizens of different countries, as localized filtering measures are introduced and at least appear to be being used to block content according to licensing restrictions.

Despite these constraints, if YouTube remains in existence for long enough, the result will be not only a repository of vintage television content, but also something even more significant: a record of contemporary global popular culture (including vernacular and everyday culture) in video form, produced and evaluated according to the logics of cultural value that emerge from the collective choices of the distributed YouTube user community. 43 Indeed, YouTube is arguably a more effective vehicle for the popular memorialization of television than are either broadcasters or cultural institutions because these latter institutions tend to memorialize television-as-industry and not television-as-experience. 44

Cultural institutions (including public service broadcasters) are actively considering how such developments will impact on their own missions and practices, 45 but less consideration is usually given to the implications of commercial spaces taking on some of the work of cultural institutions without being tied to the same public and state-based responsibilities. Archivist Rick Prelinger argues that those who have provided the infrastructure that has unexpectedly produced these accidental archives, as in the case of YouTube, are mostly “blindly unconcerned by [the] questions of persistence, ownership, standards, sustainability, or accountability” that occupy professional archivists and their parent institutions. 46 Because YouTube offers its service based on commercial interests rather than public ones, there is no obligation to store these data beyond the commercial viability of the company that provides the storage service. Nor is there any straightforward way cultural institutions can...
This chapter departed from the dominant discourses of individual consumers becoming producers to consider user-created content as a medium of everyday cultural practice, including the practices of audiencehood and cultural citizenship. To make sense of a site like YouTube, a media industry framework that considers user-created content as cultural production or distribution is most unhelpful; considering the range of practices engaged in by YouTube users (uploading, viewing, commenting, rating, favoriting, emulating, and copying) as a continuum of cultural participation situated in everyday life is more productive.

As Buckingham et al. argue in relation to the historical emergence of amateur filmmaking, while revolutionary rhetoric and a focus on the spectacular are long habituated frames for thinking about the diffusion of media technologies into the broader public, the realities of use are far more mundane and embedded within existing practices of media consumption and use. The everyday practices of YouTube’s participants and audiences—viewing, sharing, or commenting on both user-created and commercial content—are not always obviously producer or creative, and in their ordinariness they mirror the cultural and social practices of television audiences. A key difference is that these previously invisible audience practices leave material traces on the YouTube network, and this evidence of an attentive audience is essential to demonstrating the value of YouTube to advertisers.

Still persistent is the idea that it is the freedom to turn from passive consumer to active producer (or even “prosumer”) that defines the democratizing qualities of digital media technologies. Participation is defined as production; the everyday cultural practices of audiencehood are discounted as not only passive but also a thing of the past, epitomized by an understanding of television as old media. Lurking beneath the celebration of the creative consumer is the unconstructed vision of the passive spectator for broadcast television, willfully marooned in a “suburban wasteland.” It is a sad reminder of how little impact cultural studies’ work on the television audience has had on either the high-popular divide (and the gender stereotypes that go with it) or the media effects paradigm—both of which traditions underpin the “media panic” around the mass amateurization of video production in YouTube. But it is this view of the consumption of popular culture as passive that cultural studies has been arguing against since the 1980s, and it is in this area that cultural studies has the most insights to offer to mainstream debates. Furthermore, because of the new visibility of television use afforded by the publicness of user-created content communities like YouTube, we have a renewed opportunity to develop an evidence-based model of audience practices, informed by the insights into the experiences and uses of television in everyday life that have been built up through ethnographic work over the past several decades.

In 2004, before the explosion of user-created content most visibly represented in YouTube, Sonia Livingstone raised the question of what implications the Internet might have for audience theory and audience research. Several years later, the question of how audience practice figures as a constitutive element of the continuum of cultural participation...
that produces the content and value of Web 2.0 is still not well understood. If we are to make meaningful interventions into contemporary attempts to account for the significance and implications of participatory culture, then perhaps the proper next step for media, television, and cultural studies is to return to the core idea that audience would be understood as a set of cultural and social practices made mutually visible and public via the Web. While much popular and scholarly discourse imagines casual viewing of content as the lowest level of engagement, with creation as the highest level, perhaps it is time we took more seriously once again the question of the audience—asking what is involved in being an audience for user-created and user-distributed content, in media ecologies that also include television content, as in YouTube. This is especially important if user-created content has social value beyond the individualistic pleasures of production or self-expression and if its remediation as part of the networked cultural public sphere does indeed open up spaces for the practice of cultural citizenship.

NOTES
7. For further discussion of this issue, see Nick Couldry, Inside Culture: Re-Imagining the Method of Cultural Studies (London: Sage, 2006), 58-60.
8. The study was a collaboration between the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation, Queensland University of Technology, and the Comparative Media Studies Program and Convergence Culture Consortium, MIT, and appears as Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009).
9. The 4,540 videos were gathered by sampling from six days across two weeks in each of three months of 2007 (August, October, and November).
14. It is interesting to note that the list of "related videos" for the "Hey" clip, which is generated automatically based on user-assigned tags and keywords, features a large number of very performances-to-camera, including "booby dances," articulating the trademark YouTube raunch aesthetic to the basic formal "rules" of the lip-sync or dance video.
15. Available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9j4-32211r8.
16. After several imposters came forward, Lim was revealed to be the "real" performer in the "Guitar" video in a New York Times article; Virginia Heffernan, User-Created Content 339.

27. Available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=60tmd6o20ex.


33. [Jake Hermes], “Hidden Debates: Rethinking the Relationship between Popular Culture and the Public Sphere,” Journal of the Public 13, no. 4 (2006): 27-44.


45. As in, for example, the extended and as yet undelivered project of the BBC to make its entire archive publicly available for viewing and even reuse. See James Bennett, “Interfacing the Nation: Rereading Public Service Broadcasting in the Digital Television Age,” Convergence 14, no. 3 (2007): 290.


47. Ang, Living Room Wars, 6.
