The Film of Tomorrow:

A Cultural History of Videoblogging

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I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature: ………………………………………………..

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<u>Summary</u>

Videoblogging is a form of cultural production that emerged in the early 2000s as a result of the increasing availability of cheap digital recording equipment, new video-editing software, video website hosting and innovative distribution networks across the internet. This thesis explores the close entanglement of culture and technology in this early and under-examined area of media production – most notably in the self-definition and development of a specific community around video practices and technologies between 2004-2009. These videobloggers' digital works are presented as an original case study of material digital culture on the internet, which also produced a distinctive aesthetic style. The thesis traces the discourses and technological infrastructures that were developed both within and around the community of videobloggers and that created the important pre-conditions for the video artefacts they produced. Through an ethnographically-informed cultural history of the practices and technologies of videoblogging, this thesis engages with the way in which new forms of cultural and technical hybrids have emerged in an increasingly digital age. The ethnographic research is informed by histories of film and video, which contribute to the theoretical understanding and contextualisation of videoblogging – as an early digital community – which has been somewhat neglected in favour of research on mainstream online video websites, such as YouTube. The thesis also contributes to scholarly understanding of contemporary digital video practices, and explores how the history of earlier amateur and semi-professional film and video has been influential on the practices, technologies and aesthetic styles of the videobloggers. It is also shown how their aesthetic has been drawn on and amplified in network culture, mainstream media, and contemporary media and cultural production. Through a critical mapping of the socio-technical structures of videoblogging, the thesis argues that the trajectories of future media and cultural production draws heavily from the practices and aesthetics of these early hybrid networked cultural-technical communities.

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This thesis would not have been possible without the videobloggers who agreed to take part in my initial round of interviews, and who patiently replied to additional questions. I keep in touch with many of them, and stay connected to what remains of the community on new sites and platforms, such as Vine and Instagram, where short-form digital film is having a big resurgence and where they continue to display their enormous talent and creative spirit. Without them, this thesis would not be (could not be) what it is. I would therefore like to thank Adam, Andreas, Bekah, Brittany, Casey, Charlene, Cheryl, Daniel, David, Enrik, Erik, Erin, Jay, Gena, Jan, Jen G, Jen P, Juan, Loiez, Markus, Mary, Mica, Nicholas, Paris, Richard H, Richard BF, Roxanne, Rupert, Ryanne, Sam, Steve, Susan and Zadi.

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I want to thank my three wonderful children, Helene Bjørkmann Berry, Henrik Isak Bjørkmann Berry and Hedda Emilie Davidsdatter Bjørkmann Berry for being a source of endless distraction and fun. It is as much their thesis as it is mine. Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my husband David Bjørkmann Berry, who not only proofed three chaotic drafts and kept the children quiet, but who has always been there for me.

The film of tomorrow appears to me as even more personal than an individual and autobiographical novel, like a confession, or a diary. The young filmmakers will express themselves in the first person and will relate what has happened to them. It may be the story of their first love or their most recent; of their political awakening; the story of a trip, a sickness, their military service, their marriage, their last vacation...and it will be enjoyable because it will be true and new…
The film of tomorrow will resemble the person who made it, and the number of spectators will be proportional to the number of friends the director has. The film of tomorrow will be an act of love.

   Francois Truffaut (1957, quoted de Baecque and Toubiana 1999: 110)

Chapter 1 – Introduction

At 8:27 pm on Saturday, April 23, 2005, a 19 second long video clip entitled *Me at the Zoo* was uploaded to YouTube, making it the first video published online through the YouTube platform and shared around the world through the website.[1] The video featured a short recording of one of the YouTube founders, Jawed Karim, on a visit to a local zoo. The video was notable for its mundaneness, sense of the everyday and marked aesthetic of amateurism that today we take for granted in terms of most user-generated content (UGC). As the New York Times noted, "the video has a certain pleasing obviousness. 'Here we are in front of the, uh, elephants,' Karim says. 'They have really, really, really long' — suspense, but no double entendre — 'trunks.' Karim turns to face the elephants as if to confirm his observation. Waits a beat. Readdresses the camera. 'And that's pretty much all there is to say.'" (Heffernan 2009). Nonetheless, as of May 2014, the video had received 15 million views and 97 thousand comments from viewers, including the very first, by the user Tim Leister, a friend of Karim who used the username COBALTGRUV, and who concisely described this founding video as "Interesting…".[2]

However, this 19 second clip is interesting in another sense, as it also represented a landmark in the way in which media, and in this case, video, was being transformed from a discrete but expensive to distribute media-form to one which could be networked, shared, downloaded and re-used without professional training or experience. These digital videos, a kind of "vernacular avant-garde" (Heffernan 2009), are in a variety of short-form genres, from family videos to "haul videos" (documenting things people have bought) to "unboxing videos" (which have people literally opening the wrapper from their new purchases). Indeed, one of the most watched videos is an amateur family video titled "Charlie bit my finger" which had 715 million views by May 2014. Indeed, by 2010 YouTube hosted more than 120 million videos and 300 million accounts, creating new viral videos and must-watch clips daily which would be circulated by email and other media (Hoby and Lamont 2010).

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[1] The banality of the title and content pointed in some ways to early video on the internet was predominantly documentary/biographical or self-consciously aesthetic. As the New York Times observed in 2009, "this founding clip makes and repeats a larger point, too, with every pixel: Video — trivial or important — can now quickly and at no cost be published, broadcast and shared "Me at the Zoo" also sets a style standard for the classic YouTube video: visually surprising, narratively opaque, forthrightly poetic" (Heffernan 2009).

[2] Tim Leister has also written a self-published book about this YouTube first-post experience called *Interesting...* see http://www.amazon.com/dp/B009NWGOYW.

Back in 2005, however, YouTube was losing money. Nearly exhausted by the massive costs of infrastructure, bandwidth and storage, YouTube nonetheless grew at a furious pace from 2005 to 2006, until it was bought by Google (a seemingly puzzling purchase for a search engine giant), for the then outrageous figure of $1.65 billion (£979 million in 2014 £s), making its founders instant millionaires (Hoby and Lamont 2010). By 2014, as *The Economist* (2014) notes, "viewers are spoiled for premium-quality choice… and remarkably [spend] close to an hour watching videos online" per day, in comparison to the 4.5 hours spent watching television. By 2016, online-video advertising in the US is forecast to rise to $10 billion (£5.94 billion in 2014 £s), showing the prescience of the Google move into streaming media and the way in which audiences have adapted to online video and transformed the possibilities for its monetization. From start-up to incorporation into an internet giant, this narrative about the story of digital video is notable for both its simplicity and its seeming straightforwardness.

Although this founding narrative is the usual starting point that is articulated in understanding the way in which video became an everyday feature of the world wide web, it is partial and teleological. In contrast, this thesis argues that one of the key moments in the development of the practices of online video actually begins *before* the founding of YouTube in 2005, as indeed do many of the practices and aesthetics that YouTube's founders made use of in their early video work. In order to examine this often forgotten pre-history to YouTube's dominance of online video, this thesis therefore undertakes a cultural history examining this earlier moment of community practice and video making online. In some ways this approach can be understood as complementary to a media archaeology, in as much as it seeks to uncover what we might call the "failed" project of videoblogging, and is certainly informed by some of the insights of that approach, namely not only in just seeking to uncover past technologies and old media forms but also using such media to think about contemporary digital culture. Indeed, the research approach broadly agrees with the argument made by Huhtamo and Parikka in that it shares a "discontent with 'canonized' narratives of media culture and history… that widely endorsed accounts of contemporary media culture and media histories alike often tell only selected part of the story, and not necessarily correct and relevant parts" (Huhtamo and Parikka 2011: 3). As such, and following media historian David Hendy (2007: vii), I want to add that that this thesis is *a* history of videoblogging, and by no means *the* history of videoblogging,

just as it aims to position itself in *a* history of media, not *the* history of media. That is, this thesis aims to highlight the continuities and ruptures and "construct alternative histories of suppressed, neglected, and forgotten media that do not point teleologically to the present media-cultural condition as their 'perfection'" (Huhtamo and Parikka 2011: 3). However, this thesis differs from most media archaeology[3] in using non-archived historical resources, collected as part of the project, and by its focus on different facets of online moving-image culture and its technological conditions of possibility.[4]

This thesis undertakes to uncover and critically unpack this early pre-YouTube online video history and position it within its historical context as a creative and experimental community of video-makers that has largely been forgotten.[5] The research project was itself originally conceived of in those early days, from around 2001, when the Internet was ripe with the ideological promise of "creative freedom" for the rugged individuals (usually gendered as a man) who might know how to take advantage of the wild west of the internet as it turned into web 2.0, what Barbrook and Cameron (1996) called the Californian Ideology. Barbrook and Cameron argue,

> Each member of the 'virtual class' is promised the opportunity to become a successful hi-tech entrepreneur. Information technologies, so the argument goes, empower the individual, enhance personal freedom, and radically reduce the power of the nation-state. Existing social, political and legal power structures will wither away to be replaced by unfettered interactions between autonomous individuals and their software (Barbrook and Cameron 1996).

This was to see the internet as marketplace, conceived of as a self-actualising rational actor in a competitive free market, for example see the influential article "A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace" by John Perry Barlow (1996). The notion of the

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[3] Though it should be noted that there exists as of today "no general agreement about either the principles or the terminology of media archaeology" and that the "process of self-identifiaction and -definition" has only just began within the field (Huhtamo and Parikka 2011: 2). One of the great strengths of media archaeology is the way it travels "fluidly between disciplines, although it does not have a permanent home within any of them" (Huhtamo and Parikka 2011: 3, see also Parikka 2012) allowing for fresh perspectives and presenting "theoretically informed" historical narratives borrowing from "film studies and media arts as it does from the historical set of methodologies" (Parikka 2012: 2).

[4] The lack of a historical archive is a major handicap to undertaking this kind of research project with early online video, relying in large part on the personal collection amassed by the researcher, and in some repositories, such the Internet Archive, or personal collections of the video-bloggers. A large cultural history has already potentially been lost due to the difficulty of persuading traditional archiving bodies to take internet culture seriously, and also to understand that it is more than a textual and still-image medium, requiring a complex set of technologies to be taken into consideration, such as the multiplicity of video codecs that were used for early work.

[5] Although see Burgess and Green (2009), Lange (2007) and Miles (2003, 2005a) for some useful work already undertaken in relation to early video online. See also Jenkins (2009) who argues that far from being revolutionary in and of itself, YouTube "may represent the epicenter of today's participatory culture but it doesn't represent its origin point for any of the cultural practices people associate with it" (Jenkins 2009: 110).

individual actor, usually conceived of as an entrepreneur, was further popularised through the work of a number of writers, for example Raymond (2001) and Lessig (2000). This was an influential way to conceive of the political economic structures of the internet, and as Lanier (2006) later argued in response to collective notions of creativity, the internet "needs entrepreneurs to come up with the products that are competing in the first place. In other words, clever individuals, the heroes of the marketplace, ask the questions which are answered by collective behaviour" (Lanier 2006). But of course,

> The history of the Internet also contradicts the tenets of the 'free market' ideologues. For the first twenty years of its existence, the Net's development was almost completely dependent on the much reviled American federal government. Whether via the US military or through the universities, large amounts of tax payers' dollars went into building the Net infrastructure and subsidising the cost of using its services. At the same time, many of the key Net programs and applications were invented either by hobbyists or by professionals working in their spare-time (Barbrook and Cameron 1996).

This is something that is played out in the case of videoblogging, which was hugely reliant on the collective resources that produced the internet and its technologies in the first place, but also the volunteerism and contributions of videobloggers' work towards notions of community. Which is not to say there were not aspects of capitalism inherent in the development of these cultural practices and artefacts, indeed, some of the early pioneers were keen to create standalone possible "products" that might be later sold or licensed in the creative economy, however, there remained an early commitment to open source, community-oriented behaviour and the excitement of building not only the technical infrastructure for videoblogging, but also a new aesthetic and grammar of video culture.

These claims often masked the gendered reality of a political economy that favoured the already wealthy, connected, or famous – indeed, the practices that emerged were often much less about creative freedom, and more about technical skill and know-how (see for instance Herring (1992) and Warren et al (2011) on gender and age bias in amateur communities online). Taking this into account, this thesis investigates emergent practices of video-making that emerged on the internet after 2000 (though the thesis is focussing on the period between 2004-2009 for its main analysis), bearing in mind this heavily gendered technological environment and its political economy, using semi-structured interview data and analysis of the content and form of the early digital videos

they produced. Although this thesis does not formally adopt a political economic approach, it is clear that gender, wealth and capital were hugely influential and technological know-how was unevenly distributed between the (usually) amateur participants.[6]

Being an amateur generally indicates that one does something without getting paid, that instead of monetary recompense, the personal satisfaction of having created (or achieved) something is assumed to be sufficient reward. As such, the videoblogger is in many ways an amateur. However, as Newman argues, in the digital age, being an "amateur can be defined three ways: one who pursues a passion for personal pleasure; who lacks the knowledge or means to produce professional–quality work; or who toils without expectation of pay" (Newman 2008). Brigit Richard argues further that "the definition of a 'media amateur'" can also describe "technically interested private individuals who acquire and develop technology before commercial use of the technology is even recognisable" (Richard 2008: 142). In other words, being an amateur may not be purely about doing something you love, for free, but is linked to the access to and knowledge of professional equipment.

The definition of amateur needs to be contextualised and historicised, and in her seminal study, Zimmerman (1995) shows how the concept of the amateur has shifted historically. She locates the origins of amateur film within a particular, historically specific "romanticized vision of the bourgeois nuclear family, thereby amputating its more resistant economic and political potential for critique" (Zimmermann 1995: x). For Zimmermann, thus, amateur film "occupies one of the central contradictions of communications in the twentieth century: on the one hand, domination and consumption; on the other, resistance and hope" (Zimmermann 1995: ix).

Thus, an historically informed notion of the amateur forms one of the starting points for the thesis, which explores these new, often custom-written digital technologies and the emergence of new forms of amateur online communication, sharing and culture, crystallised in the practice of what was called *videoblogging*. A *videoblogger* is defines as someone who produces and maintains a videoblog, and is also likely to self-define as a "videoblogger". In this thesis, one of the main distinctions

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[6] Geography might play a part here too, as observed by one of my informants: "Even though I was a geek, I was one of those people that used to think that people who spent time talking to other people on the internet were sad. That attitude prevailed among the general population until Facebook blew it away. I'd say it was much more prevalent in the UK than in the US. Later when we met in person, Jay Dedman and I spoke about this. I said that people in the UK were suspicious of technology and geeks. He said, 'Americans think that technology is the only thing that's going to save us'." (Rupert)

drawn between someone posting videos to YouTube (here referred to as "vloggers") and a videoblogger, is that the videoblogger maintains her own (video)blog, usually individually designed, with custom blog-rolls (or vlog-rolls),[7] archives and about pages, where they post videos between three times a week to once a month. This thesis seeks to locate and understand how early adopters of videoblogging practices engaged with the nascent technologies available to them, and contributes to an understanding of how their practices developed and were conceptualised, and – as a result – the kinds of visual tropes and styles that emerged from their practices and experimentations.[8]

Indeed, it is notable that these practices drew on blogging (which was already becoming an established practice), on audio podcasting[9], and the practice of sharing photos that had emerged on sites such as Flickr. By the mid-2000s, the hype surrounding the concept of web 2.0 was starting to make its way from the narrow corridors of tech journalism and into the mainstream, and the "participatory turn" in media was heralded as the next new thing into which early videobloggers sought to create new art, documentary, film, technology and, in some cases, celebrity (Scholz 2007).

As part of this research, I undertook semi-structured interviews in 2007 to explore the interplay between the technologies used in video-blogging as moving image culture, and these processes in the co-production of identity, community and critical technical practice (Agre 1997) that developed unique short-form narratives, aesthetics and meanings. This research was paused, however, with a hiatus due to maternity leave and three premature children, which moved the project from a contemporary ethnography of videoblogging practice, to one in which the early excitement and activity had, by the time I returned to it, faded away.

However, on recommencing the study in 2012, and with the speed in which the digital landscape evolves, it has now become even more important to historicise and contextualise the original project in a much more active and deliberate way than if it had been completed as expected in 2008. Thus, this thesis is the culmination of research that has taken place over nearly ten years. What is presented here is therefore a result partly

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[7] See chapter 4, for more on this.

[8] Videoblogging as practice is not uniquely limited to the videoblogging community explored in this thesis, and one could argue that videoblogging has multiple of definitions and uses, however, in this thesis the terms 'videoblogging' and 'videoblogger' are used to specifically to denote the members of the early-adopter community under examination, in the period 2004-2009.

[9] See Farival (2014) for a history of podcasting, which argues that much like the history of videoblogging (which might owe its global reach and popularity to a site such as YouTube), the history of podcasting "goes deeper than the iPod" (Farival 2014).

of these distractions and delays, which have shaped the project in a number of ways, but most significantly in enabling some time after undertaking the research interviews, collecting the data and returning to the project to start the analysis. This has highlighted to me the importance of drawing attention to the lesser known and poorly documented moments of cultural practice on the internet, and providing a cultural history that enables dominant narratives, particularly the smooth corporate tales of mass market success and profitability, to be contested and unpacked.

Retrospectively, throughout this thesis I question the often self-interested claims that technology, via the World Wide Web, could be "participatory", and, indeed, the reach of the participation, and its depth. Nonetheless, it is also important to uncover the way in which hype and excitement about these possibilities served to actually inspire individuals and collectives seeking to build new technologies and media forms and develop the potential that these new technologies might offer. Today, with the success of massive technical-social platforms such as YouTube, Blogger and Soundcloud, many of the smaller communities of practice across the internet, some of which not only heralded certain forms of new media, but actually created many of the practices around them that we now take for granted, have either disbanded or moved on to different platforms, highlighting the importance of documenting these early cultural practices and communities. To illustrate, see for instance the upset around Yahoo's decision to shut down the social community GeoCities in 2009, which led internet archivist Jason Scoll to pose the following question: "is user content a right, a treasure, a heritage, a meaningful part of the human condition?" (Hall 2014). This question also lies at the heart of this thesis, preoccupied as it is with a history of digital culture that has not only been all but forgotten, but which is becoming harder and harder to remember due to the decisions by hosting companies to mass-delete large volumes of data from their servers (see chapter 4 for more on Blip.tv and its history in relation to this).

Despite a large volume of writing on YouTube, the use of online video in political campaigns and so forth (for instance, see Robertson et al (2010) and Wallsten (2010) on the use of online video in the 2008 US presidential campaign), little has been written about the actual everyday practices of online video production that were happening at the turn of the millennium, particularly in relation to practitioners and artists who would shy away from the later dominant platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo. The practice of videoblogging, as conceptualised here, emerged as a result of the rapid growth in digital technologies and the relative cheapness of new digital

equipment for recording, storing and disseminating data, be it textual, visual or audio-visual, across the vast network of the internet. This increased availability of digital media technologies, recording and editing software, networking platforms and distribution tools ignited a flourishing of creativity amongst amateur and semi-professional media creators, much of which converged (at the time) under the umbrella of either "citizen journalism" (Goode 2009) or "the creative consumer" (Burgess 2007: 11).

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, this thesis has combed historical data specific to videoblogging, such as archived email lists, articles and books (written at and around the time by the videobloggers themselves) to develop a critical technical and cultural understanding of how the cultural-technical practice of videoblogging emerged and developed. It combines this historical material with rich ethnographic data gathered from interviews and participant observation of the videoblogging community, and applies this knowledge to a selection of videoblogs to gain a deeper understanding of the aesthetic of what I call the *short-form digital film*. To this end, the thesis explores the following research questions: (1) how did early communities of practice and related cultural forms crystallise around digital video on the internet between 2004-2009?; (2) why did the technical-cultural assemblage of the videoblog emerge as a specific instance of short-form digital film, and how was the community around this media-form sustained?; (3) how did videobloggers understand and conceptualise their own practice and the co-construction necessary in creating the conditions of possibility for videoblog work, sharing and community building?

This thesis documents a relatively small group of early adopters who came together in 2004 to form a community of practice based primarily around individual websites and an email group. I explore the contours of this community through direct engagement with particular users (33 individuals, self-identified as 16 men and 17 women)[10], as well as close analysis of the technologies available to, utilised by and sometimes created by them. I also critically engage with the discourses surrounding these technologies as well as their practices and artefacts. As such, I look at not just the material underpinnings of the video practices, but the practices themselves and the aesthetic these practices manifested. I now want to turn to look in detail at some aspects of video making and videoblogging practices in relation to a number of moments that

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[10] User is here used to refer to "active internet contributors, who put in a 'certain amount of creative effort' which is 'created outside of professional routines and platforms'" (van Dijck 2009: 41)

help contextualise and position the way in which I understand videoblogging in relation both to video itself, but also film history and practice.

Back When Pluto Was a Planet (BWPWAP)[11]

On January 2nd 2000, Adam Kontras posted what is now widely considered to have been the first video-in-a-blog to his site. The video, "some compressed footage (only 222 KB) of us smuggling J-Dog into the hotel" (Kontras 2000, 0:11min, 160x112), featured Kontras and his fiancée Jessica carrying a cat through a hotel lobby. Kontras continued to post these little videos almost every day of 2000. Kontras' site (accessed today through the Internet Wayback machine,[12] was a personal website with text and links, and thus not what I define (or the videobloggers themselves self-define) as a videoblog, however, it was possibly the first known instance of someone linking to a video file from their website, which is why I mention it here.

Later that year, on the 27th of November 2000, Adrian Miles posted his first video on his blog (2:10, 194x144). He was staying in Bergen, Norway, as part of a research fellowship, and the video (figure 1) was accompanied by a short text, which can be seen as Miles' first attempt to articulate his thoughts on videoblogs, or *vogs*, as he called them, writing "welcome. This is a video blog. Don't know if there are lots around, or what they should be called. But if its ok to call a web log a blog then this can be a vog" (Miles 2000, original capitalisation). Miles' work is interesting because as well as being a practitioner, he was one of the first people to start theorising online video as part of his practice.[13]
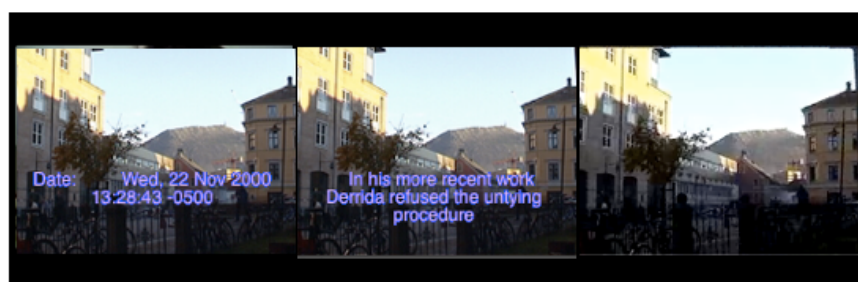
Figure 1: Adrian Miles video blog: vog (Miles 2000)

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[11] BWPWAP, or Back When Pluto Was a Planet, is "an expression used whenever one wants to talk about things in our recent past that have changed quickly" (Gansing et al 2013) – see the full curatorial statement from Transmediale 2013 (http://www.transmediale.de/content/bwpwap-curatiorial-statement) for a more detailed discussion of this term.
[12] See http://archive.org/web
[13] A short note on the method used for reproducing videoblogs in this thesis: Here I use three frames to create a montage of the presentation of the short-form digital film. The three frames are fom the beginning, middle and end of the video to give a sense of the content, narrative and aesthetic of the videoblog.

I mention the videos posted by Kontras and Miles as early examples of video-in-a-blog to show that the practice has a longer history. However, the practice of videoblogging as we think of it today, doesn't begin until 2004. In a seven second long videoblog posted to his site on the first day of 2004,[14] Steve Garfield declared 2004 "the year of the videoblog" (Garfield 2004). It was also the year Jay Dedman and Peter van Dijck got together to start the Videoblogging Yahoo Group, an email list that would act as the central hub for videoblogging activity and community from its inception till the community more or less disbanded in 2009[15].

On the 21st July 2005 Rupert Howe – a website designer and amateur film maker living and working in London, UK – posted a short video, *Should I Stay or Should I Go* (Howe 2005, figure 2), on his blog, Fat Girl In Ohio[16]. The video, which lasted 2 minutes and 47 seconds and was shot, edited and produced in his home, showed Howe talking directly to the camera about his reactions to the terrorist bombs on the underground and the number 47 bus in London earlier that month. The video footage had been shot on the day of the explosions, and Howe had originally posted a shorter, less edited video, which he later took down because he felt it was "too personal" (Howe 2005).
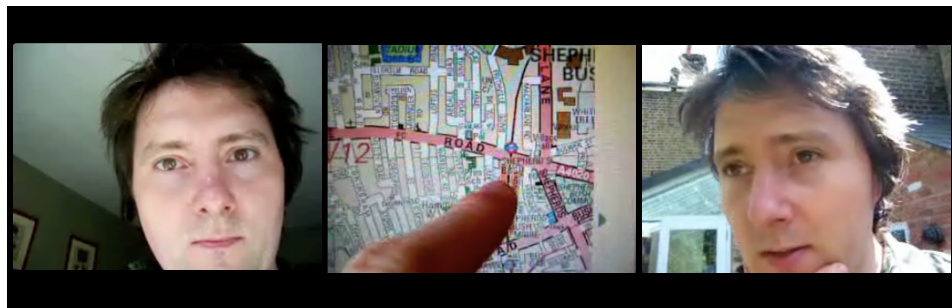
Figure 2: Should I Stay or Should I Go (Howe 2005)

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[14] https://web.archive.org/web/20041231011613/http://homepage.mac.com/stevegarfield/videoblog/year_of.html
[15] The list is still active however, with the occasional spike in activity – see chapter 4 for more detail on this.
[16] http://www.fatgirlinohio.com. Howe took the name for his videoblog from a famous quote by filmmaker Francis Ford Coppola, who once said that "to me the great hope is that now that these little 8mm video recorder and stuff now, 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, and you know, and make a beautiful film with her father's little camera-corder and for once this whole professionalism about movies will be destroyed forever and it will become an art form. That's my opinion." (Coppola 1991)

In *Should I Stay or Should I Go*, Howe moves around in his London home, talking, more or less coherently, directly into his handheld camera, a Kodak dx7440,[17] about his reactions to the terrorist attacks. At one point, the camera cuts to a map, trailing Howe's finger to show how close he lives to the location of the attacks. The cuts are fast, and longer sequences have been trimmed to make the video snappier and flow better. After a sharply edited section in which he discusses his feelings about the attacks, Howe moves into the garden. Flooded in natural sunlight (he was shooting on a small, handheld camera, with no additional "production values" such as lighting, sound or crew), he makes a short, but bold statement about how he will not leave London – instead he will take his sister and nephew to the park and spend a normal afternoon with them. As he puts it, "I guess… we're not afraid" (Howe 2005).

Like Kontras, Miles and Garfield before him, Howe posted his video on this small, relatively unknown videoblog, but the video ended up being featured on the online edition of the *New York Times*. He was not a journalist, not a filmmaker, not a public person or in any way famous. He was just an amateur with a camera and an internet connection who had something to say, albeit about an event that was consuming the media and in a format that was new and fresh. As Jenkins (2006) would argue a year later, Howe was at the cutting edge of convergence culture, "where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways" (2006: 2). This unpredictability, in Howe's case, wasn't altogether positive, however. As a result of the feature in the *New York Times* the traffic to his site grew enormously, eventually resulting in him having to take his entire website down.[18]

I highlight *Should I Stay or Should I Go* for three reasons. Firstly, although it was by no means the first video posted online, it marked my own discovery of the use of video, as opposed to text, within the blog format. Despite having read (and written) blogs for a while, I had never before seen anyone use video to communicate through their website, and my reaction to Howe's video was a mix of fascination and excitement. The intimacy that was seemingly channelled through the video (mostly close-ups of Howe's face, with his home always in the background) seemed different to

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[17] Rupert told me he "was recommended that camera by Andreas Haugstrup Pedersen because I liked the colour in his videos" (Rupert)

[18] Bandwidth from access by users has a political economy that has been hidden by the rise of YouTube. Essentially, the website owner pays for bandwidth and when that usage is exceeded, the website is disconnected. Slashdot, a technology website, became famous for "Slashdotting" websites by sending millions of users to a site.

me to the mainly text-based blogs I was used to reading. I was inspired to watch other videos on his blog, and later, to follow the links in his sidebar to other videoblogs. From there, I discovered an entire community of videobloggers, and I was fascinated by the manifold videos, attempted genres and topics covered, from the political to the personal, videos about families and children, videos captured whilst the videoblogger was at work, walking down the street, or just rolling out of bed. It seemed to me to raise a number of interesting questions in terms of artistic expression, identity and community. On one level, therefore, *Should I Stay or Should I Go,* marks one of my personal starting points for this thesis.

Secondly, the story of Howe's videoblog (initially small in scope and entirely personal, followed by massive attention from mainstream media, and eventual disappearance) is an example of the instabilities of videoblogging as media-form, especially in its early days. In this case, the cause was economic. Howe had to take the video down because he could no longer afford to keep it up. His mention in the *New York Times* meant hundreds of thousands of visitors from across the world visited his site, and watched his videos, this one in particular. Being before the days of free online video hosting, Howe was paying for his own traffic, and suddenly found himself in a situation where he owed his Internet Service Provider (ISP) large sums of money.[19] He was left with no option but to remove the entire site.[20] However, videblogs were unstable in other ways too. There was, for instance, no standard format that was used by all videobloggers. Whereas some preferred to encode their videos using Apple's QuickTime, others relied on Windows' media player or one of many flash players available across the internet.[21] Digital formats (for instance codecs) could easily change and/or became obsolete over the course of a week or month, sites were moved and links broken, and some formats (such as Flash) might play nicely on the web, but not on

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[19] "The rate was something like £10 per additional 1GB, and the files would have been around 5-6mb per minute (at 750mbps) and around 3 mins - so say 18mb each. That means I would have maxed out my allowance with 555 views. And then had to pay £18 for every 1,000 views after that. So 10,000 would have been £180 and so on with no realistic proposition of getting anything back from advertising or merch of course. That was much more than I had to spend" (Rupert).

[20] The information in this section is drawn from the notices Howe displayed on his website after he removed his blog, his interview and subsequent private email conversation with Howe. I want to add that the bandwidth costs weren't Howe's only reason for removing his blog. As he explained to me in his interview "got profiled in the New York Times, and I got a lot of hits, and got afraid of being found out by people I worked with and getting a big bandwidth bill. This was before Blip. So I took my site down. I really really really regret this. I got freaked out by it and walked away" (Rupert)

[21] Sites such as YouTube (youtube.com), Blip (blip.tv), Vimeo (vimeo.com) and others all had different flash players, which will display videos in slightly different ways. For example, some players, like the Blip-embedded display, allowed the viewer to not only navigate within the video being shown (by pausing, fast forwarding or stopping) but browse through the entire archive of videos by the artist they are watching. In contrast, at the time, if a videoblogger used the YouTube version of the flashplayer, the viewer could only access other videos at the end of the current one.

mobile devices (such as the iPhone[22]). Technologically, therefore, videoblogs could be incredibly unstable and susceptible to vanishing overnight.

Politically and legally, videoblogging encountered destabilising forces as well. For example, if there was a breach of copyright law, a video hosting site (such as YouTube or Vimeo) might remove a video without warning, and in some parts of the world (for instance, China), entire video hosting sites (like YouTube) might be banned, or partially censored. There were also debates around issues of copyright, with writers such as Lessig (2003) arguing that the US copyright laws place substantial limits on creativity (see also Berry 2008). More recent years have also seen the rising importance of social media and videoblogging, in particular in relation to social movements such as the Arab Spring, which echoes what Lovink once called "tactical media" (2011, see also Garcia and Lovink 1997), which utilised digital technologies such as Twitter and Facebook, to post violent videos directly from political protests in potentially violent conflict zones (Kluitenberg 2011). Questions of the politics of videoblogging is a recurring theme throughout this thesis, and although not at the centre of my investigation, it is a topic I will return to at various points in the thesis.

From a social or cultural point of view, and particularly within the community of videobloggers themselves, there were intense debates about what videoblogging *was*; some refusing to define it, with others insisted on making strong links with for instance televisual techniques and aesthetics, blogging, or amateur film. Some videobloggers also wrote or created manifestos for videoblogging, causing disagreements and debates (see for instance the video manifesto *Vlog Anarchy* by Verdi (2005), and *The Lumiere Manifesto* by Pedersen and Shoot (2007) and Adrian Miles' *Vogma Manifesto* (2000); the latter two both reminiscent of the Dogma 95 manifesto (von Trier and Vinterberg 1995) with their strict principles of digital "austerity"). These debates from both within

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[22] Steve Job's letter from April 2010 expands on Apple's reasoning behind choosing to disallow Flash on the iPhone. Jobs explains that Apple is committed to open standards on the web, and that Flash is 100% a propriatory product owned by Adobe. Further, he poins out that despite Adobe's claims that because they refuse to use Flash, Apple customers cannot access what he calls the "full web," there are "over 50,000 games and entertainment titles on the App Store" and "are more games and entertainment titles available for iPhone, iPod and iPad than for any other platform in the world." Jobs goes on to highlight the issues with reliability, security and performance associated with Flash and the lack of ability to use touch screen technology, before presenting a damning account of the way in which Flash drains the battery life of a device ("The difference is striking: on an iPhone, for example, H.264 videos play for up to 10 hours, while videos decoded in software play for less than 5 hours before the battery is fully drained"). Lastly, and most importantly to Jobs, Apple's decision to disallow Flash on the iPhone relates to the company's refusal to allow what Jobs calls "a third-party layer of software". As he argues, "If developers grow dependent on third party development libraries and tools, they can only take advantage of platform enhancements if and when the third party chooses to adopt the new features. We cannot be at the mercy of a third party deciding if and when they will make our enhancements available to our developers" (Apple 2010).

the community and in the more general arena, were coupled with the question of what videoblogging was *for*, if anything.

Some, like the creators of Galacticast (galacticast.com), Epic FU (epicfu.com) and Ryan Is Hungry (ryanishungry.com) were attempting to monetise their videoblogging activities, relying on advertising, sponsorships and corporate investment to generate income.[23] Other practitioners treated their videoblog as a personal diary, a visual archive of their lives, and would never dream of trying to make money from videos they saw as highly personal, as Jen G told me, "sometimes almost too personal, to a point where it might only make sense to me and a few select initiated" (Jen G). Some practitioners tried to find ways to use their videoblogging skills to generate income in tangential ways, "I don't think videoblogging itself will ever pay the bills, but I think I can find ways to make money through other projects related to it, such as creating video ads for other companies, or selling products through our video blog" (Adam).[24] These different approaches to videoblogging as a practice, as a medium, as a distribution network and through various moments of contestation and debate, point to the lack of a coherent and stable definition of videoblogs in its early days.

This instability of the videoblogging practice begs the question of how to study it. Following a long tradition of scholars questioning how to study the media (see for instance Williams [1974] 1999, Silverstone 1999a, Metz 1990), N. Katherine Hayles (2004) argues for what she calls a *media-specific analysis* of media, an approach to critical enquiry which acknowledges that texts are always embodied entities and that the form of embodiment of a given text matters to its interpretative meaning. However, like McLuhan, Hayles does not call for media to be "considered in isolation from one another" (Hayles 2004: 69), rather, following Bolter and Grusin (1999), she argues that "media constantly engage in a recursive dynamic of imitating each other, incorporating aspects of competing media into themselves while simultaneously flaunting the

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[23] There was also an awareness of the inherent problems with attempting to monetize videoblogging, as pointed out by one videoblogger; "I would never pay $3 for a video to my phone. But then I watch all these people's videos for free on my iPod every day." (Howe 2007)

[24] As another videoblogger put it, "I'm not trying to be a Hollywood entertainer, and neither are 99% of the people on this list. We're doing something different that's going to change things. I have no visions of being on a sitcom. I do have visions of someday professionally creating niche content or in some way doing video, audio and text related to technology. I do have visions of people being able to find content of interest to them that Television wouldn't produce because 99% of people aren't interested in it. However, there's money to be made and an audience to find even for the content that only 1% of people (250,000+ in the US) are interested in. Or even 1/100 of 1%. 1% of the population is a larger audience than most cable television programs get. The difference is, the barrier to entry and the cost to distribute are virtually nil compared to the old media system. There's nothing wrong with the old media system (in my opinion, you'll find others here that disagree), it's just that we're doing something different. Old Media has served us well for 50 years, but we're changing things. All revolution leads to evolution." (Sharp 2005b)

advantages that their own forms of mediation offer" (Hayles 2004: 69). This thesis, then, will treat videoblogging as a media-specific practice, meaning that its material and symbolic properties are both treated as important. It will further place particular emphasis on how these properties are in constant interplay, and in what way they can be seen to co-construct each other. It is important to remember, however, that, as Hayles argues,

> In emphasizing materiality, I do not mean to imply that all aspects of a medium's apparatus will be equally important. Rather, materiality should be understood as existing in complex dynamic interplay with content, coming into focus or fading into the background, depending on what performances the work enacts (Hayles 2004: 71).

In this sense, in particular instances, some aspects of the videoblogging practice may be given more importance than others. For instance, certain kinds of videoblogs might require closer attention to the embodied use of the camera to convey certain messages, whereas others might place a stronger emphasis on narrative, editing or effects. The aim, then, is to highlight that through the "dynamic interplay" between the technology and the content, the medium and the performance, how the videoblog is constructed. This is explored further in chapter 6.

My third reason for mentioning *Should I Stay or Should I Go*, is that it can be seen as one example of the many practices that emerged in the early 2000s that contributed to the increased number of users with little or no previous technical knowledge who entered and started participating in a global media landscape (Jenkins 2006). And it is an early example of how this could be achieved through the medium of film. *Should I Stay or Should I Go* thus represents a meeting point between "citizen media" (Howe was engaging in debate with other citizens about terrorism), "citizen journalism" (Howe was reporting on where the attacks took place, what some of the early news and reactions were), "personal media" (Howe talking from a subjective position, about the concerns of his own family and doing so from within his own home. Howe also used his own private equipment and initially shared his video mainly to a small community of friends, i.e. other videobloggers) and "user-generated content" (Howe's video was featured on the New York Times website alongside works by their own journalists).

These terms were invoked by, but are also still contested within, the scholarly community (see for instance the different conclusions drawn by Jenkins (2006) and Keen (2007) in their conceptualisation of the "fan" and the "amateur"), and as these

activities become more and more ingrained in our everyday lives, it has become increasingly important to both question and understand them. As Silverstone (1994) has pointed out, just because something is part of our everyday life, and so become invisible to us through it's "veritable daily-ness" does not mean it should not be questioned (Silverstone 1994: 3).

When I started planning this study in 2005, the mainstream media (Boxer 2005 and Caruso 2007, writing for the *New York Times,* Rosen 2004, *The New Atlantis,* Bloomberg Businessweek 2005), as well as media studies itself, was charged with anticipation about the new participatory turn in online culture, as well as excitement about "being digital", "life on the screen", online communities, etc (see for instance Negroponte 1996, Turkle 1997, Rheingold 1993, Baym 1995, 2000). The promise of cheaper technologies, smoother learning curves and easier access to both digital technologies and the internet itself, spurred an excitement about a condition of possibility within digital culture that would somehow aid creativity and increase participation among users (Lessig 2003, Benkler 2006, Jenkins 2006). Linked to this was the importance of digital literacy, with writers such as Livingstone (2004) arguing that digital literacy was "crucial to the democratic agenda" because users of new media were not merely consumers, but citizens (Livingstone 2004: 11). These ideas were, of course, also strongly advocated in early writings on the internet and internet culture (see Rheingold 1993, Turkle 1997, Jenkins 2006, Lessig 2003).

These ideas were all influential on my initial proposal of study. In my thesis, I was to explore questions of creativity, identity and community within a small sub-culture of the internet, this group of video practitioners who self-identified as videobloggers and who enthusiastically produced short digital films that they posted on their blogs. YouTube was still in its infancy, Twitter did not exist and Pluto was still a planet.

Around the time I was conducting my interviews[25], the term web 2.0 was a hotly debated topic on the internet. Tim O'Reilly's paper (O'Reilly 2005) on the social web seemed to encapsulate the very essence of what I saw was happening in the videoblogging community at the time. The ideas and concepts combined under the umbrella term web 2.0 were not so much the sudden creation of new technological standards, as the articulation of the web as a platform, where "real-time streams" (Berry

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[25] I conducted all my interviews between June and September 2007, with additional email exchanges (referred to here as additional interviews) taking place throughout the thesis writing process. For more detail, see Footnote 22.

2011) of live data could be accessed at any time and from anywhere via RSS and syndication, and where the individual device from which you accessed this data was rendered irrelevant because the software used to display that data was "written above the level of a single device" (O'Reilly 2005). Web 2.0 was always a contested term, see for example Scholz 2007, who argues that the ideology of web 2.0 "is a framing device of professional elites that define what enters the public discourse about the impact of the Internet on society" (Scholz 2007, see also Morozov 2013) and Bassett et al (2008), who were "wary and aware" of the "discourse circulating around these innovations; one that proclaims their importance, underscoring and perhaps overplaying their radical novelty" (Bassett, Hartmann and O'Riordan 2008). Nevertheless, its articulation still represented an important moment for the development of the social web and the starting point of many web 2.0 companies, like YouTube and Twitter. It is also an important discursive moment in the history of videoblogging, particularly with regard to framing the practice within a wider discourse of convergence.

In terms of the commercial aspect of web 2.0, and the wider questions of monetizing the web 2.0 technologies, and knowing as we do now the amount of free labour that goes into the creation of both successful web 2.0 businesses and the plethora of not-so-successful and failed businesses, it seems pertinent to reiterate that in this thesis, there are obvious political economic considerations related to the exploitation of free labour (Terranova 2004) and the enclosure of what has been called the commons (Hardt and Negri, 2005) or the digital commons (Benkler 2006, Moglen 2001). Chanan (2012) discusses this in relation to videoblogging where, drawing on Marx, he conceptualises the work done by video bloggers as "free aesthetic labour" (Chanan 2012: 4). However, this thesis focuses on the early, under-determined development of community based platforms, namely videoblogging, and for that reason, and due to the temporal distance between the initial project and its conclusion, it is therefore situated in the work of cultural and media history. This is not to say that there are not important questions to be asked in relation to free labour and videoblogging itself, for example, but that my focus in the thesis is the material cultural formations which relate to the condition of the web from 2004-2009[26] under which video blogging emerged,

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[26] A note on dates; I define the period of the early videoblogging community as falling between 2004 (when the email list was started) and 2009 (by which time the community had more or less disbanded). However, at some points in this thesis, I refer to earlier instances of video-in-a-blog, notably Kontras (2000) and Miles (2000) as significant moments in the history of videoblogging. These moments are included to highlight the difficulty of pinpointing exactly when an historical period begins and when it ends, and further, the importance of keeping an open mind about

flourished, and "failed", as a cultural and material practice. This enables me to explore the way in which the technical, the social, narrative and imaginaries surrounding videoblogging are constructed in particular ways before the platform was commodified.

From new/digital media to digital materiality

By the time I returned to this research project, nearly ten years later, things had changed, and as I write this, in late 2014, the internet is no longer what it was, and the research questions facing a new generation of scholars have shifted. The videoblogging community, as conceptualised here, with its associated technologies and practices, stopped functioning as a community towards the latter half of 2009, and the practice of videoblogging is now far more heavily concentrated around a number of established and commercially successful platforms; for example YouTube, Twitter, and Vine.

Manovich[27] goes a long way to describe the "emergent conventions, the recurrent design patterns, and the key forms of new media" (Manovich 2001: 38) which he sees as the new dominant cultural form of the 21st century. Manovich highlighted numerical representation, modularity, automation, variability and transcoding as the main principles of new media, although he is perhaps more famous for his theorisation of the database as narrative form. In any case, the softwarization (Manovich 2013a) of media, and further, the softwarization of cultural artefacts and the rise of what has been come to be known as a digital aesthetic or digital art, has contributed to a "new" typology of sorts of what constitutes a digital cultural artefact.

Although questions of identity and community remain crucial in developing understandings about shifts in digital culture, particularly with regard to a new generation of users, problematically considered "digital natives" (Prensky 2001a, 2001b), there are now strong calls to look beyond the symbolic and towards the materiality of the internet and its uses. This is not to say that the turn away from the symbolic is "new" exactly (see for instance Badminton 2007), but the turn to the

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the fluidity of periods of medial change. It is perhaps also worth noting that although I draw on archival material from 2004 onwards, my initial interviews were conducted in 2007, thus reflecting the historical specificity of that time (ie the videobloggers had already had a few years to reflect on their practices).

[27] Manovich rejected the term 'aesthetics' in favour of 'language' – arguing that it 'implies a set of oppositions which I would like to avoid— between art and mass culture, between the beautiful and the ugly, between the valuable and the unimportant' (2001: 38). However, as a field, digital aesthetics has been established as a useful concept in describing the collection of stylistic elements and tropes that encompass the digital (see for instance the work of Cubitt 2004) and so it is used in this thesis to denote this enclave of practices, styles and techniques.

material has become more important.[28] Studying the digital is no longer confined to a digital strand within media studies, but is being adopted across the humanities and integrated into studies across the university more generally.

Further, the articulation of a "computational turn" within the humanities more generally, has elevated the status of studying the digital somewhat. Writers such as Manovich (2013), Berry (2011), Chun (2011), Fuller (2008) and Galloway (2004) have attempted to move away from what they term the "screen essentialism" of early "new media" by looking behind the computer screen, and developing theories of platforms, software and code. Instead what we are faced with now is a "computational media" and a "computational culture" (Berry 2012, Manovich 2013). Even within this new frame, however, this debate is not completely new. Back in 1990, Ursula Franklin argued that "everyone's vernacular reality has changed" and that "there are genuinely new activities that are possible now that could not have been done without the new technologies and their infrastructure" (Franklin 1990: 47). In particular, she referred to these new technologies ability to more easily transfer, store and reconstruct information. She also pointed to the fact that "some of these affect our approaches to and perceptions of the future, that is, the projected realities" (Franklin 1990: 47).

The aim of this thesis, then, is to draw on emerging theories surrounding materiality and digitalisation, and with the field of media studies. As such, this thesis is an investigation into both the socialities and the materialities of the practices of the early videobloggers. The thesis will delve into theoretical work around software and platform studies but crucially re-connect them with the cultural and historical theories and methods of media and cultural studies. The aim is to embody both the materialities of the former, and the symbolic cultural analysis of the latter. It positions itself thus within the field of digital media, drawing on literature and research within this field, but remains attentive to the cross-disciplinary nature of the field, drawing as it does on media studies, film and cultural studies, digital humanities and software studies.

In using a theory of media as everyday life practice, this thesis owes a great theoretical debt to the writings of Roger Silverstone, both his work on technology and the everyday (1994), and his attempts to formulate an approach to studying media that takes into account both the material approaches associated with a political economic

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[28] See also some of the early cyber feminism literature, including Morse, who argued that "the virtual and material are intertwined and superimposed on every aspect of cyberspace" (Morse 1997: 28). It is also interesting to note the growing influence of New Materalisms (see van der Tuin and Dolphijn 2012 and Braidotti 2014).

study of the production and structural side of media production and the symbolic content of media, i.e. audience research, textual analysis etc (1999a). This thesis uses as its methodological starting point Silverstone's theory that media are doubly articulated (Silverstone 1994:82). Although speaking about television, he argues,

> through its double articulation into culture its significance is extended beyond its status 'simply' as object or medium, for in its status as medium, and through the provision of information and entertainment, television provides the basis for an 'education', a competence, in all aspects of contemporary culture (Haralovich 1988, quoted in Silverstone 1994: 123).

Silverstone's work is situated in a long history of writings attempting to bridge the gap between the material analysis of media and the cultural signification of the media content. Raymond Williams (1974 [1990]) argued, "the social history and the social analysis needed to be directly related to critical and analytical examination of the materials *and* processes of the specific communication" (Williams 1974 [1990]: vi, italics mine), whereas Marshall McLuhan famously proclaimed that the medium is the message (1964: 9), emphasising the importance of studying of medium-based analyses of media as "it is only too typical that the 'content' of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium" (1964: 11). Silverstone, in his attempt to reunite these two positions, argues that media is not either-or, but both material and symbolic – hence his notion of the media as being doubly articulated. This thesis follows in this tradition by emphasising not just the content of videoblogs, but their materiality.

This thesis also critically engages with the work Nick Couldry (2004, 2013) has carried out on *media as practice*. Couldry makes it clear that he doesn't want to reject other forms of media research, like studies of audiences or texts, altogether, however, he argues that by reorienting the study of media towards practice, one is allowed to answer questions about media in "more precise ways… based in the details of everyday practice and its organisation" (Couldry 2004: 128). To Couldry, his approach is "alarmingly simple; it treats media as the open set of practices relating to, or oriented around, media" (Couldry 2004: 117). In other words, he aims "to decentre media research from the study of media texts or production structures (important though these are) and to redirect it onto the study of the open-ended range of practices focused directly or indirectly on media" (Couldry 2004: 117). In this thesis, then, *practice* is defined both as the way in which the videobloggers engage with the technologies available to them, and the way in which these ways of engaging became adopted by the community as a

whole and how a sense of what videoblogging was became adopted as a kind of standard.

This thesis, then, aims to fill a gap in our understanding of the early practices surrounding online video production. This is its main contribution to knowledge; a cultural history and critical understanding of the practices developed and used by the early adopters of videoblogging as a cultural-technical hybrid.

In terms of methodology, this thesis has a number of different entry points. The object of study, videoblogging, was always very clearly defined, however, due to the time it has taken to complete the project, the nature of the methodological approach has had to be adapted and modified throughout the period of study. What was initially conceived of as a fairly straight forward virtual ethnography (itself a contested method, of course, see below), has developed into an historical project, inspired by media history and media archaeology (Huhtamo and Parikka 2011, Parikka 2012). The project was also concerned with the internet, which is itself a contested site of research (see for instance Baym and Markham 2009).

Established methods of qualitative research are still useful in light of the new digital landscape, so rather than calling for a strict reinvention of the tools, we can adapt and use what we already have in our possession. This is not to suggest that some new creative solutions might not be needed, or that new ways of seeing should be ignored (see for instance Moretti (2005) on distance reading, or Hayles' (2012) work on Danielewski's *No Revolutions*, a 'big data' distant reading that would have been all but impossible without digital technology), but rather that in terms of qualitative research, there are "ways to navigate the novelty of the contemporary landscape while drawing on and contributing to the accumulated methodological and topical wisdom of relevant pasts" (Markham and Baym 2009: xv).

The internet and the technologies associated with the web offer a rich environment for conducting research, both as a research area and as a research method and, as it has been argued, it "brings into sharp relief previously assumed and invisible epistemologies and practices of inquiry" (Markham and Baym 2009: vii). In other words, in addition to providing a "new field" of research, the internet has caused researchers to "reconsider basic principles and practices of qualitative inquiry with important critiques of a priori methodological certainties" (Markham and Baym 2009: viii).

The internet can be seen as an object of study, a social phenomenon in its own right that is worthy of study; it can be conceptualised as a tool for conducting research around a particular (and not necessarily internet-specific) object or event (Hine 2000); we can also think of the internet as a (field) site for conducting research (Markham and Buchanan 2012). These three conceptualisations are clearly not separate entities, but overlap and compliment each other in a number of ways. However, "depending on the role the Internet plays in the research project or how it is conceptualized by the researcher, different epistemological, logistical and ethical considerations will come into play" (Markham and Buchanan 2012). In other words, certain kinds of research can be said to encourage certain kinds of methods, on the internet, as in the life world.

A running thread throughout this thesis concerns the challenges of studying a recent history such as the one I am studying here, complicated by the fact that the empirical data is historically specific to that period. In other words, this thesis is not merely an historical investigation into videoblogging, it is also a historical-contemporary ethnography into the sociotechnical practices that were happening between 2004 and 2009.[29]

In total, 89,820 words of interview data have been collected, a corpus from which I draw out results and analysis. Additionally, a set of videos were analysed throughout the thesis which were recommended to me by the videobloggers as part of the interviews (and where more than one video was recommended, the first selection was chosen). Much of the discussion around videoblogging at the time was taking part on the videoblogging yahoogroup email list, so this has also been a key resource to draw from for textual analysis.

The research materials thus form an archive of sorts – a distributed network of texts (interviews, emails, websites), memory (mine and theirs, materialised in texts but also through the affective re-experience of the films), and a large collection of videos. The videos are more dispersed than they were in 2005, particularly after one of the main sites for hosting videoblogs closed its doors in November 2013 (see chapter 4 for the discussion of blip.tv), but they are still mostly locatable (although not straightforward to find). YouTube, which was considered such a bad choice for the videobloggers back in 2005 (again, see chapter 4), has remained surprisingly stable as a site for storing,

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[29] The thesis is also, as I cannot escape my own subject position historically located as it is, a reflection of the digital present (2014), touching, as it does on 'new' technologies (these will be 'old' or 'out of date' within a few years too) such as Vine and Instagram video.

finding and re-discovering videoblogs – some videobloggers have ironically even retrospectively uploaded their old films to YouTube.[30] I now want to briefly outline the structure of my thesis chapters. The aim is to introduce the main contours of the thesis but also to expressly present its narrative arc.

Structure of thesis

Chapter 2 discusses the literature review and the methodological approaches, problematics and challenges associated with undertaking this thesis, including an overview of the field, and the methods used. This chapter engages with the methodological choices made in the execution of this thesis, as well as consider the ethical implications of carrying out research with and around human subjects online.

Chapter 3 situates the thesis historically by drawing on a long history of amateur and semi-professional film-making. This chapter will necessarily provide a short history of film, video and the internet, particularly the internet technologies that contributed to the emergence of the concept web 2.0, media convergence and the social turn within new media.

The next three chapters contain the empirical study and analysis, focussing on the technologies, practices and aesthetics particular to the community of videobloggers.

Chapter 4 presents a more detailed technical history of period under investigation, and gives an overview of the tools and technologies used and developed by the videobloggers. The chapter also outlines the contours of the videoblogging platform and its structure as a cultural-technical hybrid.

Chapter 5 engages with the identity of the videoblogging community, exploring their shared discourse and sense of togetherness, as materialised through the work produced and community of interest. Thus, this chapter looks beyond the technologies, to the working practice of videoblogging as described by the informants.

Chapter 6 examines what kind of aesthetic emerges from the combination of practices and technologies as outlined in the previous chapters. In this chapter, I perform a close reading of a collection of videoblogs, and use this data, combined with

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[30] Following from this research it seems to me that locating not just a textual respository for the the project, and which this thesis represents the major output, but also a video archive would be a good outcome from the project and one which I am keen to investigate with my informants following completion. It would also contribute to my attempt to include my informants as co-investigators, to some extent, in the project I have undertaken here and reflects the research ethics and method that have informed the project (see below, chapter 2) and which I will describe in more detail in the conclusion.

the interview data, to map the key features of the videoblog aesthetic. I argue that the aesthetics of the videoblog has been hugely influential and can be traced back to these early practitioners' experimentations with not only new technologies but with form and style.

In the conclusion to the thesis, chapter 7, I draw these strands together and offer my reflections on the research and its implications. Although the early adoption phase of videoblogging has clearly come to an end, the practices developed by the videobloggers continue to influence amateur creators producing video online.

I now turn to outlining the critical background and contextualisation of the thesis, with a particular focus on the way in which a number of strands converge at the turn of the millennium in new forms of videoblogging practice. I do this by undertaking a review of key literature in this field and related scholarly work.

Chapter 2 – Critical Background

The literature on digital, online and user-generated video is vast and growing in direct relationship to the growth of video-sharing, video-capable mobile devices, and the development of a video on-demand global industry. Moreover, the scholarly work exploring this is distributed across a range of disciplines, and uses a number of methodological approaches and theoretical models to explore the social video phenomena.[31]

In this chapter I want to situate this thesis within this research literature to give a sense of the field and also to demonstrate how this research draws on and extends important work. Here, I think it is important to give a sense of not just the cultural historical dimensions of videoblogging, but also a sense of the scale technically, economically and socially. Therefore I have chosen to include a survey of the empirical work, especially work that attempts to tease out socio-economic issues in relation to quantitative measures. I have also attempted to provide some connections with literature directly related to YouTube, which has unsurprisingly become keenly studied particularly in internet studies, and the work associated with a sense of community, drawing both from early work on virtual-community but also later work on online communities and social networks. Lastly, I have sought to engage with the work on identity, mainly due to the importance that self-presentation and identity has for my respondents, and how identity is connected to notions of community, shared practice and technical infrastructure.

This thesis is located in the field of media and cultural studies, but more particularly in the intersection of digital media, cultural history and internet studies. In this chapter, I provide the key underpinnings and theoretical work that I draw from in both describing and critically engaging with my research ethnography later in the thesis, but also to demonstrate the range and depth of materials drawn on. The aim is not to provide an exhaustive outline of all of the literature across these fields, rather it is to provide important moments and exemplars relevant to the discussion I have below. The literature review is not intended to offer a formal history as such – that will be the focus of the next chapter – rather, the aim is to engage with the key literature and debates

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[31] For example, there is a growing body of work that attempts to empirically enumerate the growth and development of time-based media online (Deloitte 2012), and which has been given another impetus with the growth of short-form video-sharing such as Snapchat, Vine and other platforms.

around the subject of videoblogging. This chapter will also provide the methodological overview and address any ethical issues and concerns.

Literature Review

The terms *videoblogger* and *videoblogging* have contested origins, and share their history with terms such as life casting, video streaming and video podcasting, yet alongside vlogging, it has become the common term within academia when referring to the practice of posting home-made videos to video sharing sites such as Dailymotion, Vimeo or YouTube (see Burgess and Green 2009). There are variations of the terms in use, however; for instance, Miles first referred to "vogs" in his early writings and experiments with online video (see Miles 2000) though he also refers to "desktop video" (Miles 2008: 116). Lange (2007) consistently refers to "vlogging" and "vloggers" in her work. Burgess and Green (2009) use both "videoblogging" (and "videobloggers") and "vlogging" (and "vloggers") to describe the practice of posting videos to YouTube, Venderbeeken (2011) refers to "Web Video", and Treske defines "the time and space that we as human beings share with 'video'… a *video sphere"* (Treske 2013: 8). Despite these differences, there is a certain agreement within this emerging field of the definition of the term(s) and their associated practices.

In its earliest form, videoblogging was the social practice of posting videos on an internet blog, originally a form of online journal called a web-log. Thus, a videoblog is a blog that uses video as its main form of expression. This definition was complicated by the emergence of vlogs on YouTube, where vlogging would grow to include anyone posting a video of themselves online. To distinguish between video blogging on YouTube and within the videoblogging community, I shall refer to videos posted to YouTube as vlogging and vloggers, and the videoblogging community I am looking at as videoblogging and videobloggers – see Burgess and Green (2009), Lange (2007) and Lovink and Niederer (2008).

It is helpful to define both what is meant by "virtual community", and some of the notions that this concept engenders. The term may seem somewhat out-dated, as we now tend to think of groups of people who meet and socialise online as operating across social networks, yet to historically position videoblogging requires the utilization of certain concepts that were used at the time. Social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram did either not exist or existed in a very early iteration in the

period I am looking at,[32] and although the community gradually migrated over to these platforms, the early history of the community were organised in a different way. This will be explored in chapter 4.

The concept of *community* itself requires some unpacking. As shown by Raymond Williams (1985), the word community is historically located and socially constructed, evolving in meaning through history. Following Benedict Anderson comes the notion that all communities are in some sense "imagined" and that "communication media play a central role in determining the different styles in which communities have been imagined throughout history" (Feenberg and Bakardjieva 2004: 26). Thus, it follows that the concept of "virtual community" is equally open to a variety of interpretations, at a variety of moments. That technologies affect social relations is also not a new idea. Already in 1990, Ursula Franklin announced herself "overawed by the way in which technology has acted to reorder and restructure social relations, not only affecting the relations between social groups, but also the relations between nations and individuals" (Franklin 1990: 13).

Empirical Work on Internet Use and Video[33]

To give an indication of how fast the number of people posting video to the internet has grown, it is useful to refer to the yearly reports by Pew Research's Internet Project. In 2004, Pew could report that only 3% of internet users had uploaded video files to the internet, compared to 17% who had posted written material and 21% who said they had posted photographs on the web (Rainie 2005). At this point, Pew defined the content creators as either *power creators*, who despite having the greatest access to broadband internet, being the most prolific bloggers and downloading the most amount of files, were the *least* likely to produce video content; *older creators*, who, despite being older (in their 40s) and the least likely to engage in a wide variety of online activities, were *most* likely (8%) to post video content and maintain a personal web page; and *content omnivores*, prolific web users (despite having the worst broadband connections), who used the internet "all the time" and 4% of whom were posting video online (Lenhart et al 2004).

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[32] For instance, Facebook was founded in February 2004, but didn't open registration to universities until October 2005, and to the wider public in September 2006 (Arrington 2006). Twitter launched in March 2006. Instagram was first released on the iTunes app store in October 2010.
[33] I should note, the majority of the empirical work cited here, is based on data from the US, which is a reflection of the bias often found in this kind of research.

In 2006, a survey of blogging found that 37% of bloggers would say that the main topic of their blog was "my life and experiences" and that they "use their blogs as personal journals… [and do] not think of what they do as journalism" (Lenhart and Fox 2006). Most tellingly, 77% declared that they had shared their artwork, photos, stories, or videos online (this is compared with 26% of all internet users at this point). Thus we can see that in only two years the amount of people posting video content on the internet had increased dramatically, from 3% to 26%.

By 2007, Pew estimated that "online video now reaches a mainstream audience" with "57% of online adults have used the internet to watch or download video, and 19% do so on a typical day" (Madden 2007). The survey was more conservative in estimating that only 13% upload original video content (Madden 2007). By 2008, the number of people visiting video-sharing sites such as YouTube seemed to have levelled at 48% (Rainie 2008) – by 2009, this number had increased to 62% (Madden 2009). This increase was explained by the rise in video-on-demand services such as Hulu, which made watching online content much easier, and increased the amount of professionally produced content available online.

In terms of uploading content, this figure had risen to 14% by 2010 (up from 8% in 2007). A large percentage of these (39%) only intended to share their videos with friends and family, with 31 % saying "they 'always' place restrictions on who can access their videos" (Purcell 2010).

By 2011, a reported 71% of internet users were visiting and using video-sharing sites, and although this survey does not include information about how many users upload content, it referred to a study of mobile usage which found that "34% of the cell phone owners in the country [had] shot video with their phone; 26% [had] watched video on their phone; and 22% [had] posted videos or photos online" (Moore 2011).

In 2013, "54% of adult Internet users have posted original photos or videos online that they themselves have created" (Duggan 2013). This group, referred to as *creators,* were further broken down into 52 % who post photos and 26% who have posted video online. This is an increase from 45% and 18% respectively in 2012 (Duggan 2013). Leaving the numbers for photo creation aside, Pew further notes that "those under 30 are particularly likely to be creators and women are more likely to be creators than men" (Purcell 2013). As we can see, the number of people posting video online is increasing year by year, but in terms of this thesis, the perhaps most interesting finding from Pew is that "for this group, the most common subject matter is friends and

family doing everyday things (58% post videos with this kind of content), followed closely by videos of themselves or others doing funny things (56%) and videos of events attended (54%)" (Purcell 2013). Further, Pew points out that "in contrast, those who post their own videos online are less likely to post videos that have been intentionally staged, scripted or choreographed (just 23% do this) or educational or tutorial videos they have shot themselves (30% do this)" (Purcell 2013). In other words, staged, scripted or performed videos are less likely among those referred to as content creators, or amateur filmmakers.

There are a number of empirical studies of videoblogging from the period under examination in this thesis, ranging from gender balance on YouTube (Molyneaux et al 2008) statistical overviews of users' motivations for videoblogging (Stoeckl et al 2007), overviews of technical requirements and tools available (Parker and Pfeiffer 2005), and advisory papers to governments and industry about the "inherent potential" in online video and videoblogging (McGuire et al 2007). For example, Stoeckl et al (2007) used the uses and gratification approach to determine the motivational forces behind blogging and videoblogging respectively.

In a study on YouTube from 2008, Molyneaux et al (2008) found that "men posted vlogs more than women – 58% to 33%; the gender of the vlogger could not be determined for the remaining 9%" and that "most vloggers, 61%, were adults ranging in age from 20 to 50 years, although about one-third, or 36%, were younger" (2008: 4).[34] They also found that "female vloggers are more likely to vlog about personal matters than male vloggers" with "more than 60% of the female-authored vlogs and less than half of the male- authored vlog (48%) were about personal themes". They further found that male vloggers tended to post about entertainment, and "public and technology related topics" whereas female vloggers were more likely to to interact with the community (Molyneaux et al 2008: 5).

Whereas the study found no significant difference in number of edits, sound or video quality in videos by male or female videobloggers, Molyneaux et al (2008) found a large difference in viewership numbers, where female vloggers received on average "6,797 views" and male vloggers attracting an average of "166 views" per video. When broken down, those tagged with "YouTube community" had both the least amount of edits and received the highest number of views, with personal videos, containing "the

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[34] Interestingly, "while the majority were created by men, 39% of the primary characters in the vlogs were women" (Molyneaux et al 2008: 10).

second least amount of scene cuts" coming second (Molyneaux et al 2008: 6). An analysis of the comments of four selected videos,[35] showed that the comments were "overwhelmingly negative" with 55% claiming that the videos were "boring" and 52% rated them poorly because they didn't know the vlogger (Molyneaux et al 2008: 8). The authors found that men were most likely to comment on the vloggers personal appearance, women were less likely to write negative comments, however, the male comments were also the most positive overall (Molyneaux et al 2008: 9). The study concluded that although more men than women tend to post videos to YouTube, the female vloggers have the same level of technical skills as the male vloggers, and a much higher interaction level than the male vloggers (Molyneaux et al 2008: 10).

Using statistical data drawn from a questionnaire completed by 792 participants, Stoeckl et al (2007) concluded that the motivation for producing online video was split between enjoyment, dissemination of information, contact-seeking and personal documentation. They further argue that "video production is more associated with fun and time passing then is weblogging" whereas "weblogging is regarded as being more useful in the dissemination of information" (Stoeckl et al 2007: 410). Monetary recompense was shown to have little or no motivational force. A number of de-motivations were identified as it being too time consuming, not having any interesting information to share, and concerns for privacy (Stoeckl et al 2007: 407).

An industry research group called Media Impact published a report on videoblogging in 2005 (Parker and Pfeiffer 2005). The report is mostly technical, outlining issues with search (at the time there was no meta data attached to video files, so they were not easily located using web searches) and quality (low bandwidth = low quality videos) (Parker and Pfeiffer 2005: 6). The paper discussed syndication, search, comments, hyperlinks and aggregation as the main obstacles to videoblogging. Interestingly, the article acknowledges that "video blogging will only come about through open development and collaboration between engineers and researchers from diverse fields" (Parker and Pfeiffer 2005: 8). The paper also claimed that the practice "will be fuelled by the passion and enthusiasm of those creating content— those who go to the trouble of recording their lives and opinions within the fledgling medium, shaping it as a lively and useful resource for generations of Internet users to come" (Parker and Pfeiffer 2005: 8).

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[35] This is clearly a very small sample, and thus it is hard to draw any definitive concluions based on the data analysed. However, the example serves as a useful snapshot of online behavior at this time.

McGuire et al (2007) categorised videoblogging as being "on the rise" and offering potential revenue to publishers who could "can take advantage of the higher ad revenue offered by embedded video compared to standard display and text ads" (McGuire et al 2007: 8). However, the authors did not see videoblogging as "providing another vehicle for long-form video news", instead they saw it as being there to "create a compelling adjunct or sidebar role, which video can play in making the core product more interesting, relevant and competitive in terms of time-share" (McGuire et al 2007: 7).

Approaches to Cultural History and Video

In this section, I examine the extant literature that draws both on media historical accounts and the nascent field of media archaeology. The aim is twofold, first to see how videoblogging has been somewhat neglected within standard cultural historical accounts of the rise of online networks, the internet and online video more generally, but also to use the insights of media archaeology, particularly its links with German media theory and its emphasis on the materiality of media,[36] which makes explicit certain characteristics in relation to undertaking a media history that I find useful. This is not to say that media history does not provide adequate resources or indeed follow similar methods in its historical approach, rather media archaeology with its strong notion of contestation of "success narratives" or teleological trajectories raises to a methodological principle the importance of disjunction, failure, breakdown and disappearance as part of parcel of the development of new media technologies – and

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[36] Here I also follow writers such as Chun (2012), Fuller (2008), and Manovich (2013a) subscribing to a material understanding of the digital, seeing videoblogs as material artefacts, rather than the temptation to explore immaterial aspects of videoblogging (seen for instance in Miles 2003). To consider videoblogs as immaterial objects fails to take into consideration their inherently material nature. Firstly, videoblogs depend entirely on physical technology both during production, distribution and consumption. At no point does a videoblog escape from this materiality. Take, for instance, Kirschenbaum's (2004) analysis of the hard drive. Storing a video for editing requires a hard drive. A hard drive is a non-volatile storage device made of rotating platters with magnetic surfaces, and a video file (as with all digital files) rests on this physical layer, without which it would not exist. In other words, although "as a written trace digital inscription [may be] invisible to the eye, […] it is not instrumentally undetectable or physically immaterial" (Kirschenbaum, 2004: 92). What this means, is that despite having little or no technical knowledge of the underlying structures of the computer, and particularly the hard drive, the videoblogger depends on its materiality, and rely on it's stability, for all her work. The irony here, as Kirchenbaum points out, is that "since hard disks, in most users' experience, either work flawlessly or else crash spectacularly, the notion of the device as a binary black box with no capacity for error short of global failure is perhaps inevitable. But these functional extremes are precisely what reinforce the dominant perception of immateriality" (Kirschenbaum, 2004: 95). It is also notable that exemplary as Kirschenbaum's "forensic" approach to the hard disk is, we must also note the historical nature of hard disks, which are themselves increasingly being replaced by a new material storage medium, namely solid-state drives (SSD). It is ironic that the very "immateriality" that hard disks made possible to experience, when looked back upon, were actually noisy mechanical, and actually quite fragile constituent parts of a computer. It is clear then that "immateriality" is an historically constructed and technically created form of experience in relation to the digital.

which, of course, were always "new" in the times in which they appeared. The aim, thus, is to remain open and reflexive about the way in which the cultural history of videoblogging did unfold.

There is a perceived problem within digital scholarship of losing track of an ever-expanding field that changes too rapidly for anyone to keep up whilst retaining a semblance of critical distance. There is thus a problem, as Mirzoeff argues, of "writing the digital present" – of somehow capturing, or freezing, the digital flow (Castells 2001) before it's gone, out-dated. As he asks,

> can the writing of the digital present and its implied futures only be accomplished by a counterhistory that refuses to tell a history of progress? How do we write a history of something that changes so fast it can seem like a full-time job keeping up, let alone learning the software? (Mirzoeff, quoted in Lovink 2011: 11).

In many ways, this thesis started as exactly that, engaging with and attempting to capture a rapidly changing "digital present" in which new technologies were announced glorified and abandoned on a yearly, if not monthly basis (see history of QuickTime in chapter 3 for an example of how new and updated versions of the software was released often many times a year). Many articles, papers and books published at the time shared a certain naïve optimism about the potential of the new digital technologies, seen for instance in Jenkins exploration of "participatory culture" (2006), which lauded digital technologies for their ability to bring people together and empower them to produce and consume content in completely new ways. As he later put it, "a participatory culture is one which not only lowers the barriers to participation but also creates strong social incentives to produce and share when one produces with others" (Jenkins 2009: 116).

No thesis dealing with online video can ignore YouTube, so it is useful to examine some of the most relevant literature on this platform. Indeed, this thesis exists in an adjacent relationship with a large volume of literature on YouTube, which is at once relevant and peripheral, due in particular to the strained relationship between the videobloggers and the YouTube platform (explored further in chapter 4). Nonetheless, YouTube was the first big commercial platform to truly embrace video as a serious contender in the information flow of the internet, and thus much early writing on videoblogging, online video and vlogging was focussed on YouTube and the communities, practices and aesthetics developed there. The literature on YouTube is vast, however, and here I have focussed on work directly relevant to this thesis. As such, this overview does not include discussions of statistical surveys (such as Gill et al

2007; Xu et al 2008), investigations into the impact of YouTube on elections (see for instance Gueorguieva 2007; Conway, Kenski and Wang 2013; Vergeer and Hermans 2012; Dylko et al 2012; Towner and Dulio 2011), research into gender and gender representations on YouTube (Molyneaux et al 2008), nor into the specifics of various communities within YouTube (Rotman et al 2009).

In 2008, Mitchem argued that "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 month and is the third most visited site in the United States after Google and Yahoo" (Mitchem 2008: 278). In 2014, YouTube boasts an impressive 1 billion unique visitors a month (YouTube Statistics 2014) although, as Geert Lovink reminds us, "YouTube's slogan, 'Broadcast Yourself', is put into action by less than 1 per cent of its users" (Lovink 2008: 11). Rather, he argues, "in this Long Tail age, we know that it's mainly about 'Broadcasting to Yourself'". In many ways, Snickars and Vonderau are correct when they argue that "the peculiarity of YouTube… lies in the way the platform has been negotiating and navigating between community and commerce" (Snickars and Vonderau 2009: 11).

Snickars and Vonderau argue that "YouTube is often spoken about as if it were a library, an archive, a laboratory or a medium like television, with the respective metaphor inviting hypothetical exploration of what YouTube's possible, probable and preferred futures might be" (Snickars and Vonderau 2009: 13). They also point out that although cultural contexts give the site different meanings, "from a computer-science viewpoint, YouTube is nothing but a database" (Snickars and Vonderau 2009: 13), which reflects Lovink's comment from 2008, "we no longer watch films or TV, we watch databases" (Lovink 2008).

Burgess and Green's (2009) research on YouTube attempts to tackle the platform holistically, and in so doing proves a useful overview of the service, it's users and cultural significance. However, it does so at the cost of much detailed investigation into the specifics of the platform. The monograph, based on a survey of 4320 videos sampled from six days across two weeks in August, October and November 2007, gives a valuable snapshot of YouTube in this period. This period falls at the latter end of the period analysed in this thesis. Using content analysis, the authors created a typology of the videos found on YouTube, from corporate advertising campaigns, via music videos, fan videos and vlogging. Burgess and Green (2009) link the success of YouTube to the

emergence and popular acceptance of web 2.0, and argue that "this shift from the idea of the website as a personal storage facility for video content to a platform for public self-expression matches YouTube to the ideas about a user-led revolution that characterizes rhetoric around 'Web 2.0'" (Burgess and Green 2009: 4).

One of the main findings by Burgess and Green was that over half the videos they surveyed were user-generated, 40% of which were vlogs (Burgess and Green 2009: 43). This demonstrates that by 2008, vlogging was a relatively established practice amongst the early adopters on YouTube. However, a more interesting finding, is the breakdown of the most favourited/most viewed videos in their sample, and most discussed/most responded videos. In fact, the traditional content, defined as "videos originally produced within the established media industry" (Burgess and Green 2009: 43), ranked higher than the user-generated content in terms of number of views and favourites. However, the user-generated content far outweighed the traditional when it came to most discussed and most responded to, thus reinforcing the value of vlogging for a sense of community;

> it seems that, more than any other form in the sample, the vlog as a genre of communication invites critique, debate, and discussion. Direct response, through comment and via video, is central to this mode of engagement. Vlogs are frequently responses to other vlogs, carrying out discussions across YouTube and directly addressing comments left on previous vlog entries (Burgess and Green 2009: 54).

Lange (2008a) argues that there are a number of what she calls (mis)conceptions about YouTube[37]. The first is that YouTube is a video sharing site, which she argues it both is (in the sense that you can share videos there) and isn't, in that "for a subset of participants, YouTube is an imagined community of people who share an interest in video making or communicating through interactive video" (Lange 2008a: 88). As such, YouTube is *more* than a video-sharing site. The second (mis)conception is the desire for researchers to study "ordinary people" on YouTube, arguing that "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" (Lange 2008a: 90). Lange argues that the technical requirements, time and effort it takes to post videos, coupled with the fact that only a small percentage of registered YouTube user actually post videos at all, means the idea of studying "ordinary users" is itself flawed.

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[37] She uses the term (mis)conceptions "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" (Lange 2008a: 87).

Thirdly, Lange argues that contrary to the fact that most users simply go to the site to watch particular videos, YouTube is a community, populated by users who invest in each other and each other's content. As she argues, "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" (Lange 2008a: 94).

In another study, Lange (2008b) explores the way YouTube users negotiate the public/private distinction in their social networks. She argues that YouTube encourages a "fractalisation of the public and private" and consequently, that the YouTubers negotiate being either "publicly private" or "privately public" on YouTube (Lange 2008b). Despite some claims that users articulate and negotiate their social networks through their profile page, by linking to and viewing other users' profiles (Donath and boyd 2004), Lange argues that this is merely one way that networks are formed on YouTube. In addition, YouTubers use a carefully managed technical approach to sharing their videos, an approach that is linked directly with their sense of private and public. For instance, some users choose to use YouTube's "friends-only" sharing option, whereas others carefully manage how much private information to reveal in their videos. Other ways to manage privacy is to carefully choose either private tags (to avoid getting noticed) or popular tags (for more exposure).

In contrast, Losh (2008) argues that "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'" (Losh 2008: 111). She further argues that although "there may be real human beings populating the audience constellations of YouTube… they satisfy stock roles, such as griefer, self-promoter, parodist, pundit, and seconder of motions" (Losh 2008: 112).

In a more critical engagement with YouTube, Juhasz (2008) argues that although "YouTube delivers fast, fun, videos that are easy to understand and easy to get, it also efficiently delivers hungry eyeballs to advertisers" (Juhasz 2008: 135). Through an analysis of the difference between user generated content and professional content, Juhasz points out that YouTube "is not the level or uniform playing field people want to pretend it to be" (Juhasz 2008: 136). Vlogs are "bad" videos, unedited with "little attention to form or aesthetics while carefully attending to the daily life, feelings, and thoughts of the maker", and "depend upon the intimate communication of the spoken

word" (Juhasz 2008: 136),[38] whereas corporate videos are "music-driven, quickly-edited, glossy, slogan-like vernacular of music videos, commercials, and comix. They consolidate ideas into icons; meaning is lost to feeling" (Juhasz 2008: 136). Burgess and Green (2009) refer to Graeme Turner's discussion of the myth of DIY culture, and argue that "even when ordinary people become celebrities through their own creative efforts, there is no necessary transfer of media power: they remain within the *system* of celebrity native to, and controlled by, the mass media" (Burgess and Green 2009: 23). Burgess and Green further argue that vlogs posted on YouTube are not simply based on "a desire to broadcast the self" (2009: 26). Viewed instead as what Burgess (2007) calls "vernacular culture", "the creation and sharing of videos functions culturally as a means of social networking as opposed to a mode of 'cultural production'" (Burgess and Green 2009: 26).

Richard (2008) argues that YouTube perpetuates an "ideology of authenticity" (2008: 143) linked to the poor-quality recording tools and subsequent poor resolution images produced. She argues that this aesthetic, together with the small windows displaying videos "conspire to create 'a look of everyday life'" (Richard 2008: 143). She argues that far from being a "substitution or… an exchange for classic media art", YouTube videos are a "supplement, a marginal but important fresh addition and revitalisation of art" (Richard 2008: 150), with YouTube bringing to light previously invisible practices. As she argues, through YouTube, "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" (Richard 2008: 150, see also Jenkins 2009:110).

In this thesis, the notion of authenticity is drawn from Michael Renov (2004) who speaks of the "lure of authenticity" associated with documentary filmmaking, achieved through a "cunning appropriation of particular tactics or stylistic traits (the use of 'witnesses'; the low-tech look, shaky camera; grainy, out-of-focus images)" (Renov 2004: 22). Renov also points out that some non-fiction "itself displays a number of 'fictive elements' – instances of style, structure, and expositional strategy that draw on pre-existent (fictional) constructs or schemata to establish meanings and effects for audiences" (Renov 2004: 22).

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[38] Or as Sean Cubitt notes, "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" (2008: 45)

In addition to the studies mentioned above, a number of studies on YouTube point to how YouTube has transformed the distribution model for vernacular video, but also for artists more generally (Jenkins 2007). Sarah Cook (2008) for instance, traces the work of several artists who use the internet, and YouTube in particular, to exhibit and publicise their work. She argues that "YouTube and other video sharing sites work because users can link to the video content from many places online (social networking sites, blog posts, scholarly articles, personal websites, etc.)" (Cook 2008: 180). Mitchem argues that media is parasitic (following the work of Michel Serres) and that "the media sphere (including 'old' media) continually adapts in reaction to user-generated content" (Mitchem 2008: 273). Consequently, "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" (Mitchem 2008: 273). Mitchem argues that this parasitic relationship works both ways, YouTube feeds on content from the broadcast media, whereas broadcast media in return start producing content appropriate for YouTube (see also Croteau 2007).

Despite the commercial success of sites such as YouTube, and its relatively large uptake among users, the practice of videoblogging (as conceptualised here; divorced from any video publishing platform, and located within the community I explore) has remained under-researched. Whereas much attention has been lavished on blogging (for a small sample see Blood 2000, boyd 2007, Bruns 2007, Walker 2006), and a number of texts have dealt exclusively with YouTube (Lovink and Niederer 2008; Burgess and Green 2007, Snickars and Vonderau 2009, Lange 2008a, 2008b, 2009), videoblogging itself remains an under-developed area of research within media studies.[39]

Despite its success, then, online video production is in no way limited to the YouTube platform. Nor is it limited to a few experts producers or media corporation. On the contrary, "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" (Sherman 2008: 161). This clearly

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[39] Some of the research into Netporn has discussed some of the issues related to video production in an amateur as opposed to a professional environment, however, this work is somewhat tangential to videoblogging as a practice that I explore in this thesis, but see Paasonen (2010).

includes video that exist across a plethora of platforms, be it Vimeo, Vine or on independent videoblogs.

The perhaps most notable scholarship specifically on videoblogging, and the work that intercepts most closely with my own, is the writings of Adrian Miles (2000, 2003, 2007, 2008), Will Luers (2007), Matthew Clayfield (2007) and some of the anthropological work of Patricia Lange (2007). Lange's work generally focuses on YouTube, see for instance her most recent study of kids on YouTube (Lange 2014). However, in 2007, Lange carried out an ethnographic project on a small group of female videobloggers, exploring the feminist motto "the personal is political" in relation to the vulnerability female videobloggers face online. In her paper on the "vulnerable videoblogger," Lange's attention is focussed on a small group of women from the same community of users as the present work. Her findings are therefore illuminating, and drawn upon in this thesis. Lange argues that "sharing intimacies" on the videoblogging platform is "socially transformative" because it offers women a space in which "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" (Lange 2007). They achieve this, Lange argues, "by being vulnerable and sharing intimate moments and choices" (Lange 2007).

Her paper is an exploration of "how certain woman video bloggers' work and personal choices use intimacy to create reactions in viewers that encourage reconsideration of the blogger's own and viewers' ideas about social action and values" (Lange 2007), and draws on interviews with 17 videobloggers and a close reading of their videos. Lange is particularly interested in the notion of vulnerability and the potential risks that the videobloggers (and especially the female videobloggers) accept as part of posting intimate and personal moments online. Her research concludes that this risk is considered acceptable when seen in relation to the benefits brought to the videoblogger from posting these moments online. In fact, Lange concludes that "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."

In contrast, Will Luers (2007) argues that whereas "the spectacle of everyday" and "the intimate view of private life" has always been of interest to the film and television industries, "what is different about videoblogs (or vlogs) is the spectacle of the un-commodified everyday" (Luers 2007). Luers argues that although there are examples of videoblogs attempting to monetise their practice, there is "something new"

about videoblogging; "a social context that is not explicitly market-driven" (Luers 2007). Luers recognises that although the technologies available to the videobloggers (be it "RSS feeds, video compression codecs, and tagging systems") can be seen as technical extension of advertising strategies, aimed at allowing the videblogger maximum exposure and reach of her videoblogs, "rather than compete for attention in the marketplace, most vloggers look to their peers for feedback and conversation. For perhaps the first time, we have a somewhat organized public arena for a cinema without show business" (Luers 2007).

For Luers, people videoblog to make their life "cinematic" (Luers 2007). He asks; "what is it like to make one's life 'cinematic'? Why is 'dramatic conflict' a necessary filter for understanding the stories we inhabit everyday? What is missing in our private lives that can be rediscovered (recovered) and shared as video with others?" (Luers 2007). For Luers, it is this idea of "living cinematically" that lies at the heart of videoblogging, a need to aestheticise the everyday through the process of framing, editing and (re)-presenting the personal. As he argues, "digital production tools and online distribution systems do indeed make us global citizens with an 'expansive visual vocabulary'. But as a model for an emergent global cinema culture, videoblogging has rediscovered a collective value in the local and the personal. Not the bland universals offered by the entertainment industries, but the thickness of daily experience" (Luers 2007).

Adrian Miles has written extensively on videoblogging, theorising it as a soft media form (2003), engaging with the discourses surrounding the practice, particularly with regard to they way it was "currently defining itself against the mirror of contemporary popular television, and to a lesser extent various forms of independent film practice (documentary, essay films, travelogue, no budget cinema, home movies, and so on)" (Miles 2007). As well as being an early practitioner of videoblogging, and writing the Vogma manifesto (Miles 2000), Miles has written extensively on "softvideo" and videoblogging. Miles comes out of a hypertext/ electronic literature tradition, and so treats what he calls "desktop video" (2008: 116) as "a writerly space where content structures are malleable, variable, and more analogous to hypertext than to what we ordinarily understand digital video to be" (2008: 115). He also argues that videoblogs are "less about consumption (watching others' content) than exploring models for authorship and production . . . it is the ability to participate as communicative peers that is much more significant and viable for distributed networks

than our reconstitution into new consumers" (Miles 2003: 230). This literary approach to videoblogging, both in form and content, relates strongly to Miles' argument that "hypertext can be viewed as a postcinematic writing practice in its combination of minor meaningful units (shots and nodes) and their possible relations (edits and links)" (Miles 2008: 116).

Miles developed the notion of softvideography (Miles 2003, 2008), a form of digital video where the medium of consumption (the computer) is no longer divorced from the medium of production (the computer also). Miles also explores the notion of soft media, a 'new' media form that has been created without the intention of ever being shared beyond a single viewer (at a time) on this viewer's personal digital device. The notion of softvideography is useful in thinking about early forms of videoblogging, the way in which much of this media was in fact never, or at least very rarely, broadcast outside of the confines of a computer, but in discussing the "writerly space" of the computer screen, however, Miles tends to focus on the embodied practice of the author/practitioner (videbloggers), without engaging with the materiality of digital technology itself.

Deriding what he sees as the disconnect between the discourses of "newness" and medial innovation amongst videobloggers, and the actual, conservative empirical facts of the videos themselves, Clayfield (2007) argues that whereas "the dominant authorial-rhetorical line of the vlogopshere… is one that celebrates digital democracy, citizen's media and multidirectional conversation… a highly progressive alternative to mainstream, corporate media" the reality is that the majority of videoblogging "remain inherently, if unconsciously, conservative" (Clayfield 2007). Clayfield argues that the problem with the videobloggers' failure to close the gap between their discourse and their practice is not a lack of creative intention, but a failure to allow the videos to speak for themselves; "what hinders the realisation of videoblogging's potential is not authorial discourse per se," Clayfield argues, it is "its overbearing dominance over and silencing of other discourses, especially that of the media object itself, which when listened to has much to say" (Clayfield 2007).

Miles (2006) agrees with Clayfield's assessment of the disconnect between the discourses emerging from the videoblogging community and the videoblogs themselves, arguing that although the videobloggers might say they are providing "an alternative to the views covered in the mainstream media, the forms of audio and video which are distributed and published via blogs remain resolutely conservative in their

interpretation of how audio and video [function] as a material practice and object"
(Miles 2006). Instead, Miles argue that "what remains novel in the audio and video
blogging model is only the range and ease of distribution" (Miles 2006) and that "by
and large, they continue to follow those media forms and formats which have been
established over the course of decades in the broadcast media" (Miles 2006). Clayfield
states that "most videoblogs lift their forms and formats directly from television, and
only very rarely in resistant, critical or subversive ways. *Rocketboom* mimics a
newscast; Steve Garfield's *The Carol & Steve Show* presents itself as a homemade
sitcom" (Clayfield 2007).

However, I argue that both Miles and Clayfield fail to place any great
significance on the materiality of videoblogs, as well as on their situatedness in an
invested network of practice (as shown above, Miles believes the videoblog content
remains unchanged by disconnecting it from the videoblog).

Luers (2007) argues that videoblogging provides a social function, allowing
feelings of connection, validation of ideas and experience, emphasised by the way the
members of the videoblogging community look to one another for feedback and
support. For both Miles and Luers, then, videoblogging provides communicative
networks and a sense of community, which is far more important than the content
produced.

As Chanan (2012) points out, there is a clear lack within film studies of giving
attention to semi-pro film production like videoblogging. Chanan points out that
videoblogging, because it is "not premised on practical knowledge of film production
(and has little appreciation of production practices beyond the Hollywood studio
system)" (Chanan 2012:4), does not "figure" as a topic within film studies. He points
out that because of the individual nature of videoblogging (usually one person does
everything, from conceptualising the idea, filming, editing and production, through to
dissemination), the practice also does not fall into the category of traditional
documentary production, nor does it equate with the "politicised film-making of thirty
or forty years ago" (Chanan 2012: 4). Instead, Chanan draws similarities with the work
of Alexandre Astruc and the concept of the *caméra stylo* – "the idea of the camera as a
tool to write with – indeed twice over, first, when you shoot and then when you write
the film on the timeline" (Chanan 2012: 4). I am very sympathetic to this
conceptualisation of videoblogging, but whereas Chanan's work is focussed on
videoblogging in relation to activism and citizen journalism, my work will extend this

to focus primarily on the autobiographical aspect of short-form digital film. Here it is useful to look at Curran and Marshall's (2011) article on educational blogs, which give a brief history of the videoblogging group, but is focussed mainly on the potential of blogging more generally. Curran (2009) also provides a more detailed history of podcasting, categorising videoblogging as a "new" iteration of the podcasting genre.

Heidenreich proposes three possible futures for online video, though he also envisages that these three might co-exist as well. The first he calls the "parasite mode" (Heidenreich 2011: 23), which essentially appropriates collaborative practices into corporate advertising and marketable data, creating branded events. The second format relies on the "increasing embeddedness of images in the real world" (Heidenreich 2011: 23), and explores the creation of "rich images that contain tagging, face-recognition and other symbolic appropriations of the visual" (Heidenreich 2011: 23), though I imagine this format could also potentially contain other contextual data like metadata, geo-locative data and so on. Thirdly, Heidenreich proposes the "possibility of a collaborately created visual world" (Heidenreich 2011: 23), where art lives in a collaboratively created wiki-like existence where authorship is only asserted "occasionally when needed" (Heidenreich 2011: 23). It is not clear when this would be, however.[40]

While remaining focussed on the importance of studying and understanding the materialities of digital artefacts, this chapter draws attention to a point made by Manovich (2001) and highlighted by Bishop (2012), who argues that "in foregrounding… two-way communication as a fundamental cultural activity (as opposed to one way flow or a film or a book), the Internet asks us to reconsider the very paradigm of an aesthetic object: Can communication between users become the subject of an aesthetic?" (Bishop 2012). The idea of communication being fundamental to the digital aesthetic seems particularly useful when revisiting the work of the videobloggers and elucidates aspects of the practice in new and interesting ways.

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[40] In her paper on digital art, in which she laments the disavowal of the digital within the art world, the art historian Claire Bishop (2012) asks what it means to "see, think and filter affect" through the digital. For Bishop, it is not enough to use digital technologies to make, display or disseminate art, instead, she argues, "the digital is, on a deep level, the shaping condition – even the structuring paradox – that determines artistic decisions to work with certain formats and media" (Bishop 2012), and, as such, artists need to engage more fully with the digital *itself* and confront what the digital *is*. I should add that media artists and scholars have been engaging with "the digital" for years, see for instance the work of Phil Morton, in particular his video art "Copy-it-Right" (Morton 1976) which, in which he makes plain the process by which he is creating art through bringing together analogue and digital technologies. See also John Whitely's video *Catalog* (1961), which was made by re-purposing military artillery computers and re-programming them to create art. Whitely's artwork was itself highly influential on Apple computers' screensaver art and iTunes visualiser art. See also Lovejoy (2004).

The digital aesthetic of communication, and the mediation of communication, is also illustrated in the movie *LOL* (2006). In his essay on the *mumblecore*[41] movie, Christian (2011) describes how director Joe Swanberg creates intimacy between his characters; a couple in a long-distance relationship which is being mediated through mobile technology, by utilising a digital aesthetic; "an aesthetic which was born of visual cultures on the Internet… the visual culture created by new media technologies: the exhaustive use of the close-up, for example, and the use of direct address and subjective camera, styles based in webcams and YouTube" (Christian 2011: 117). Although Christian here describes the formal traits of the digital aesthetic (the elements that make it up, such as the close-up, webcams and so on), it is through the process of communication (their entire relationship is "mediated through mobile technology") that the digital aesthetic is born and developed. He also acknowledges that this aesthetic was born out of "webcams and YouTube".[42]

Indeed, this is an aesthetic that includes the autobiographical, the amateur and the journalistic as shown by Lim (2013), who explores videoblogging in a Malaysian context, arguing that new media acts as an "enabling platform" (Lim 2013: 311) that "has opened the door to a new kind of citizen-based 'grassroots' journalism; videos are cheap to produce, do not require extensive skills, and, more importantly, allow for once-silenced voices to speak out and engage a wider (external) audience" (Lim 2013: 313). This highlights the potential for videoblogging to act both as a coming together of disparate and dissatisfied voices and as a representation of a nation in the midst of a changing political climate. As she acknowledges, however, the paper does not delve into the practices of videoblogging or indeed into individual videos, and Lim calls for future research to "look further to examine each individual video… including personal video channels on online video-sharing platforms that have garnered 'high viewership', and develop a relevant framework to analyze its contents" (Lim 2007: 312).

Virtual Communities and Social Networks

The concept of "virtual communities" was in use as far back as in 1968 (Licklider and Taylor, in Rheingold 1993, see also Feenberg and Bakardjieva 2004), however, it first received prominence through the work of Howard Rheingold (1993), whose study of

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[41] Mumblecore is a term describing "a small movement of mostly white, male filmmakers making cheap, realist movies exploring the lives of young people at the dawn of the twenty-first century" (Jean Christian 2011: 117).
[42] For a feminist critique of webcam culture, see Jimroglou (1999).

The Well forms the basis for much early writing on web communities. For Rheingold, a virtual community is a space to meet friends with similar interests to oneself, and departs most strongly from notions of "standard" or "offline" communities in terms of the effect on or possibilities for the individual, in particular with regards to questions of identity. As he asked, "are relationships and commitments as we know them even possible in a place where identities are fluid?... We reduce and encode our identities as words on a screen, decode and unpack the identities of others" (1993: 61). This relates strongly to the argument posed by Poster (1995), who argued,

> virtual communities derive some of their verisimilitude from being treated as if they were plain communities, allowing members to experience communications in cyberspace as if they were embodied social interactions. Just as virtual communities are understood as having the attributes of 'real' communities, so 'real' communities can be seen to depend on the imaginary: what makes a community vital to its members is their treatment of the communications as meaningful and important. Virtual and real communities mirror each other in chiasmic juxtaposition (Poster 1995).

Question about online spaces and identity are explored further by Sherry Turkle (1997), who argued that "when we step through the screen into virtual communities, we reconstruct our identities on the other side of the looking glass" (1997: 177). Turkle's argument, that individuals can be "whoever they want" on the internet, was strongly influenced by her research into early virtual spaces, such as the Lambda MOO and MUDS, that encouraged playfulness with regard to identity. However, further research has revealed that peoples' online identities more often correspond to their offline selves than not (see for instance Markham 1998; Kendall 2002, Castells 2001). For Bakardjieva and Feenberg (2004), presenting a "stable" identity (preferably genuine) is one of the key conditions for the successful establishment of an online community.[43]

There is a vast literature on the relationship between internet activity and identity formation (Baym 2000, Bechar-Israeli 1995, Donath 1999, Jones 1997, Turkle 1997, Poster 1995). Much of this literature started with an emphasis on the online versus offline identity (Turkle 1997, Poster 1995, Jones 1997), a distinction which makes less sense today, when the use of smart devices that are with us all time and which negotiate all our interactions through the one device, leaves the online and offline

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[43] The use of the word "stable" here is not intended in a normative fashion and perhaps the word "consistent" would be preferable, pointing to the fact that a user assume a "consistent" profile across multiple points in the network.

distinction less useful. Below I want to trace some of the writings on the internet and identity, particularly with regard to blogging.

In her seminal study of life on the screen (1997), Turkle explored notions of identity in the age of the internet. She argued that some of the early communities online "can become a centre for discovering who one is and wishes to be" (Turkle 1997: 184). For Turkle, the online activities of a user had the ability to make the user reflect on their offline self, "having literally written our online personae into existence, we are in a position to be more aware of what we project into everyday life" (Turkle 1997: 263). In other words, the user may not have a fully formed understanding of who she is, but being online and creating a persona there, might help her understand how she constructs herself offline.

Turkle (1997) argues that the anonymity afforded by computer-mediated communications technologies (CMCs) can have a liberating effect on users. By "hiding" behind an avatar, Turkle argues that ideas or identities that are otherwise off-limit can be explored. Turkle explored the ways in which use of CMCs affects the user, and particularly, how identity is altered by, for instance, the multiple windows on the computer screen (see also Murray 1997, Friedberg 2006). Turkle's analysis included interviews with users of MOO's and MUD's and raised interesting questions about gender and politics, community, sexuality and identity. Her basic premise was that by stepping "through the looking glass" (Turkle, 1997: 9), by leaving the physical body behind, the user could achieve things not possible in "the real world;" such as gender-swapping at the click of a button (1997: 211). Turkle's work forms the basis of most subsequent work on online identity.

Hevern's (2000) study of identity and personal homepages found that there was a "striking complexity to the ways individuals deploy textual, graphic, and other elements to create a personal presence in cyberspace" (Hevern 2000: 8). Hevern agued that personal homepages "give authors a better sense of self-understanding and personal efficacy", "foster social relationships and contact with other people" (Hevern 2000: 13), "allow authors to 'try on' a new identity" (Hevern 2000: 14) and "fashion a new meaning for experiences and a new sense of the self" (Hevern 2000: 15). Further, homepages "permit authors to reach out to others as helpers, guides, or sources of information" (Hevern 2000:15), which also sometimes means raising socio-political issues they are interested in in order to "create an environment which is more congenial than or supplements the author's off-line world" (Hevern 2000: 16). Finally, Hevern

found that "the online self is generally an accurate representation of the offline self" (2000: 17).

Alongside questions of identity and community, lies an array of issues regarding the concept of private and public. These concepts are complex, rich and heterogeneous, and I cannot do justice to the large literature here. Suffice to say that here I am working with a conception of public/private drawn, at least initially, from the work of Jürgen Habermas (1989), for whom the public sphere was based on open interactions between free citizens in the political realm, and the private sphere was founded on hidden interactions between free individuals in the domestic realm (see Habermas 1989: 3).[44]

Here, I draw particular attention to the feminist critiques by Jean Bethke Elsthain ([1981] 1993) and Nancy Fraser (2013). As Elshtain argues, "human beings have and continue to divide their lives into one or more of a bewildering number of possible variants on the public and private. These divisions bear implications for women and politics" (Elshtain, 1993: 11). And as Fraser (2013) argues, "the household, like the paid workplace, is a site of labor, albeit of unremunerated and often unrecognized labor" (Fraser 2013: 28). So, whilst these discussions are not the main focus of this chapter, the issues they raise are crucial to the negotiation of public and private in videoblogs, particularly with regard to gendered approaches and responses from the videoblogger and so remain a crucial touchstone throughout the thesis.

The "private" and "public" videoblogger cannot be easily separated, and there exists tremendous overlap between the personal and community practice as observed. However, videoblogging exists within this very tension – the intimate, personal nature of the videos mixed with the inherent public nature of the form. Here, the work of Silverstone is useful, particularly his distinction between "sharable" and "shared" media (Silverstone 2006: 91). This I argue is at the heart of the short-form digital film, and which Patricia Lange has argued "may translate into larger spheres of social action and political participation" (Lange 2007). In other work, Lange draws a distinction between being "privately public" and "publicly private" (2008b: 372). Being privately public "means making connections with many other people, while being relatively private with regard to sharing identity information" (Lange 2008b: 372). What distinguishes people in this category is that they are actively extending their friend/subscriber base, whilst

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[44] I would recommend Habermas (1962) as a useful starting point for thinking about the public sphere and its structural transformation, but also see Outhwaite (2009) and Dews (1999). The importance of historicizing the public/private dichotomy has also been argued elsewhere, (Benhabib 1992, Susen 2011)

being very protective of their private data. In contrast, being "publicly private" indicates a user who willingly and publicly shares private or intimate information about herself, yet tries very hard to limit the reach of the videos produced, either by making the video "friends-only" or by manipulating the tags to limit reach. "The first part of this compound expressions thus refers to the *amount of identity information* imparted by video makers. The second part refers to the *available physical access to the video and to the interpretative content* that may be understood only by the video maker and a few viewers" (Lange 2008b: 370).

Castells (2001) argues that we are seeing a rise in "networked individualism" – where electronic communication encourages a different, or enhanced form of sociality, allowing groups of individuals to come together to form collectives based around interests. For Castells, contra Rheingold, the focus is on the individual, as opposed to on the community as such. Rather than alienating individuals from their (offline) communities, Castells argues that social networks actually increase their participation with other people, both online and off.

Similarly, Bakardjieva (2003) argues that virtual communities contribute towards what she calls "immobile socialization" – by which she means "socialization of private experience through the invention of new forms of intersubjectivity and social organization online" (Bakardjieva 2003: 291). Drawing on Raymond Williams' concept of "mobile privatization," the "withdrawal of middle-class families from public spaces of association and sociability into private suburban homes" (Bakardjieva 2003: 291) as a result of broadcast technologies and the automobile, Bakardjieva argues that "the Internet is being mobilized in a process of collective deliberation and action in which people engage from their private realm" (2003: 291).

Blanchard (2004) argues that "blogs have the potential to evolve into socially beneficial, self-sustaining virtual communities" due to their technical features, mainly comment sections and blogrolls, which provides interactions between the author and the audience, and "interlinking of blogs… around particular topics' respectively" (Blanchard 2004). She further argues that "it is possible that a sense of community may develop and be shared between these interactive blogs. This will decrease the dependence of the virtual community on any one blog author and increase the chances of viability for the virtual blog community as a whole" (Blanchard 2004). Whilst I agree with Blanchard's emphasis on blogrolls and comments as having provided a technical means for interaction between users, her study is limited because of her focus on a

single blog as the basis for a community. She asks whether a blog can provide the "virtual settlement" (Jones 1997) upon which a virtual community can be established, whereas in contrast this thesis sees the potential community emerging from a network of different, yet interlinking blogs – a network that also extends outside of the 'blogosphere' and onto other platforms and virtual spaces.[45]

In their work, and in what has become a dominant understanding of social networks, Ellison (2007) defines social networks as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (Ellison 2007: 211). Points 2 and 3 certainly connect to notions of the videoblogging community, whereas her first point that shows the move from virtual communities to social networks. For the videoblogging community, there was no "bounded system" – rather the community was spread over multiple sites, their own individual sites included, the community email group and various "offline" meet-ups. This was chiefly due to the need to create the technical systems to support videoblogging practices and lack of agreement about what that practice might be.

In examining identity and community online, it is important to return to the materiality of media, particularly Roger Silverstone's work, which emphasises the exploration of both the material and cultural dimensions of technology use and reuse. In particular, I draw on his concept of the double articulation of media. As Livingstone explains,

> Through the concept of double articulation, Silverstone… contrasts the analysis of the media qua material objects located in particular spatio-temporal settings with the analysis of the media qua texts or symbolic messages located within the flows of particular socio-cultural discourses, precisely in order to demand that we integrate the two (Livingstone 2007: 18).

Silverstone argues that "through the structure and contents of its programming as well as through the mediation of public and private spheres more broadly, [television] draws the members of the household into a world of public and shared meanings as well as providing some of the raw material for the forging of their own private, domestic

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[45] Blogrolls were an early social networking technology that created networks of related blogs listen on the sidebars of a blog, indicating that the author either liked or endorsed the blogs on her blogroll. With the rise of web 2.0 the function of the blogroll changed. The use of RSS feeds meant one could start subscribing to feeds rather than blogs (and new services, like Feedburner or delicio.us, that allowed the user to organize the feeds she subscribed to became popular). With the rise of social media, the blogroll has all but disappeared, but remains an interesting historical curiosity.

culture" (Silverstone 1994: 83). To Silverstone, the double articulation of television depends on the active involvement of the consumer to "domesticate" both the object and the medium. He points out that this process of domestication starts with production, carries on through marketing and ends with the consumption of media. The notion of "domestication" sits uncomfortably with many, particularly feminist scholars (see for instance Tait (2007) on television's role in domesticating plastic surgery; see also Berker et al 2005). Indeed, Silverstone did attempt to deal with this in his later work, where he "managed to show the dangers of domestication" (Hartman 2007: 11). Instead of a "domestic technology", then, I would like to keep in mind that videoblogging is also an *intimate technology*[46] – an interesting contradictory element of videoblogging shown by the fact that videoblogging is also in some sense shared in public. Here, I am pointing towards the way in which technologies form part of/are formed by the quotidian experience of the user, and thus acts a mediator between the personal experiences of the videoblogger, and the public representation of these through the videoblog. Vetere et al (2005) argue that "even though an intimate relationship often requires no mediation, new technologies are regularly manipulated to help us feel connected with those for whom we care". Vetere et al's work is interesting; focussing on the way technologies can mediate intimacy for the user, however, here, intimate technologies is meant to denote a use of technology that is located in the sphere of the home, yet mediated through "public" technologies into a "sharable, but not necessarily, or inevitably shared" world (Silverstone 2006: 91).

This thesis follows Silverstone (1999a) and Couldry (2004) in a move beyond a traditional theoretical divide within media studies, which Couldry defines as the "unprofitable disputes of the past... [seeing] media as texts or media as a production economy" (Couldry 2004: 115). As Couldry argues, this dispute is not productive and sees audience research and screen theory arguing over the "determining status of the

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[46] Others have previously used the concept of intimate technologies in different context. The V2_lab in the Netherlands did a project called *Intimacy* (V2_lab 2010) exploring the relationship between fashion and technology. The project, culminating in the exhibition *Pretty Smart Textiles*, explored the use of electronics in textiles, creating fabrics that can be augmented depending on where the wearer is in relationship to others, as well as how it is worn. "Clothing can be considered a second skin and by implementing technology in it, you are bringing it into your intimate space," says Nicky Assmann, an e-textile designer whose work was part of a recent exhibition in the Netherlands. "You are not just carrying technology like a laptop or an iPhone, but wearing it constantly" (Ganapati 2010). The intimate technologies explored in the V2_lab project, then, were different in design and scope from the technologies I am seeking to explore here. Whereas the V2_lab exhibition is interesting in the way it explores the physical intimacy of wearing technology close to the body. The concept of intimate technologies was also explored in a paper by Vetere et al (2005), discussing the potential for developing technologies that allowed for greater physical intimacy in relationships.

text" (Couldry 2004: 116), and audience research and political economy disagreeing over "the importance of audience practices of meaning-making" (Couldry 2004: 116). Instead, Couldry suggests that a focus on *media as practice* allows us to move beyond and above the text itself, move the production economy of media to the background, and instead focus more specifically on media as practice. Couldry himself draws heavily on the work of Silverstone (1994, 1999a), who made one of the first serious attempts to bridge this theoretical gap within media studies (see Couldry 2008: 380-381).

In this thesis, I use the term *invested network*, instead of the more problematic notion of community, which although having been adopted by early writers of the internet, still retains notions of geographical or national togetherness (as used, for instance, by Benedict Anderson (1991) in his notion of imagined communities). Although I would be quite comfortable with the concept "collective" which indicates both close geographical proximity (see Gomez Cruz and Ardevol 2013) and the idea that the members have chosen to join, participate and cooperate because of similar interest in a particular issue, artistic endeavour or practice, the term invested network tries to capture the idea of something more than a pure socio-technical network. Indeed, videobloggers do not necessarily share a geographical location, nor are they necessarily brought together because of a particular issue (see for instance membership of the website mumsnet, which despite a vast number of lurkers, is aimed primarily at mothers). An invested network isn't a club or membership related, in that, following the technical logic of networks, it is open to anyone, and yet, paradoxically, there is a sense of belonging and community. As Luers argues, "what is clear is that network value defines different social needs: being connected, finding validation for one's experience and ideas, being a producer as well as a consumer" (2007).

A large amount of writing exists on the rise of amateur or participatory culture (see Jenkins 2006, Benkler 2006), showing how new digital media technologies are allowing user-generated content to compete with professionally produced content.[47] This rhetoric has been challenged by those who argue that instead of signalling a liberation of the individual creativity of the ordinary user, participatory culture is nothing but a "glamorization of the user" (Baym and Burnett 2009: 435) that leads to the exploitation of the labour (see Hardt and Negri 2001, Terranova 2000) produced by volunteers working for free for the benefit of massive corporations. Niederer and van

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[47] Although, as has been shown, the internet is by no means a level playing field (see for example Marsden 2010).

Dijck (2010) argue that the idea of the wisdom of the crowd is further problematized by the "technological tools and managerial system[s]" that "structure and maintain" the content produced within these sites (Niederer and van Dijck 2010:1368). Instead, they argue, sites such as Wikipedia are in fact sociotechnical systems, or as Latour calls them " 'sociotechnical ensembles' in which the strict division between 'material infrastructure' and 'social superstructure' is to be dissolved" (Niederer and van Dijck 2010: 1373).

Identity-formation or creation has been strongly linked to the activity of blogging. For instance, Chandler (1998) argues that (if done reflexively) authors can "change ourselves to who we really want to be" (Chandler 1998) through writing their home pages. Reed defines the weblog as an "index of self" (Reed 2005: 230); "a space in which persons can be themselves, free of constraints and able to say what they think and feel about everyone around them" (Reed 2005: 230). Hevern (2000) describes the bloggers' identity formation as a journey

> bloggers travel along connected paths through their lives... they look back on what has happened to them and forward to what might occur... Identity is conceived here as an ongoing process of construction across both time and space, one in which an author draws out and twists together a multi-layered overlapping set of concerns, beliefs and engagements among the postings (Hevern 2004: 332).

Whether bloggers feel that it is the ability to edit themselves or the immediacy of their posting that best represent their 'online' identities, it would seem that the blog acts as a digital representation of how they see themselves, as well as afford the blogger a sense of empowerment. boyd (2006a) argues that bloggers "refer to how the blog gives them a locatable voice and identity in the digital world" (boyd 2006a). To them, "their blogs [are] their online identity, their digital representation" (boyd 2006a).

Cheung (2004) argues that personal homepages increase the users ability to present themselves in a particular fashion, in part because they can draft the text they present to the world, and keep re-editing it even after publication. This is "despite the fact that the home page gives its owner no control over who might read it in what context and no way to interactively modify the impression given depending on the individual reader's reaction" (Brake 2009: 19). For Cheung "the global reachability of the personal home page enables the home page author to get validatory feedback from net browsers who empathize or share with the author's identity or narrative" (Cheung 2004: 61). This is in contrast to Reed (2005), who argues that "at the heart of journal

blogging is an ethos of immediacy. Weblogs entries are meant to be 'of the moment', a record of how the individual felt or thought at that particular point in time" (Reed 2005: 227). Reed further argues that bloggers "often… actively downplay their role as writers or authors… insisting that there is no real act of construction in what they do" (Reed 2005: 228).[48]

Whereas Reed (2005) argues that this sense of authorship is downplayed by the blogger, when it comes to videobloggers, the opposite has been argued. Burgess and Green (2009: 29) for instance, claim that on YouTube, "self-promotion is assumed to be a principal motivation" and "amateurs are represented as individualistic, self-expressive producers who are mainly interested in 'broadcasting themselves', rather than engaging in textual productivity as a means to participation in social networks" (Burgess and Green 2009: 29-30). As a result, "the collective practice of user-led content creation is side-lined in favour of individualistic narratives of web celebrity and self-expression" (Burgess and Green 2009: 30).

Sherman argues that "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" (Sherman 2008: 161). Tollmann (2008) sees YouTube as an "extra reality" (2008: 172), in the sense that you can always find a video on the site that relates to anything you might be thinking of. As such, videos on YouTube "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" (Tollmann 2008: 172).

However, the definition of the amateur on YouTube as "individualistic, self-expressive" and "individualistic" (Burgess and Green 2009: 30) does not echo the defintion of the amateur as explored by Zimmermann (1995), Newman (2008) and Richard (2008). Zimmermann sees the amateur as someone who does something for the love of it, without expectation of being paid, whereas Newman sees the amateur as an individual who "pursues a passion for personal pleasure; who lacks the knowledge or means to produce professional–quality work; or who toils without expectation of pay"

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[48] This is reflected in a comment made by one of my informants, who told me that "being a diarist doesn't appeal to me, personally. I'm more interested in the element of accumulation - a buildup of content to give relevance to the form that meaning establishes itself over time" (Mica).

(Newman 2008). Further, Richard (2008) argues that, in the digital age, "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" (2008: 142). This definition of amateur is tied much closer to the concept of the "early adopter" – a term used frequently in technology circles to point to member of a kind of technical elite, who for instance sign up to new services before they become mainstream. For instance, having a low user number on a service such as Twitter, or being able to say you joined the service in 2006 or early 2007, has high status, and means you can call yourself an early adopter.

In this thesis, I use the term *early adopter* in a wider sense, to denote individuals who, in Richard's words "directly intervenes in the production processes of the medium and does not just simply use the medium" (Richard 2008: 142). It follows from this that although the early adopter (or amateur) is largely self-taught, she actively contributes to the development of a platform. As such, I am interested in how the early videobloggers were not simply producers of short-form digital films, but also part of developing the tools for creating films for the internet. As Richard argues, "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. Media amateurs open a previously culturally unformed space of experience" (2008: 142).

Next, I outline the methodological choices made in this thesis and reflect on the ethical considerations associated with undertaking this kind of research.

Research Method and Approach

A virtual ethnography is defined as a qualitative research method, conducted primarily or exclusively online, utilising digital tools, such as email, discussion lists and digital archives, which aims to conduct analysis of users' interactions and discussion online and through which the researcher embeds herself in some kind of digital participant observation. This is most commonly referred to as a "virtual ethnography" (Hine 2000), but is also sometimes referred to as "network ethnography" (Howard 2002), "social media ethnography" (Postill and Pink 2012), "adaptive ethnography" (Hine 2004), or "multimodal ethnography" (Dicks et al 2006). As with traditional ethnography, virtual ethnography is an ethnographic approach to studying content, communities and practices in a digital context; a qualitative approach to studying media that sees media

as connected to a wider social context. However, it is also important to note that "ethnographic discourses are necessarily 'partial truths' and the cultures they purport to describe are always to some extent the product of the researcher's imagination" (Moores 1993: 4). Further, as Clifford Geertz points out, "what we call our data are really our own constructions of other's people constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to" (Geertz 1973: 9). This call for reflexivity is echoed in the writings of McRobbie, who argued for the importance of highlighting "the 'partiality' of ethnographic writings, encouraging us to understand representations as interpretations rather than pure mirror images… insisted there on a reflexive consideration of the positions and subjectivities of participant observers, so as to "locate out own autobiographies and … experience inside the question we might want to ask" (McRobbie 1982: 52).

Virtual ethnography (Hine 2001) can take many forms, from formal or discursive analyses of webpages, via investigations into forums, chat rooms and email lists (list servs, yahoo groups etc.), to a more individual exchange via email or chat (text, audio or video). The virtual ethnography conducted in preparation for this thesis was initially conducted over a period of six months, where I was in asynchronous contact with thirty-three videobloggers,[49] but the entire ethnographic experience actually lasted closer to five years, including my initial scoping of the project, getting to know the community, and participant observation before, during and after the initial interviews were conducted. The ethnography consisted of interviews (through asynchronous e-mail interviews, two internet chats and two video-exchanges, one phone call, one audio-interview), a cataloguing of videos from the videobloggers' blogs (I collected 45 videos), photos shared by the participants (five), and a close observation of the participants actions on the web more generally (through participant observation), in email lists (the yahoo groups Videoblogging, Vlog Theory, Vlogeurope and Artists in the Cloud), social networking sites (mainly on Instagram, Twitter and Vine, though I also briefly re-connected with members of the videoblogging community on YouTube, Vimeo, Dailymotion, Facebook, Light and kik) and in correspondence (after my initial

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[49] Here, they are referred to as "participants" or "informants". Where I discuss "videobloggers" more generally, the terms is used more widely about the members of the community, ie. not limited to the participants who took part in my interviews.

interviews, I conducted 14 additional interviews with a sub-group of the original videobloggers in 2013 and 2014).[50]

Ethnography as a research method grew out of anthropology, and was first introduced to media studies in the 1980s (Ardevol and Cruz 2013: 29) through the work of, amongst others, David Morley and Roger Silverstone (Morley and Silverstone 1990). Initially, media ethnography was utilised mainly to learn about audiences and their viewing habits. The initial media ethnographies were thus often focused on the domestic, visiting people in their homes and exploring the ways in which the media intersected with the everyday life of the participants, taking into consideration "sociological variables such as ages, sex, class and ethnicity" (Cruz and Ardevol 2013: 30).

The ethnographic method is descriptive, designed to capture as much vivid detail as possible about its subject, yet it must also move beyond mere description as the ethnographer critically engages with the material gathered and makes interpretive decisions on what constitutes important findings and what does not. In the words of the anthropologist Tim Ingold, ethnography aims to "describe the lives of people other than ourselves, with an accuracy and sensitivity honed by detailed observation and prolonged first-hand experience" (Ingold, quoted in Pink and Morgan 2013). This has also been called "thick description" (Geertz 1994). Grenfell also links this to the use of grounded theory in ethnographic research, which means that "concepts and theories are derived from, or grounded in, the beliefs, understanding and interpretation of the group" (Grenfell 2005: 416).

However, as Baym and Markham has argued, "the Internet changes the way we understand and conduct qualitative inquiry," (2009: 26) and so too for ethnographic research. An early proponent of "virtual ethnography," Hine (2000) argued that the "Internet provides a rich resource for studying the way that people engage with media." As Bird and Barber (2006) point out, however, "it is important to remember that 'virtual ethnography' is not so much a method in itself, but is often a way of applying [old methods] in a new context" (Bird and Barber 2006: 140).

Ardevol and Gomez Cruz (2013) argue that, within early media studies, ethnographies were traditionally "carried out mainly in participants' households, since

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[50] I contacted all the original videobloggers at this point, but not everyone responded. Some said they weren't interested in engaging any further, however, some were still very excited about videoblogging and spoke with great warmth about the videoblogging community (see chapter 5).

the reception of media mostly occurred there" (2013: 30, see also Morley 2005, Morley and Silverstone 1990, Moores 1993, Seiter 1999, Couldry and McCarthy 2004). With the rise of the digital, media ethnographers became interested in "how human communication was possible through digital technologies if social cues became blurred through anonymity" and, by extension, how "identity formation and social order could emerge in virtual communities" (Ardevol and Cruz 2013:30). This distinction, between the "online" and "offline", the "real" and the "virtual", haunted early internet studies, and media studies more generally, for a long time. Hine (2000) attempted to "dissolve" this dichotomy in her exploration of a "more holistic and wider research questions that sought to describe how the internet and information and communication technologies... were integrated and shaped in everyday life" (Ardevol and Cruz 2013: 30).

Early writings on virtual ethnography met with some resistance from established ethnographic practitioners, whose main criticism were focussed on the lack of adherence to strict ethnographic practices, such as deep immersion in a community (see for example Howard 2002). Despite acknowledging that "as new forms of social organization and communities appear, researchers much adapt their methods in order to best capture evidence" (Howard 2002: 553), Howard also points out that,

> for some researchers claiming to do ethnography online, going into the field is little more than a state of mind because there is so little convergence between their lives and the subjects' lives: there is no physical entry into or exit from the community. There is no territorially-based field site, and the social cues that are available are unbundled from much of the context in which the content was produced (Howard 2002: 559).

The aim for this thesis, then, was to engage seriously with the idea that entering into the field would mean *more* than "little more than a state of mind."[51] The aim, thus, was to immerse myself in the "social situations being studied" and use my experience as a participant observer[52] to "try and learn how life is lived there" (Hine 2008: 6).

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[51] It is important to note that the 'virtual spaces' explored by Hine in 2000, are significantly different to the networked or social media spaces we encounter across the internet today. Her method, therefore, do in some instances feel out-dated (see Postill and Pink 2012). However, most of the empirical work completed for this thesis was also conducted *at this time*, which means that although the methodological approaches to studying the internet have evolved since, this thesis remains in part embedded to a pre-web 2.0 mentality. However, with hindsight, the thesis also benefits from a reflexive engagement with the methods used at the time, and the aim is to provide useful reflections on the methods used.

[52] On August 15th I uploaded my first videoblog to YouTube. The video, called simply *First Video blog* (Berry 2005), was 1 minute 23 seconds long, featured footage filmed in my parents apartment in Oslo, and had all the elements of a "classic videoblog" – talking head, short cuts/edits, mix of colour-footage and sequences in black and white to denote past and present, attempt to speak directly to the audience, self-reflection on my own style and content, with a "so how did I do?" posted at the end to encourage engagement/conversation, critique and feedback. Since 2005, the video has had 2445 views as of September 2014 and has received five comments, five likes and two dislikes.

For the duration of my study, I conducted a participant observation of the videoblogging community, not only engaging with the community through the email list, but embedding myself more fully with the practice of videoblogging; producing 115 videos (over four years), participating in community organised events such as the Seven Maps project[53] and taking part in online video conferences. The field of study was thus defined around the central email lists, with branches leading out towards individual videoblogs, community project sites, as well as on- and off-line events such as Pixelodeon and Vloggercon, which included the members of the community. My field of study encompassed the email list, the videoblogs of the participating videobloggers and the community sites organised and ran by members of the community. This field site remained "fixed" for the duration of the original study, but as the community started to disperse across different social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram and Vine, I actively remained connected to the core users by migrating with them and staying connected after my initial fieldwork was complete.

Having thus located my field of study, the next step was to identify and locate a "core group" of users formed by participants who actively engaged with each other and formed the base of the group's "identity" (Gomez Cruz and Ardevol 2013: 35). The core data for the thesis was always meant to come from in-depth, qualitative, open-ended, asynchronous email interviews with members of the videoblogging community. These participants were sourced from the Yahoo Videoblogging email group, of which I was already a member. Despite having been a member of the group for a while, once I started my research, I wrote a formal email to the group, introducing myself and my research. In the email, I asked for volunteers who would be willing to take part in my

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[53] The Seven Maps project is interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, it was funded through the community fundraiser initiative Have Money Will Vlog (HMWV), which is best described as an early iteration of Kickstarter, IndieGoGo or GoFundMe – although apparently the term "crowdfunding" was first coined by Michael Sullivan (an active member of the videoblogging community) when he tried to explain his newest project, fundavlog in 2006; "many things are important factors, but funding from the 'crowd' is the base of which all else depends on and is built on. So, Crowdfunding is an accurate term to help me explain this core element of fundavlog" (Sull, *fundavlog*, August 12, 2006, Sullivan n.d). Secondly, the Seven Maps project was different from other HMWV-funded projects as aimed to be completely interactive, incorporating comments and suggestions from the community; "welcome to the game. Along with the community, you pledge funds to Seven Maps, a project of Daniel Liss and HMWV. You then use this wiki to help figure out where Daniel will go and what videos he will shoot. Daniel will produce 7 videos based on the community's wishes. We can send Daniel anywhere the community can afford. The goal is to pioneer the direct collaboration between the audience and creators to produce the stories we want to see covered. All you need is $10 to play" (HMWV 2006). However, "because of the chaotic nature of having an entire community try to decide what one person will do, we have chosen 5 Filters. These five people will work with the community on this wiki to figure out the best projects and work with Daniel to make sure he understands and follows through" (HMWV 2006). The five "filters" (of which I was one) managed the practical aspects of Daniel's journey and filtered through and ultimately selected the creative tasks he was set by the community. For more on the seven maps outline and funding, see http://havemoneywillvlog.com/2006/08/07/seven-maps-funded/ and for the videos produced see Liss (2006).

study, making it clear what I was hoping to achieve, how much time it would take etc., what Frankel (1992) calls "establishing rapport" (1992: 359).

I had responses almost immediately from a number of group members, after which I used the snowball effect – asking the people volunteering to recommend others who might be interested in taking part. This helped me in contacting people directly who I did not know personally, and although it may have introduced a certain amount of bias (Howard 2002), it also gave me a sense of the connections between people (who recommended who etc.).[54] This is particularly pertinent when studying online spaces, where the members are unlikely to be located in the same physical location, hence making interaction between them more difficult to analyse and understand. In this particular community, the members were spread across the world, and it was helpful that such a diverse group of people volunteered or agreed to take part. My study had members from the US, UK, the Netherlands, France, Iran, Denmark, Norway, Australia and Colombia), including seventeen women and sixteen men, from a variety of social backgrounds and different ages (the videobloggers age ranged between 24 and 55 years old), resulting in a diverse sample of people (see chapter 5 for more details about the videobloggers).[55]

That there is a bias towards the West and particularly towards the American videobloggers is a result of the way in which these early-adopter communities organised on the internet. It is also likely due to high cost associated with early video-blogging (equipment, access and storage) and the high technical skills required. Regarding their employment status, fourteen were employed, and ten were self-employed. Seven were students, out of which three were also employed and two were self-employed. One informant was unemployed. Apart from one respondent, who declined to answer, the informants were all aged between 24 and 55 years old.

To counter the criticism of virtual ethnography made by writers such as Howard (2002), that most virtual ethnographies aren't in fact ethnographies at all, merely an interview or textual analysis of emails, I was very keen to add qualitative and rich materials to the textual data gathered in the interviews. In addition to the questions discussed during the interview process, then, the virtual ethnography included an

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[54] On reflection, I developed a better rapport with those who had contacted *me*, as opposed to those I had sought out. They were also more likely to respond to additional emails.
[55] The social classifications for my informants included three black and one Latino informant. The question of race (as well as the question to class) is not one I have looked at in much detail, however. It would be interesting to explore this further in future research.

investigation of the sites and videos produced by the informants, in particular, any work they themselves directed me towards as illustrations of their answers to my questions. In other words, my ethnography became increasingly multi-sensory (Dicks et al 2006), with participants sending me – in addition to text-based emails – photos, videos and audio-files, links to websites, links to other videobloggers whose work they'd been inspired by and so on. This resulted in much richer exchange of information (Meho 2006, James and Busher 2006). As James and Busher (2006) point out, the use of new media technologies such as email can seriously affect the credibility and trustworthiness of both researcher and participant, both in terms of knowing to whom one is speaking and in terms of knowing if one has interpreted the meaning of the answer as it was intended. By being able to cross-reference information from the interviews with information from the participants sites, this potential obstacle was countered to a certain extent. Further, as I myself engaged in a participant-observation of the community at this time, I was able to gain a much richer understanding of the practices and discourses that were being utilised within the community. There is a sense in some early writings on ethnography that the method is tied intimately with the personality of the ethnographer herself, and that in some ways the skills you need aren't easily taught. As Frankel (1992) argues,

> Participant-observation is less a method than a bag of tricks. The fledgling ethnographer's ideal, in so far as (s)he acquires one, is to use the mixed bag of strategies and tactics (s)he has been taught (mostly by way of ancestor myths and legends) flexibly, wisely, productively, and ethically as the unique field situation unfolds (Frankel 1992: 359).

This was certainly my experience. For example, conducting my interviews over email gave me many advantages, however, each advantage had it's own concern, some examples of which I will discuss here. Firstly, an email interview process is very low cost, both in terms of travel (I didn't have to travel anywhere), equipment (I only needed my laptop, an email address and an internet connection), and because the replies would arrive in text form, there would be no transcription costs (both in terms of time spent transcribing and any equipment I might use for the job). However, as Hine (2000) argues, part of the ethnographic process is the travelling, getting there. Hine describes the anthropologist as she gets on the plane, after carefully researching both where to go, how to get there and what to expect once she arrives, and highlights how this journeying, from the familiar to the unknown, is an essential part of the ethnographic process. Conducting email interviews then, strips this level of exploration from the

process. Hine describes how she replaced her physical journey with a virtual one, diving into an (to Hine, at the time) unknown internet, and seeking out "villages" (webportals), communities (list servs and usergroups) and individuals (webpages and their creators).[56]

A second advantage to using email interviews is that they are very "efficient" in terms of the range of participants you can reach (Meho 2006). In my case, many of the participants were from as far away from the UK as the US, the Netherlands, France, Denmark, Norway and Australia, and using email meant that I could communicate equally with all, across time zones, and vast geographical distances. In terms of "efficiency", email also allows you contact multiple participants in one email, and still make sure the participants remain anonymous from each other (using the blind carbon copy in the email client, or bcc).

A third benefit from email interviews is the element of reflection that the asynchronous process allows. Whereas in a face-to-face interview both interviewer and interviewee can feel the pressure of thinking of an answer and coming up with how to best phrase it in order to be understood correctly (and often within a limited time scale), email gives both parties the ability to reply when it's convenient for them. This, hopefully, encourages more reflection as well as making the process more enjoyable for the interviewee.

One downside of conducting interviews via email, however, was the lack of extra-textual material you get when interviewing people face to face. In many cases, I had to guess the emotion of the speaker, and I deliberately used emoticons (such as :-) to indicate a smile and :-(to indicate a sad face) to convey my own feelings about a particular reply. In email, you also lose tone of voice, facial reactions and body language, which form a big part of how we communicate. Looking back on the pilot study, I found that the material provided to me in the audio and video responses were much richer both in terms of content and tone, emotion and delivery. However, I understand that with the amount of time it took these two participants (particularly the video response) to make the material, upload it to the web (in order to retain anonymity, we set up a private account just for this), most participants preferred to respond by text.

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[56] Here, again, the historical nature of my research becomes apparent; no longer do we tend to think of the "location" of the internet in these terms, rather "location" now most often refers to geolocation (the ability to pinpoint exactly where "in the real world" a user is located, where a photo was taken, or update posted). As such, the method described by Hine (and developed for this thesis) has itself become historically specific.

For the researcher, text may be "easier" in terms of transcription "costs" although I would have preferred video in terms of its richness.[57]

Kennedy (2006) argues there are ways in which gender, social class and race are easily recognizable online, both in terms of what has deliberately been put there by the user and what can be read between the lines. The question still remains as to who has access to the internet and in the videoblogging community, despite the perhaps surprisingly gender-balanced nature of my own sample, there were at this time a vast majority of white, middle-class, well-educated, mostly male users. Meho argues that email interviews can allow for greater "democratisation and internationalisation of research" (Meho 2006: 1288), enabling those less advantaged to take part, regardless of their geographical location or socio-economic status.

The virtual ethnographer should not limit herself to merely one site of study (Ardevol and Cruz 2013), and instead seek out the participants across a plethora of social media sites, such as for instance Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, and – if possible – in person. In the case of my research, I felt it would be limiting to only rely on the information gathered in the interviews. The videobloggers were part of a socio-technical network of websites, applications and technologies, as well as a technical-social community centred around the email list, but also branching out onto other individual and community-run sites, off-line events such as social gatherings, festivals and "hackathons". At this point, it seems very clear to me that meeting the participants in person would have been ideal, however, this was proven impossible for personal and financial reasons. I did, however, make a concerted effort to speak with individuals through additional channels; on Skype, via video messages and on the phone, which contributed to establishing a relationship of trust. Further, I participated in the community itself through joining in conversations on the email list, joining additional email lists (such as Artists in the Cloud, VlogEurope and Vlog Theory), and taking part in community initiatives such as the *Seven Maps Project* (Liss 2006), the yearly Videoblogging Week (in April), and the yearly *NaVloPoPo* challenges.[58] I also actively

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[57] Having said that, as I got to know the informants better, I found it useful to simply ask them.

[58] NaVloPoMo (or National Videoblogging posting month) was developed by the videoblogging community as an offspring of *NaBloPoMo* (National Blog Posting Month), designed to encourage bloggers to update their blog every day for a month. The videoblogging community would attempt to post one video per day in all of November. One year, in 2009, one member suggested that instead of everyone posting a video everyday (which requires a lot of work), 30 videobloggers would each post one video, which built on the video from the day before, making one long film at the end of the month. I took part in this project, which worked as a kind of free association from one day to the next. The videos explored different styles, genres and topics, all linked in more or less obvious ways, as described by Howe (2009) "this is a decentralized game, a decentralized medium and a decentralized community. So, as far as

participated in the community by leaving comments on the group members' videoblogs, and once platforms like Twitter started appearing, I followed – and was followed by – the core group of users I had been engaging with the most. My participant-observation also included the production of my own videoblogs[59], which, albeit viewed by a small audience, meant that I developed a solid understanding of the technical intricacies of videoblogging and experienced how videos were received, viewed, circulated and discussed within the community.

This thesis critically engaged with the data gathered in the virtual ethnography by transcribing it into plain texts (this included audio or video interviews), as well as screen shots of videoblogs and a collection of email correspondence from the yahoo email list. A number of videos were also transcribed and thus became part of the textual corpus. The textual data was then coded, which then formed the basis of my analysis.

Research Ethics

In any research project dealing with human subjects, it is imperative that the researcher abides by ethical guidelines concerning the care and protection of the research subject. There is a long history of established policies available to support the researcher in making informed and reflexive decisions about the well-being of informants in their work (see for instance the British Sociological Association (2004) and the Association of Internet Researchers' ethics charter (2012)). These include "the basic tenets shared by these policies include the fundamental rights of human dignity, autonomy, protection, safety, maximization of benefits and minimization of harms, or, in the most recent accepted phrasing, respect for persons, justice, and beneficence" (Markham and Buchanan 2012). Today, the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) offers a charter of ethical guidelines, first published as Ess (2002), with a revised version 2.0 in Markham and Buchanan (2012).

Historically, there has been a tendency within internet research to focus on the textuality of the internet, and thus avoid the problem of the human subject. For instance, Bassett and O'Riordan (2002) argued "there is a need for an acknowledgement of the

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I'm concerned, anything goes. Publish wherever you want, in whatever codec. Publish round animated gifs if you want. How we aggregate it, navigate it, reconstruct it, replay it, will be part of the game. Everybody can do it their own way, or create their own places to gather the videos and people. It'll no doubt change and develop as we go along through the month" (Howe 2009).

[59] These were available on trine.blip.tv up until November 2013, when blip decided to delete all old videoblog content. Some of my videos are still available on YouTube.

textuality of the Internet, with Internet technologies now being used to publish texts produced in a complex convergence of written text and audio/visual media" (Bassett and O'Riordan 2002). As such, researchers need to credit those texts with their legitimate authors, making it a legal issue, as well as an ethical one.[60] Bakardjieva and Feenberg (2001) argue that "the very possibility of research depends on the good will of the populations studied. To needlessly alienate them by exploiting their online activities where consent and involvement might have been negotiated is not only disrespectful, but also destructive of the research enterprise" (Bakardjieva and Feenberg 2001). However, as Markham and Buchanan (2012) points out, "in internet research, 'human subject' has never been a good fit for describing many internet-based research environments".

This thesis is sympathetic to the textual approach to studying the internet, and is employing visual and textual analysis of videoblogs as a core part of the thesis. However, it also acknowledges that both human and non-human actors populate the web. Following, Bruckman (1995, 2002), this thesis therefore conceptualizes its human subjects as "amateur artists" (Bruckman 2002). This approach aims to bridge the gap between human subject research with its strict rules about anonymisation, and the internet-as-text approach outlined by Bassett and O'Riordan (2002), with its rather flat approach that reduces all human subjects to the sum of their textual output. As Bruckman argues, "internet users deserve credit for their creative and intellectual work" (Bruckman 2002). In her work, further describes the internet as "a playground for amateur artists creating semi-published work" and argues that "this approach helps make some ethical dilemmas easier to reason about, because it highlights key novel aspects of the situation, particularly with regard to disguising material" (2002).

When conducting my interviews, the informants were therefore informed participants, and treated respectfully, made fully aware of my research and then included in what I was undertaking. None of the participants requested to remain anonymous, though some had specific requests in terms of referencing their work (be it to their first name, last name, internet moniker or website name). Thus, in this thesis, when referring to my interviews, I only refer to the videobloggers by their first names (eg. Rupert). Videobloggers whose work I am referring to from the wider community

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[60] Berry (2004), on the other hand, argues that the key to conducting ethical research is by ensuring the non-alienation of the research subjects, achieved through "open and participatory research methodologies [that] promote an Ethics of Care" towards the research subjects by "return[ing] research results to the community and the researched groups" (Berry 2004).

and the videoblogging email list are referenced as authors (eg. Howe 2014), and where I discuss particular videos, these are also credited to the videobloggers as authors (eg Howe 2005).

I now turn to the historical contextualisation of the thesis, with a brief history of film and video, the rise of the internet and digital film.

Chapter 3 – History and Context

In this chapter, I want to provide some of the contextualisation and historical background to the cultural formation of the videoblogging community. Due to limitations on space I have been selective in the historical material I have drawn from, and have in places been forced to provide only broad outlines of the trajectories I am interested in mapping. It is crucial to take account of the multiple strands that play into any historical moment, and the contingency that remains central to historical research. Here, I am presenting a cultural history that is somewhat influenced by the nascent field of media archaeology. As well researched historical accounts, media archaeology is attentive to the discontinuities as well as the continuities in a historical narrative, and aims to take account of the mis-steps and dead-ends that inevitably form part of the historical process. So in this chapter I have sought to overlay a number of distinct historical strata, as it were, providing some sense of the multiple histories and cultural techniques that were influential on, directly referenced by, or informed the practices of the videoblogging community.

Although my thesis covers videoblogging in the years 2000-2009, the main case studies – drawn from my ethnography, and due to my interest in the dynamics, social formations and cultural practices of early video-blogging communities – remain focussed on a specific moment in which the community was at its most active, namely the period between 2004-2007. This is not to say that the videoblogging community was not connected to earlier historical trends, ideas and, crucially, media-specific artefacts, such as film, and their associated practices, such as documentary technique. As such, I have tried to do justice to this multiple history without losing sight of my research object. I have therefore attempted to bring out what I see as the salient moments in the pre-history of videoblogging, bringing forward some sense of coherence whilst remaining attentive to the contradiction, incoherence or chaos of the historical process. Following Collingwood, I would agree that in writing history one "reflects on one's own work… whilst claiming our rights of selection, construction, and criticism… but however fragmentary and faulty the results of one's work may be… it is the idea of the historical imagination as a self-dependent, self-determining, and self-justifying form of thought" (Collingwood 1961: 236-249).[61]

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[61] Indeed, it is the work of the historian not merely to copy out the authorities, but "one is always leaving out things which, for one reason or another, one decides that one's own work does not need or cannot use" (Collingwood 1961: 236).

According to media archaeologist Erkki Huhtamo, the history of moving images presents a series of "cyclical phenomena", or repeating *commonplaces* (Parikka 2012) – which, when placed side by side, might induce in the media historian a sense of *déjà vu* (Huhtamo 1997). He uses as an example the similar reactions from the audience watching Étienne Gaspard Robertson's *Fantasmagorie* shows in Paris towards the end of the 18th century, and the first presentation of the *Cinématographe* by the Lumiére brothers, famously showing a train arriving at a train station (*L'Arrivée d'un train à La Ciotat*, 1895). He also draws similarities to a more recent display of such immersive performances, the "stereoscopic movie spectacle *Captain EO*, the 'onslaughting' aspect of which has been enhanced – in addition to the customary 3-D effects – by laserbeams, which are released as if from the screen world to the audience space" (Huhtamo 1997). What connects these seemingly different experiences, is what Huhtamo calls *topoi*, what he refers to as commonplace formulas that act as "building blocks of cultural tradition" (Huhtamo 1997).

Huhtamo argues that "topics of media culture… are recurring, cyclical phenomena and discourses that circulate" (Parikka 2012: 11). This allows one to think of moments in media history as "motifs that are recurring – whether as more general cultural phenomena… or in more tactical use" (Parikka 2012: 11). My intention is to trace an archaeology of videoblogging that "does not follow a divine plan" (Zielinski, quoted in Parikka 2012: 12) but instead acknowledges "an interest in and a need for new ways of understanding media cultures outside the mainstream" (Parikka 2012: 14). In other words, I want to trace a history of videoblogging that is interested not so much in accepted narratives or canonical events, but rather traces the development of certain *motifs* that can be seen as recurring in the history of film, video and digital media. Those identified here broadly falls into the following categories; (i) *significant technological advances*, such as small, handheld cameras, making portability and mobility not only possible, but desired; (ii) *the relationship between technical change and aesthetic change*, for instance the employment/development of certain narrative techniques, such as talking directly to the camera, as opposed to the more traditional voice-of-god-style of narrative; (iii) *community*, the coming together of individuals to form communities of practice, experimentation and technical expertise. The videobloggers may have seen themselves as completely new in the wider history of film and television (Hodson and Verdi 2006), but these motifs appear in many previous instantiations of amateur video production, both past and present. Following Parikka

(2012: 5), then, I want to "start in the middle – from the entanglement of past and present" and then to explore "the part-futures and future-pasts, as well as parallel side-lines of media archaeology." The sense of déjà vu, however, should not distract from seeing what is distinctive in particular historical constellations around media-forms. That is, that although there may be similarities and continuities, there are also discontinuities and disjunctions that I seek to map and explore throughout this thesis.

In this chapter, I want to start with a brief history of film and cinema from the turn of the 19th century. Second, I want to connect the development of video to various counter-cultural moments in the growing influence of television, mediated in part through video technologies, particularly in the latter part of the twentieth century. Finally, I want to present a technical and cultural account of the growing use of digital technologies, in some cases tangential to, and in others central to, the development of what finally emerges after a somewhat contradictory process of experimentation, technical innovation and media practice, digital video and then in online video.

Early Histories of Moving Images

It may seem strange to start tracing the origins of digital online video with a history of early cinema, however, as many have argued, "most co-called new media have been imagined from a cinematic metaphor" (Rodowick 2007: viii, see also Manovich 2001: 78-79, who argues that "a hundred years after cinema's birth, cinematic ways of seeing the world, of structuring time, of narrating a story, of linking one experience to the next, have become the basic means by which computer users access and interact with all cultural data"). This is not to dismiss other paths that this history could have taken, just as with cinema itself. Following Elsaesser, for instance, cinema exists in what he calls an "expanded field" – which means that entertainment was not necessarily cinema's intended function, rather, "there have been very distinct uses of the cinematograph and the moving image, as well as of the recording and reproducing technologies associated with them, other than in the entertainment industries" (Elsaesser 2006: 20). Elsaesser points out cinema's medical and scientific use, military and surveillance use, censoring, monitoring as well as "the sensory-motor coordination of the human body in classical cinema" (Elsaesser 2006: 21), or as Renov argues, cinema's "potential for the observation and investigation of people and of social/historical phenomena" (Renov 2004: 171-172). Tom Gunning argues along similar lines, pointing out that a "full

understanding of film's relation to technology demands more than a longer span of diachronic history" and that, instead, the history of film needs to be read alongside a "wider system of interlocking technologies which compose the terrain of modern experience" (Gunning 2004: 19).[62]

The first motion picture camera was invented by Etienne Marly in 1882, followed in 1886 by George Eastman's invention of the hand held camera (Mumford 1934: 445). In 1889, Thomas Edison developed what has been known as the modern motion picture camera, and six years later, in 1895, he invented the motion picture projector (Mumford 1934: 445). In December 1895, the Lumière Brothers projected their first film on their Cinématographe (Neale 1985: 41).

In 1929, Dziga Vertov released *Man with a Movie Camera*, "an experiment in the cinematic communication of visible events without the aid of intertitles, without the aid of a scenario, without the aid of theatre" (Vertov 1929). The film follows Soviet citizens as they go about their everyday lives, working, playing, interacting, yet the movie was not shot as a narrative story, rather, Vertov shot the movie over four years (Feldman 2007), and the footage was later edited together from a vast database.[63] The film is lauded for its experimentation with a range of different cinematic techniques, yet it's greatest contribution is perhaps its message that the camera can travel anywhere, and capture anything from any angle, position or placement. Vertov's influence on later film and video movements stems from his concept of the camera as an eye (the *kino-eye*); an enhanced eye, beyond human perception, that catches life 'unawares'. However, the kino-eye is not transparent, in that it also foregrounds its own construction as formal intervention, as mediation, and hence adds artistic "value" to whatever is being created. As Dawson (2003) argues, "Vertov proclaimed the primacy of the camera itself (the 'Kino-Eye') over the human eye [and] he clearly saw it as some

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[62] Here it might be worth mentioning Steve Neale's approach to cinema, which is interesting for the way he bridges two separate schools of thought in cinema history; the first in which film technology treated as "a self-contained sphere with a self-contained history" (Neale 1985: 159), a chronological account in which "each new feature or process either displaces those already in existence or else simply adds to them, increasing the stock of technical resources available" (Neale 1985: 159); the second being completely engrossed with the concept of realism and "works from the premise that the sounds and images comprising films are linked ontologically to the objects that the microphone and camera record" (Neale 1985: 159). This follows the theories of Bazin (1967) and Kracauer (1960), and displays a contradictory and troubled relationship with technology – at once the advances in technology allow for more and more realistic cinema, yet the increased use of technology as "the goal would be [technology's] complete disappearance" (Neale 1985: 160), both representation and technology is repressed, along with the film industry itself. Neale, however, tries to develop what he calls a "counter-approach" by locating technological innovation within aesthetic, ideological and economic, scientific and technical contexts, all of which exist within the broad umbrella of the film industry.
[63] Interestingly, the movie *Tarnation* (Caouette 2003) was created from a large database of sorts of archived home move footage, including answer phone messages, photographs, Super 8 footage and VHS videotape.

kind of innocent machine that could record without bias or superfluous aesthetic considerations (as would, say, its human operator) the world as it really was" (Dawson 2003).

Vertov's "checklist"[64] for *Man with a movie camera* has inspired many subsequent manifestos for filmmaking and film-makers. For instance, Hicks argues that "Godard saw the 1972 translation of Vertov's works as a cinematic equivalent of Chairman Mao's 'Little Red Book'" (Hicks 2007: 134) and as Dawson (2003) argues, "Vertov's concept of a self-reflective cinema, of the viewer identifying himself with the filmmaking process, would really only reappear at the end of the 1950s in the work of filmmakers like Chris Marker, Jean-Luc Godard, or in America, Stan Brakhage" (Dawson 2003). Vertoz's approach can also be seen reflected in the *Dogme manifesto* (von Trier and Vinterberg 1995) and the "10 Golden Rules of Lomography" (quoted in Burgess 2006), which encourages a similar method for capturing photography, based on 10 "anti-rules", "clearly intended to offer resistance to the ways in which the rules of 'professional photography' repress 'ordinary' creativity and continually redraw the boundaries between amateur and professional" (Burgess 2006). Thus we can see how Vertov continues to inspire amateur film and photography movements in the digital age. Here though, I want to draw attention to its use as an inspiration directly for videoblogging (see for instance Adrian Miles' *Vogma Manifesto* (2000), a list of "commandments" for early videoblogs, see below, and *the Lumiere Manifesto* (Pedersen and Shoot 2007), but also through the work of Manovich (2001).

During a discussion on the videoblogging email list in November 2009, one member made a point that a video he had watched that morning "however pretentious you may think this sounds… really [is] carrying forward and reinventing the tradition of observational documentary filmmaking that can be traced back through Direct Cinema, Cinema Verité and Kino Pravda all the way to the Lumiére brothers' first films" (Howe 2009). Another comment made on the list in February 2005 was clearly an attempt to position videoblogging in a wider history of film and cinema; "There's Astruc's famous camera stylo… Chris Marker's experiments with video (he has whole series of 2 and 3 minute works that to a contemporary eye are vogs), and of course Vertov's numerous manifestos and dreams in the 1920s where he explicitly called for filmmakers to be

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[64] "Kino-Eye is understood as 'that which the eye does not see,' as the microscope and telescope of time, as the negative of time, as the possibility of seeing without limits and distances, as the remote control of movie cameras, as tele-eye, as X-ray, as 'life caught unawares,' etc., etc. Kino-Eye as the possibility of making the invisible visible" (Vertov, quoted in Manovich 2013b)

distributed everywhere contributing from everywhere and the work being collated and shown nationally. What he was describing of course we would recognise as CNN ;-)" (Miles 2005b). In many ways, then, there was certainly knowledge of these early forms of cinema amongst the videobloggers, and some of the early videoblogger practices could easily be mapped onto Vertov's checklist, including "rapid means of transport, highly sensitive film stock, light handheld film cameras, equally light lighting equipment and a crew of super-swift cinema reporters" (Vertov, quoted in Dawson 2003).

An important film practice, which can be traced back to the end of the 1890s, was "home-movies", an art form that highlighted "domesticity and cultural context" and allowed people access to "a version of their own lives" that "enabled new ways of seeing" and "the shaping of memory" (Norris Nichols 1997: 203). Through this form, people "negotiated their relationship with their surroundings and sense of self". The practice developed in a period in which "amateur film was defined in economic and technological terms rather than within social, aesthetic, or political relations" (Zimmermann 1995: 12; see also Gaines 2006). Zimmermann provides perhaps the most extensive overview of amateur film in her exploration of the development and conceptualisation of home movies from the early days of cinema (from 1897 onwards) until the late twentieth century. Her work shows how the early developments of film cameras, film stock and projection equipment had great influence on the way in which "entrepreneurs, artists, hobbyists and workers" (Zimmermann 1995: 12) were able to make amateur film (Zimmermann 1995: 13, see also Fox (2004), and Kattelle (n.d) for an overview of amateur film gauges from 1898 - 1973). What her account shows, is that given access to equipment and knowledge of how to use it, from a very early stage, the technologies of film making were allowing individuals the opportunity to play and experiment with the making of films, exemplified by Stan Brakhage's experimentation with splitting the lens and non-camera-based film making (Fox 2004). In a limited sense, then, filmmaking was "democratised" from the very beginning.[65] However, it remained a mostly private practice, especially in terms of projection and viewership, for reasons of distribution and medium affordances (for an interesting moment of public use of amateur film footage see Pasternack (2012) on the film footage of the assassination of John F. Kennedy).

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[65] Again, as has been argued with regards to the internet, questions of class, gender, and race problematize any notion of "democratized" media access, technological expertise, and practice.

In the 1930s, as part of the consciousness-raising propaganda machine in socialist Soviet Union, Alexandre Medvedkin travelled across the Soviet Union on a *kino-poezd*, or ciné-train, consisting of "three train carriages transformed into a film-production studio complete with projection room and living quarters" (Stark 2012: 128)[66]. Medvedkin's ciné-train is interesting here because of the production processes that were used.[67] Medvedkin and his team would stay in one place for a few days, make a film and screen it in that same location, meaning that the feedback loop from conception to completion was very small and that "the subjects of the ciné-train's films were also their intended audience" (Stark 2012: 130). "Film today and show it tomorrow," was their motto (Stark 2012: 129), an idea that is echoed in later film and video work. This fast production-line system of capturing, producing and displaying film was quite revolutionary, and, years later, inspired French film maker Chris Marker to experiment with a similar process, when he worked with the factory workers in Besançon (see below). The ultimate aim of Medvedkin and his contemporaries was to "hold up a transformative and coercive mirror to the people, to show them the facts of their daily existence, which, once reflected back to them, would provoke them to take their lives into their own hands and *change*" (Stark 2012: 131, italics in original).

Where Vertov concentrated on the visual power of cinema, with the camera as an enhanced eye through which the world could be captured, the French critic and film director Alexandre Astruc conceived of the camera in a more literary tradition, as a pen, which he called the *caméra-styló* (Astruc 1948).[68] For Astruc, the camera follows the tradition of the literary, where "the idea of the camera as a tool to write with—indeed twice over, first when you shoot and then when you write the film on the timeline" (Chanan 2012: 5) is in focus. Cinema, then, would develop a language of meaning, much like the essay or novel had done previously,

> this new age of the cinema [is] the age of caméra-styló (camera-pen)… the cinema will gradually break free from the tyranny of what is visual, from the image for its own sake, from the immediate and concrete demands of the narrative, to become a means of writing just as flexible and subtle as written language (Astruc 1948: 160).

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[66] Interestingly, Marker both celebrated and criticized Medvedkin in his film *The Last Bolshevik* (1993)

[67] The moving train is an interesting *topoi* in media history, from the Lumière Brothers' *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (1895), via Medvedkin to numerous digital videos (see for instance Liss 2006d for a videoblog, and Jesster (2014) for a Hyperlapse Movie showing trains moving through landscapes.

[68] The Caméra-Styló was also frequently referred to on the list, for instance "a camera in your phone is pretty much Astruc's Camera Stylo isn't it?" (Miles 2009, see also Chanan 2012).

Astruc thus imagined that the breakthrough for film and cinema as an art form would not come through the entertainment industry, where it had been treated as a mere "fairground attraction" (Astruc 1948), but as "a fundamental tool for human communication" (Sørensen 2009: 142). Kinder has argued that although "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" (Kinder 2008: 57).[69]

Another history of amateur/documentary film making and the condition of possibility within what was known as Militant Film, was the "experiments in *autogestion*" (Stark 2012: 118), in which a group of workers at Rhodiaceta textile factory in Besançon, known as *Groupe Medvedkine*, "emerged from a sustained *recontre* with the French film maker Chris Marker" (2012: 119). Marker spent a period of time in the factory, interviewing and filming the workers (not always with the permission of the factory owners) and produced a film, *A bientot j'espere* (*Be seeing you*, Marker 1968), which explored life in the factory, with particular focus on the factory occupation in 1967, following one worker in particular, a young militant, Georges Maurivard. The aim, in Marker's own words, was "to give the power of speech to people who don't have it, and, when it's possible, to help them find their own means of expression" (Marker 2003: 39).

What was particular about this example, however, was that although the workers demanded better working conditions and increased pay, the originality of the Rhodiaceta strike, and what places it as one of the main influences of the protest movement that engulfed Europe in the spring of 1968, was the workers' demand for access to culture.

When screening the film, Marker was strongly criticized by a large proportion of the workers for romanticising the struggle of the workers, exploiting the workers and misrepresenting the women in the film; making them appear merely as wives, "rather than as workers and militants in their own right" (Stark 2012 126). In response, Marker supplied those of the workers who were interested with filming and editing equipment, as well as training in film production, and helped setting up a second, parallel film company, which became the Besançon Medvedkin Group. Intended to be more open and collaborative than Marker's own work, "this militant cinema would follow a

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[69] Atruc further argued, "With the development of 16mm and television, the day is not far off when everyone will possess a projector, will go to the local bookstore and hire films written on any subject, of any form, from literary criticism and novels to mathematics, history, and general science" (Astruc 1948).

collective and non-hierarchical model of production, seeking to abolish the separating
between expert and amateur, between producer and consumer" (Stark 2012: 127).

Stark draws parallels between the Medvedkin group and the contemporary work
of another French film maker, Jean-Luc Goddard,[70] who established the *Groupe Dziga
Vertov* "with its parallel but ultimately irreconcilable claims for self-reflexivity,
collectivity, and class consciousness" (Stark 2012: 119). Indeed, Vertov's notion of the
kino-eye and Astruc's concept of the *camera-stylo* have proven hugely influential on
both theories and practices of digital film (see for instance Manovich 2001;[71] Sørensen
2009; Kinder 2008; Chanan 2012).

Drawing on home movie footage from the 1950s, Zimmermann argues that
amateur film from this period can be seen in parallel with the social, political and
economic conditions in post-war America. Zimmermann traces the development of
what has been known as a "Do-It-Yourself" (DIY) ideology - where the "domestication
of amateur filmmaking as a leisure-time commodity erased any of its social, political, or
economic possibilities" (Zimmermann 1995: 113). It is interesting that Zimmermann
also makes links between gender, patriarchy and power, although these issues are not at
the centre of her study. Instead, she traces the material conditions for amateur
filmmaking (Zimmermann 1995: 113-121), the standardization of the 8mm equipment
(over 16mm,[72] which became standard for semi- and professional film making) and the
development of what she calls "aesthetic control" whereby many stylistic traits from
Hollywood were incorporated into amateur filmmaking in the domestic sphere. Among
the avant-garde, on the other hand, filmmakers were encouraged to break with aesthetic
conventions and "exploit their minimal budgets through exploration, experimentation,
and risk taking" (Zimmerman 1995: 130). Here, then, we see a divergence between

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[70] Godard, too, was influential on the videoblogging community, although there is not space to discuss his work in much detail here. One mention, however, appears in the Vogma Manifesto – "a vog is Jean-Luc Godard with a mac and a modem" – (Miles 2000) and there are a few casual comments on the videoblogging list, including; "there is no art without constraint. Bandwidth, screen size, user time and network stutter are constraints (Thought experiment, if Godard started his career as videoblogger, what do you think he'd be doing?)" (Miles 2005b). "To me there's a large element of YAWN to the strictures and suggestions being proffered here… How very very dull it all becomes when you tell people this is how you should do it if it's to be done 'correctly'. So terribly boring. 'Watch those eyelines.' 'Don't shoot from below.' And definitely no jump cuts. Godard must be vomiting as we speak... Free your mind, tell your stories in whatever way feels good to you. Life's too short." (Croma 2008). Two of my informants also listed Godard as one of the filmmakers influencing their work (Sam, Brittany). One also cited Vertov as influential on his work (Sam).

[71] As Manovich argues, "Vertov stands halfway between Baudelaire's flaneur and today's computer user: No longer just a pedestrian walking down a street, but not yet Gibson's data cowboy who zooms through pure data armed with data-mining algorithms" (Manovich 2001: 275).

[72] Norris Nicholson points out that "the first 16 mm cine-camera for amateurs became commercially available in 1923" (1997: 202).

amateur-domestic filmmaking, on the one hand, and avant-garde experimentation on the other (see Norris Nicholson 1997: 202).[73]

Zimmermann argues that the rise in amateur filmmaking was caused by a number of factors, including increased free time for the middle classes, a general increase in knowledge about technical equipment and filming technique, due partially to publications such as *Amateur Movie Maker* and *America Cinematographer*, which encouraged "technique and technical mastery as the first phase on the road to achieving cinematic 'perfection'" (Zimmermann 1995: 68). However, as Zimmermann argues, despite being constructed discursively as a "privatized, almost silly, hobby" (1995: 157), amateur film also contributed to the democratisation of media production, and she argues, this discourse may in the future "liberate it as a more accessible and meaningful form of personal expression and social and political intervention" (Zimmermann 1995: 157).

Televison, Media and the Rise of Video

In this section I want to introduce the emergence of video and the way in which the technologies that underpinned it gave rise to a new set of practices made possible by a more flexible medium of videotape. Video, Blom argues, "propels artists to take media power in their own hands, using televisual techniques for the noninstrumentalist purposes of art" (Blom 2012: 277). Indeed, in the 1960's Sony introduced the new category of the "industrial standard" video-recorders and as Garcia explains, "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 more widely available" (Garcia 2008: 294).

One of the early movements to embrace these new video technologies was the guerrilla television movement. This group of amateur and professional videomakers closely resembles the early adopters of videoblogging.[74] There are generally few

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[73] This desire to break with conventions, push the aesthetic boundaries of the medium and user their limited budgets to their advantage, can be seen reflected in the discourses of the videoblogging community, particularly amongst those self-identifying as "artistic" (chapter 5). In terms of the discussion here, it is interesting to note that those identifying as "personal" or "everyday life" videobloggers, were more likely to adopt more "traditional" narrative structures.

[74] Although in this thesis I am not engaging with political aspects of videoblogging in much detail, there were videobloggers who used their practice as a way to both engage with political issues, and indeed take political action. Here I am thinking in particular of the videoblogger Josh Wolf, who was arrested, and later sentenced to prison, for "refusing to testify before a U.S. grand jury and for failing to hand over unpublished video footage he shot during a

explicit references to the guerrilla movement in either Hodson and Verdi (2006) and Dedman and Paul (2006), however, there are references to the movement itself in emails on the email list in April 2010 which announced the screening of restored tapes from the 1970s (MacFie 2010) and one in which one videoblogger draws the direct link between the two groups;

> People were doing things similar to vlogging then except they used portapack cameras to shoot & early public access (and occasionally PBS) as well as art & community spaces to distribute (Rhodes 2007).

In the Guerrilla Television manifesto (1971), Michael Shamberg outlined "a technological radicalism" (Boyle 1985: 229) attacking commercial television, arguing that is was "a conditioning agent rather than a source of enlightenment" (Boyle 1985: 229) for the masses. Video, in contrast, was seen as a decentralising force that had the potential to bring forth a "Whitmanesque democracy of ideas, opinions, and cultural expressions" (Boyle 1985: 229). Integral to this, was the idea that this new form of video would be made by and for ordinary people. Boyle argues that although the ideas behind guerrilla television were articulated in Shamberg's publication, as well as in the magazine *Radical Software* (published by the collective Raindance, made up of, among others, Shamberg, Frank Gillette, Paul Ryan and Ira Schneider) (Boyle 1985: 229). Boyle accounts for the rise and fall of the group TVTV, which made a number of documentaries (Boyle 1985: 230), whereas Chapman focuses more on the problem of preserving the work created by these early videomakers, calling for institutions and individuals to "begin planning for their care and creating access to them" and the links with previously unseen and forgotten videos to the rise in digital archives, in particular the Media Burn Independent Video Archive (Chapman 2012: 50).[75] Shamberg was strongly influenced by Marshall McLuhan[76], and argued that the significance of the medium of video was "much greater than that of a mere improvement of an old

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raucous clash on the streets between San Francisco police officers and anti-G8 protesters" (Locke 2006). The incident was interesting because it really challenged the relationship between the videobloggers and the media. Wolf, who like many a videobloggers at the time, employed a discourse that was often "disdainful of corporate-controlled media," was "now voluntarily taking the legal heat for amateurs and professional scribes alike" without the " benefit from mainstream media's deep pockets" (Locke 2006). Wolf was freed on April 3rd 2007, after seven and a half months in prison, when his lawyers reached a compromise with the federal prosecutors in which he handed over the tapes, but was excused from identifying any of the individuals that featured on the video (Egelko et al 2007).

[75] http://www.mediaburn.org

[76] The videobloggers were certainly aware of the work of McLuhan, as a few quotes off the email list shows; "I just stumbled on this superb quote from Marshal McLuhan. 'The old medium is always the content of the new medium. As movies tend to be the content of tv and as books tend to be the content of movies.' It pretty much perfectly sums up the web. It started by gobbling up tv, radio, movies, music etc., but since some of these media companies wholesale boycotted it a black market of goods spring up as well as leaving a tremendous opportunity for innovative media makers... i.e. the world of videoblogging and youtube among others (Meiser 2009).

medium, that rather videotape can be a powerful cultural tool" (Shamberg 1971: 26). Shamberg provides a theoretical context for guerrilla television, and this is also where his influences are most strongly seen; arguing that "Americans are information junkies" (Shamberg 1971: 1). He was also influenced by Norbert Weiner and Buckminster Fuller (Boyle 1992, Merrin 2012, Chapman 2012).[77] Central to the movement was Shamberg's belief that "guerrilla television gets cameras to the people to let them do it themselves" (Shamberg 1971: 37).[78]

As with earlier forms of amateur and semi-professional media production, the guerrilla television movement would not have been possible had it not been for the changes in the technologies available to them (Boyle 1985). The new equipment was compact, lightweight and affordable, and the hand-held video recorders and accessories allowed individuals to record and edit film and video on the go. This technological basis made for a conversational aesthetic that is reflected in the content of the films/videos, featuring interviews, close-ups, point of view shots and "smaller" visual vistas than those utilised in cinematic productions. These portable technologies contributed to the emerging *style* of these kinds of films and videos, a style that initially disrupted the viewers' ideas of what film and television should be like, and which, eventually, formed part of what has been known as a DIY aesthetic. This aesthetic has today been adopted into mainstream film and broadcast television programs, such as *The Office, The Blair Witch Project*, *Grizzly Man* and others.

The style and content of guerrilla television was largely determined by the technology available to the video makers at the time. Lack of access to expensive cameras and edition technologies, national distribution channels and access to a wider audience, meant guerrilla television had to make do with the technologies available to them. Chapman (2012) argues that "the development of a totally new style of media production surrounding half-inch video-tape was due both to the experimental

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[77] This theoretical exploration "rests on four elements: a philosophy of media ecology, a critique of 'Media-America' and broadcasting, a belief in video as a remedy to this system, and a tentative understanding of how computers might influence the future of video" (Merrin 2012: 101).

[78] Interestingly, in the early days of the videoblogging community, individual members would volunteer at their local Apple store, teaching people simple video editing techniques and how to start a videoblog; for instance Susan told me "I gave my first presentation at the Apple store here in Plano, TX last Saturday… Before I ever gave the presentation, the lead instructor at the store told me that he wanted me to present once a month, and to pick dates for the next couple months… the presentation itself went awesome, and I had a captive audience, and I think I may have even made one mom almost cry with one of my videos (no, I haven't posted that one on my vlog yet – it will probably be Christmas Eve or Christmas Day post). The Apple guys were very very nice to me, and they were thrilled with my presentation, and seem very eager for me to come back in January" (Susan).

inclinations of the early adopters and to the unique cultural and technical features of the new portable equipment" (Chapman 2012: 42).

The guerrilla television style was informed by the understanding that corporate television was "structured as an opposition between people with transmitters, and the people with receivers" (Chapman 2012:42). Boyle (1985) argues similarly that the form and content of guerrilla television, which was largely documentaries, was dictated by the technological limitation the video makers were working within, as much as any political or philosophical conviction these "video freaks" might have shared. Ironically, Boyle argues that the beginning of the end for TVTV, for a while "guerrilla television's most mediagenic and controversial group" (Boyle 1985: 229), came with the commissioned to make a pilot for NBC, called *The TVTV Show*.[79]

Shamberg saw enormous potential for what we have come to know as citizen journalism in the work of the video-makers at the time, and it is tempting to draw parallels between video collectives such as TVTV and Videofreex on the one hand, and the early videoblogging community on the other. Shamberg wanted to disrupt the media ecology of "Media America", to empower individuals to actively take part in their own media environment, because, following McLuhan, he believed that "media and man evolve together" (Shamberg 1971: 7), and that video represented the most important cultural technology of our time, as it "frees film to become an art form" (Shamberg 1971: 8).

There is also the importance of festivals to the creation of a shared practice and purpose, for example the New York Women's Video Festival, which ran between 1972 and 1980 (Barlow 2003), which links portable video, the women's movement, and how festivals contributed to the emergence of new cultural practices and new spaces for political contestation. Barlow argues that for many women, creating video became a unique means of self-expressions (see also Juhasz 2003, 1994). This was often achieved through "sharing individual life experiences and analyzing them collectively", allowing them to "discover[…] their own subjectivity [through the idea that] personal testimony leads to theory and action" (Barlow 2003: 6).Video likewise allowed women to explore their subjectivity, and the feminist political documentary (concerned with biography,

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[79] Boyle (1992) argues "although the rhetoric of guerrilla television may seem dated today, its utopian goal of using video to challenge the information infrastructure in America is more timely than ever and at last practicable. Today's video activism is the fulfilment of a radical 1960s dream of making 'people's television'." (Boyle 1992: 67).

characterized by structural simplicity, and eager to establish trust between the filmmaker and her subject) proved an especially flexible form (Barlow 2003: 6).

Renov (2004) makes a strong argument that "something happened" between 1970 and 1990 that facilitated a shift in the politics of documentary film making – from political and social commentary to more personal perspectives on culture and identity. He points in particular to the work of video artists Wendy Clarke, who "in 1977… began experimenting with the video diary format" (Renov 2004: 177-178) as one example of the shift in documentary style and content in this period. Renov argues that after the political storm of the 1970s (the Guerrilla TV and the feminist movements were part of this), the period after became rather more interested in the personal (Renov 2004: 179). Renov also points out how, in this period, the documentary tradition moved away from an "informed" and "objective" style to a more individualistic perspective (Renov 2004: 176). Norris Nicholson (1997) makes a similar argument, when she states that "early amateur film is one way of tapping into people's memories about themselves and how they relate to others in contrasting contexts" (1997: 199).

This is represented in the 1993 BBC2 series, Video Nation. The Video Nation series, which ran from 1993 – 2000, "signalled, and possibly helped to constitute, a critical change in the framing of the public sphere" (Matthews 2007: 447), paving the way for "what Jon Dovey (2000) has described as 'first person media' forms, within contemporary lifestyle and docu-soap programming" (Matthews 2007: 435) and thus, creating audiences for the arrival of personal media diaries in the UK.

In the last two sections I have briefly mapped a brief history of film and video, distilled through the practices of various amateur or semi-professional groups and individuals over the past one hundred years. It is by no means a complete or exhaustive history (for histories of film, cinema and technology, see Neale 1985, Rodowick 2007, Friedman 2009, and for a more thorough history of media, see Briggs and Burke 2010), but serves to contextualise and historicise the practice of videoblogging in the larger media landscape of the 20th century. Now I want to turn to the rise of the internet and digital video.[80]

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[80]There is no space here for an in-depth discussion of the technical differences between film, video and digital technologies, beyond an acknowledgement that these developments in the technological foundation of the mediums, were crucially important to the change in practice they afforded. Further, the adoption of digital technologies has been equally significant for the emergence of the practices explored in this thesis. Blom (2012: 280) argues that "digital platforms… reduce the difference between film and video to a question of rhetorical (as opposed to technical)

The Rise of the Internet and Digital Video

The internet is a global computer network, a network of networks, developed by Darpa in the 1960s (Naughton 1999). Its military origins are well documented (Abbate 1999, Naughton 1999, Castells 1996, 2001), and shows how "military concerns and goals were built into the Internet technology… favour[ing] military values, such as survivability, flexibility, and high performance, over commercial goals, such as low cost, simplicity or consumer appeal" (Abbate 1999: 5).

Campbell-Kelly and Garcia-Swartz write against what they see as "teleological histories" that are "often based on a single cause for an historical epoch", an approach I have much sympathy with.[81] For instance, whereas the "accepted" narrative about the origins of the internet describes the "demonstration of 4-node ARPANET network in 1969" as the "epoch-making" moment (Campbell-Kelly and Garcia-Swartz 2013:18), Campbell-Kelly and Garcia-Swartz argue that "when the Internet took off in the early 1990s the world was covered by thousands of isolated networks and the integration of these networks into a global entity was likely to happen, whether ARPANET existed or not" due to the fact that linking up these systems was an obvious inventive step in the development of networking technology (Campbell-Kelly and Garcia-Swartz 2013: 18).

Abbate also points out that the World Wide Web didn't emerge out of the ARPA research community, but from a separate group of computer scientists working at CERN, amongst them Tim Berners-Lee and Robert Cailliau (Abbate 1999: 214). She also draws attention to the work on hypertext developed by Ted Nelson, whose manifesto *Computer Lib* (1974) partly influenced Berners-Lee (Abbate 1999: 214, Nelson 1974, Wardrip-Fruin and Montford 2003). The success of the World Wide Web, follows a similar path. However, what was "the unique feature of the web, as Berners-Lee conceived it, was that it did not require a directory of any kind, local or global" (Campbell-Kelly and Garcia-Swartz 2013: 30).

> Given the go-ahead to experiment by my boss, Mike Sendall, I wrote in 1990 a program called 'WorldWideWeb', a point and click hypertext editor which ran on the 'NeXT' machine. This, together with the first Web server, I released to the High Energy Physics community at first, and to the hypertext and NeXT communities in the summer of 1991…The specifications of UDIs (now URIs),

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formatting," but following Kittler (1999), here it is argued that the digital is more profoundly different than mere rhetoric.

[81] The origins of the ideas that informed the internet might be traced back as far as 1938, with H.G Wells' publication of *World Brain*, a concept that conceived of "a complete planetary memory for all mankind" (Wells 1938: 60). Wells' ideas re-emerged in the writings of Vannevar Bush, whose "As We May Think" (Bush 1945) "described an information storage and retrieval machine called the 'memex'" (Campbell-Kelly and Garcia-Swartz 2013: 20).

> HyperText Markup Language (HTML) and HyperText Transfer Protocol
> (HTTP) [were] published on the first server in order to promote wide adoption
> and discussion (Berners-Lee 1998).

It is important to remember that sociality was happening across computer networks long
before the development of the Web. The first Bulletin Board System (BBS) went online
in 1978 and got increasingly popular as functionality improved. Initially, only one user
could be online at any one time, but from 1994 "it was possible for bulletin boards to
connect to one another by low-speed telephone networks" (Campbell-Kelly and Garcia-
Swartz 2013: 26). In 1985, Larry Brilliant and Stewart Brand started the Whole Earth
'Lectronic Link (the WELL), which went on to become one of the most prolific, and
certainly one of the most documented online communities at the time (Rheingold 1993,
Abbate 1999, Turner 2008, Campbell-Kelly and Garcia-Swartz 2013: 26).

One of the most important technical aspects for online video is codecs,
compression algorithms and the rapidly changing digital standards at the time. Codecs
have multiple meanings; they are both a device or computer program responsible for
encoding for decoding a digital stream or signal and a standard. It is thus both a
compression format[82] (or standard) – a way of storing data – and an implementation of a
program that can read and write compressed files (Wikipedia 2014b).

There is a plethora of video codecs[83], but here I wish to highlight the history of
QuickTime in particular. As Cubitt argues, "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" (Cubitt 2008: 46). I highlight QuickTime because it was such an important
codec for the videobloggers to know and understand, and because, as it turns out, the
development-cycle of QuickTime was significant to the videobloggers. QuickTime was
also the first consumer-based video handler that actually worked, both as video support
and as a shared platform amongst a large group of users. Manovich argues,

> the introduction of QuickTime in 1991 can be compared to the introduction of
> the Kinetoscope in 1892: Both were used to present short loops, both featured
> images approximately two by three inches in size, both called for private
> viewing rather than collective exhibition. The two technologies even appear to
> play a similar cultural role. If in the early 1890s the public patronized
> Kinetoscope parlours where peep-hole machines presented them with the latest

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[82] After being compressed, files only retain some of the data from the original file (this is called a lossy format), so in
some sense the codec could be considered a "translator" that makes decision about what data makes it in to the
compressed version and what data gets discarded.
[83] See Wikipedia (2014a) for a full, and regularly updated list.

marvel – tiny, moving photographs arranged in short loops – exactly a hundred years later, computer users were equally fascinated with tiny QuickTime movies that turned a computer into a film projector, however imperfect (Manovich 2001: 313).

In other words, the importance of QuickTime for the development of online video practices cannot be overstated.

QuickTime was designed by Bruce Leak and was first shown to the public at the World Wide Developer Conference in May 1991. During Apple's onstage presentation, QuickTime was displayed playing Apple's iconic 1984 advert playing directly off the computer on the stage for the presentation. As has become usual with Apple's big launch presentations, the event was a huge success and QuickTime was considered an astounding technical breakthrough. The first generation of QuickTime (version 1.0) displayed an aspect ratio of 320 x 240 pixels, and had a frame rate of 15 frames per seconds. The codec was called the Apple Video Codec, also referred to as Roadpizza (Multimedia Wiki 2008).

The next year, 1992, Apple launched QuickTime 1.5, which added the Cinepac codec and vectorquantization. Cinepac was a lossy video codec that had previously been used in, among other, the Atari Jaguar. This allowed for more compact video compression. The 320 x 240 ratio remained stable, but QuickTime now supported 30 frames per second. Apple also added text tracks, and released their first Windows compatible version of QuickTime (1.0 for Windows). This version included Cinepac and INDIO (from Intel)

In February 1994, Apple launched QuickTime 2.0, which supported the addition of music tracks in addition to the already supported video and text. With this, QuickTime was becoming a fully integrated multimedia application. In the same year, Microsoft launched their competitive Video for Windows (version 1.0), using Microsoft's own RLE and Video Codecs, which was woeful in comparison.

QuickTime 2.5 was launched in 1995, and now supported sprite tracks (which allowed the use of animation to be superimposed over the video) and Virtual Reality (VR). In the same year, Microsoft launched Windows 95 which came with the Direct X codec. Microsoft had also just launched Video for Windows, which wasn't very successful. Java and Javascript were also introduced in 1995.

Importantly, the number of commercial users of the internet overtook the number of research and academic users in 1995. Simultaneously, the formal definition of the term 'the internet' was unanimously passed by the Federal Networking Council

(FNC) on October 24th 1995. The definition was agreed upon after members of the internet as well as intellectual property right communities had been consulted. The resolution reads;

> The Federal Networking Council (FNC) agrees that the following language reflects our definition of the term 'Internet'. 'Internet' refers to the global information system that – (i) is logically linked together by a globally unique address space based on the Internet Protocol (IP) or its subsequent extensions/follow-ons; (ii) is able to support communications using the Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) suite or its subsequent extensions/follow-ons, and/or other IP-compatible protocols; and (iii) provides, uses or makes accessible, either publicly or privately, high level services layered on the communications and related infrastructure described herein (Cerf et al 2012).

John Perry Barlow, a founding member of the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) wrote the *Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace* in 1996, in which he declared cyberspace to be "a civilization of the Mind" (Barlow 1996) demanding independence from governments and nation states. The declaration was part of a generation of thinkers influenced by the revolutionary rhetoric associated with the early web, drawn from, among others, William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) and government discourse on the "information superhighway". A close reading of Barlow's text, however, reveals "a wealth of contradictions and misdirection: newness is rooted in history; revolution is effected by commercial transaction; and liberal democracy becomes libertarianism" (Morrison 2009: 54). Nevertheless, the bodiless, immaterial world of distributed identities Barlow describes can be seen reflected in early writing on online behaviour and community, see for instance Turkle (1997), Rheingold (1993) and Poe (2011), who argues that "diffused networks *equalize* social practices and values evolved in and around them" and that "*all* virtual social practices are equalised in the sense of 'more equal than the real world'" (Poe 2011: 224-225, original emphasis). It is interesting to note the degree to which Barlow's writing contributed to a conception of cyberspace and its users that emphasised immateriality above materiality.

One of the earliest and perhaps lasting video archive or storage website for video was founded by Brewster Kahle in 1996. This was called the Internet Archive,[84] which was committed to building a full archive of the internet, storing every webpage and providing a history of the internet through the Way-Back Machine.[85] The Archive has

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[84] http://archive.org
[85] http://archive.org/web/web.php

the potential to be the most lasting of all the video archiving sites although its political economy is fairly unstable. It is still possible to find videoblogs from this period in these archives. Many videobloggers used the archive to host their earliest videos (pre-Blip.tv) and many continued to cross-post their films there for many years, as a backup. The founders and members of The Archive were not, however, active members of the videoblogging community.

In 1997, QuickTime MPEG was launched, which basically allowed and supported the playback of the MPEG codec. This is significant because the MPEG format was an important industry standard. Netflix, a rental video company which has become a major player in the digital video streaming market, was launched in 1997, as a DVD-by-mail service.[86]

In 1998, Apple launched QuickTime 3.0, which added the ability for QuickTime to understand GIFs, JPEGs and TIFFs. Perhaps more importantly, QuickTime 3.0 allowed the user to output video directly to Firewire, cutting down export time dramatically. QuickTime 3.0 also included support for the Sorenson video codec, which meant QuickTime could now support fully professional codecs. It also included support for the Q Design music codec, allowing more flexible uses for their QuickTime platform. Final Cut Pro was first released as an alpha in 1998. The non-linear video editing software was originally designed for Windows (by a company called Macromedia) but Apple purchased it after Adobe rejected an offer to design a mac-compatible version of Premier for Apple (Koo 2011). Final Cut Pro allows users to perform non-linear, non-destructive editing of any QuickTime-compatible video format, supporting multiple video and unlimited audio tracks, and a plethora of editing options, video transitions and video and audio filters.

In June 1999, Apple launched both QuickTime 4.0 for Mac and QuickTime 4.0 for Windows. This iteration supported Mp3 and video streaming. It also supported connecting to a QuickTime streaming server. Here, one of the fundamental building blocks for the live streaming of audio-visual data across the internet was laid. In December 1999, Apple launched QuickTime 4.1, meaning Apple released two big updates this year. This was a major update, allowing the processing of video files larger than 4 GB. It also introduced variable bitrate for Mp3 files, allowing better quality files to be produced (for a detailed account of the history and development of the Mp3

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[86] "For twenty dollars a month, the sites subscribers could rent an unlimited number of DVDs, one at a time, for as long as they wished; the discs arrived in the mail, in distinctive red envelopes" (Aluetta 2014).

format see Sterne 2012). In 1999, Apple also launched iMovie, a video editing software aimed at consumers, i.e. not professional filmmakers.

Although individuals had created personal webpages (home pages) for years, Pyra Lab's launch of Blogger in 1999 contributed to changing how people interacted on the internet. Blogger was a publishing platform that "allowed unskilled individuals to run blogs easily and free of charge" (Reed 2005: 220-221). The term "weblog" was coined by John Barger in December 1997 whereas the more popular term "blog" was coined by Peter Merholz in April/May 1999 (boyd 2006a). The terms were used to signify a personal homepage that was distinctly different from a personal home page. Instead of a static web page with text, links and images, blogs are "web-based journals in which entries are displayed in reverse chronological sequence" (Herring et al 2004). As early adopter and early weblogger Rebecca Blood argues, there have been personal websites that have subsequently been identified as "blogs" since 1998 (Blood 2000). Initially, there were very few of these weblogs, which meant that – similarly to the early videoblogging community – the bloggers were all reading each others posts. As Blood (2000) points out, with the launch of Blogger and what she calls the "post-Blogger explosion" the nature of blogs changed. As she argues, whereas the early community of bloggers had been concerned with the "web at large", the new bloggers treated their sites more like a diary:

> these blogs, often updated several times a day, were instead a record of the blogger's thoughts: something noticed on the way to work, notes about the weekend, a quick reflection on some subject or another (Blood 2000).

In her work, boyd (2006a, 2006b) traces the development of the early blogging platforms, including Typepad, Diaryland and Live Journal as well as the evolution of the definition of blogging. boyd argues that whereas most early writing on blogs attempted to define it as a genre of writing, it is more helpful to "reframe blogs as a culture-driven medium upon which the practice of blogging can occur" (boyd 2006a) . She argues;

> In the context of communication, a medium is the channel through which people can communicate or extend their expressions to others. Examples of mediums include paper, radio, and television. In McLuhan's terms (1964) a medium is an 'extension of man' that allows people to express themselves. Blogs are precisely this; they allow people to extend themselves into a networked digital environment that is often thought to be disembodying. The blog becomes both the digital body as well as the medium through which bloggers express themselves (boyd 2006a).

This is a useful way of thinking about blogs and is relevant for the way in which videoblogging later developed. Through blogs, wikis and message boards, previously passive readers can become active writers and producers of knowledge (Benkler 2006: 213). Through aggregation and syndication, the individual user can create his or her own media stream.

In January 2000, Adam Kontras posted what is considered to be the first online video on his website, and in November 2000, Adrian Miles posted his first videoblog. Miles was also one of the first to attempt to document short-form digital film. The *Vogma Manifesto* (December 2000) set out a simple set of rules for a videoblog, which he termed a "vog". He wrote that a "vog";

> respects bandwidth
> is not streaming video (this is not the reinvention of television)
> uses performative video and/or audio
> is personal
> uses available technology
> experiments with writerly video and audio
> lies between writing and the televisual
> explores the proximate distance of words and moving media
> is dziga vertov with a mac and a modem (Miles 2000, original formatting).

Miles' definition is useful for a number of reasons. Firstly, it was one of the first attempts at theorising online video (for later attempts, see for example Miles 2007, Luers 2007 and Clayfield 2007), written at a time when posting a video on the internet was incredibly difficult, hence the first rule; respecting bandwidth. It is also interesting in that it distances online video from the televisual through the rejection of streaming technologies. Thus, Miles' definition has already defined the online video as a discrete, limited format, one which has a clearly defined beginning, middle and end, and stands alone in a potential sea of other online videos. It thus also sets the videoblog apart from live streaming technologies that were to flood the internet a few years later, Justin.tv being a notable example. Miles also defined the online video as "personal", a definition that may have excluded a number of practitioners who considered themselves "videobloggers" but who did not make inherently personal content (see for instance Galacticast, Epic Fu and Chasing Windmills – these shows were videoblogs but not "personal"). Lastly, Miles' definition nods to Dziga Vertov, an attempt to provide historical antecedents for online video.

In 2000, Netflix's CEO, Reed Hastings, offered to sell a 49% share of Netflix to Blockbuster in order to develop and expand its online service, an offer that was turned

down by Blockbuster, seeing no threat from digital media in wake of the dot.com bubble (Aluetta 2014).

In 2001, QuickTime 5.0 was launched, which allowed MPEG 1 video playback (for both mac and Windows). It also added Sorenson video 3 playback, Flash 4 playback and export, and had a new VR engine. QuickTime 5.0 was the first launch that seriously developed QuickTime's potential as a video *editing* software, and not just a media player, by supporting real-time rendering of effects and transitions in DV files. The pieces of technology for supporting videoblogging were therefore strengthening into a comprehensive technical system.

In 2002, Apple launched QuickTime 6.0, supporting MPEG 4 playback, import and export, as well as support for Flash 5, JPEG 2000 and MPEG 2 playback. Apple also included support for Instant On Streaming Playback, which would change the way video content could be consumed online. Also launched was the RSS 2.0 feed specification and many implementations of it were supported on websites and blogs.

In June 2003, QuickTime 6.3 was released, adding support for AAC/AMR codecs, which increased the quality of compression for audio output. Apple also included the first support for mobile formats, the 3gPP codec, which supported mobile video camera formats from brands such as Nokia and Sony Ericsson. This allowed seamless movement of files between mobile and computer, allowing not only playback possibilities, but also more logical storage and archiving of mobile video files.[87] In October of the same year, Apple launched the Pixlet codec, allowing QuickTime to process High Definition (HD) video files. In December, QuickTime 6.5 was launched, furthering support for 3gPP (mobile), AMC (audio) and Apple lossless. Thus we can see that Apple yet again moved the bar in terms of professionalising its software which was usable by professionals and consumers. In August 2003, Chris DeWolfe and Tom Anderson launched Myspace, which for a short period before Facebook and Twitter, would become one of the largest social networks on the internet, as well as on the first sites to promote video content.

In 2003, Apple released Final Cut Pro 4, which now included a package of additional applications, *Compressor* for transcoding between video formats, *LiveType*, *Soundtrack,* and *CinemaTools.* Apple also launched Final Cut Express, a cheaper and slightly downgraded version of Final Cut Pro.

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[87] These video files were very small, with very low resolution, so were perfect for device-to-device sharing, but not much else.

The term "podcasting" was first coined in 2004, when Ben Hammersley, a technology writer for the Guardian "rhetorically asked what the emerging practice of amateur online radio should be named: 'Audioblogging? Podcasting? GuerillaMedia?'" (Sterne at al 2008)[88]. One of the earliest adoptions of the term came from "former MTV host and self-anointed tech-guru Adam Curry" (Sterne et al 2008). Podcasting is the creation of "a digital media file, or a series of such files, that is distributed over the internet using syndication feeds for playback on portable media players and personal computers. Like 'radio', the term can refer either to the content itself or to the method by which it is syndicated; the latter is also termed podcasting. The host or author of a podcast is often called a podcaster" (Sterne 2008). As such, podcasting can be seen as closely related to both blogging and videoblogging (there also exists the term audio-blogging, which indicates that audio files are regularly embedded in a users' blog, much like videos are embedded in the videoblogger's videoblog).

In 2004, Blockbuster finally launched its own online subscription service, however they had left it too late. Netflix, who had offered to merge with Blockbuster four years earlier, had by then amassed 4.2 million subscribers and become the industry leader for online subscription-based video rentals. Blockbuster went into administration in 2011 (BBC News 2013).

In February 2005, YouTube was founded[89] by Chad Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed Karim.[90] It allowed anyone with a video camera, computer, a mobile device and internet access to watch and publish video content online. YouTube simplified the technical process of videoblogging, leading to a transformation of online video culture.[91] This was a shift from the idea of the website as a personal storage facility for video content to a platform for public self-expression that matches YouTube to the ideas about a user-led revolution that characterizes rhetoric around web 2.0 (Burgess and Green 2009: 4).

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[88] Sterne et al (2008) undertakes a limited textual search to place the development of the term podcasting within a history that takes into account the contestation of its use of the way in which certain actors (particularly Apple) have sought to control it. Most notable is the claim that podcasting is a conflation of iPod and Broadcasting. The authors divide podcasting into practice and product, before contrasting podcasting with broadcasting (broadly understood). The authors conclude by claiming that podcasting is broadcasting. They believe that it continues to work through the division between producer and consumer – that is that it is not merely an outgrowth of blogging culture. However it remains an open field for contestation by others who may use the technology to contribute to that breakdown of mass broadcasting. See also Farivar (2014) for a discussion of the politics of podcasting.
[89] http://www.youtube.com/yt/about/ (see also Burgess and Green 2009)
[90] Since then, YouTube has grown to become the world's largest video sharing site, and claims to have more than 1 billion unique visitors each month, 100 hours of video uploaded each minute, and over 6 billion hours of video watched each month.
[91] For a fuller description of YouTube, see chapter 5 (see also Burgess and Green 2009, Jenkins 2009, Lovink and Niederer 2008, Snickars and Vonderau 2009, Lange 2008a, 2008b).

A number of competing video platforms were launched in 2005. In April, Dailymotion, a French video sharing website founded by Benjamin Bejbaum and Olivier Poitrey, was launched, and in July, News Corporation bought MySpace for $580 million. Myspace users' had (since February 2005) had the ability to embed YouTube videos in their Myspace profiles and realizing the competitive threat to the new Myspace Videos service, Myspace banned embedded YouTube videos from its user profiles. Myspace users widely protested the ban, prompting Myspace to lift the ban shortly thereafter (Longino 2006). Other examples of video platforms launched in this period include Veoh (founded by Dmitry Shapiro in September 2006), Vimeo (founded November 2004, VideoEgg (founded by David Lerman, Matt Sanchez and Kevin Sladek in early 2005).[92]

QuickTime was one of the fundamental technologies that formed part of the videoblogging practice. Apart from a very small number of users who relied on Windows Media Player, the majority of the independent videobloggers I interviewed relied on QuickTime[93] (both the application and the codec) in some way through their videoblogging practice. QuickTime was therefore a crucial part of the history of videoblogging and in April 2005, Apple launched what was to the last major update to QuickTime for four years.

QuickTime 7.0 introduced the codec H264[94], which was to become the standard format for audio-visual digital content across all of Apple's mobile media devices (iPhone, iPod touch, iPad, and Apple Watch). It would later become the industry standard format for displaying audio-visual content on the internet (Kwang 2012). Apple also upgraded to iMovie HD, which included support for HDV (720p and 1080i) and introduced a new feature called "Magic iMovie" – streamlining the video editing process by automatically inserting a pre-selected video-transition between clips.

In September 2005, Tim O'Reilly, entrepreneur and publisher, announced the contours of what he saw as the "Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software" (O'Reilly 2005), thus launching what became known as web 2.0. In computer science terms, a 2.0 upgrade (from a 1.x version of a programme) indicates a large and significant upgrade, and likewise, web 2.0 indicates a significant

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[92] There are too many to list here, but a few important ones are Archive.org, blip.tv. Dailymotion, Facebook, Funny Or Die, GodTube, Hulu, LiveLeak, Mefeedia, Openfilm, and Photobucket.
[93] Andreas, Cheryl, Enric and Raymond all explicitly mentioned it, but looking through their videoblogs, I found that a much larger number relied on this particular codec.
[94] H264 is a video-compression format. It is particularly good because it is able to produce high quality video in relatively low bitrates.

upgrade, or shift in the how the Web works. Examples of web 2.0 technologies include the move from static to dynamic webpages, the increase in user-generated content and the growth of social networks.

According to scholars, web 2.0 is a number of things. For instance, Bassett (2008) argues that it acts as a model for us to understand the internet and that in contrast to earlier models of the internet, web 2.0 "diagnoses/projects/demands a particular relationship between forms of practice and forms of architecture. 2.0, in other words, is based on an understanding of the dynamics of the system (the new media ecology) *in use*" (Bassett 2008, original emphasis); Andrew Keen, on the other hand, understands web 2.0 to be "Socrates's nightmare: technology that arms every citizen with the means to be an opinionated artist or writer" (Keen 2006). Keen despairs at the 'cult of the amateur', a culture that merges the ideology of the 1960s counterculture with the techno fetishism of Silicon Valley to produce

> an ideology… [that] worships the creative amateur: the self-taught filmmaker, the dorm-room musician, the unpublished writer. It suggests that everyone – even the most poorly educated and inarticulate amongst us – can and should use digital media to express and realize themselves. Web 2.0 'empowers' our creativity, it 'democratizes' media, it 'levels the playing field' between experts and amateurs. The enemy of Web 2.0 is 'elitist' traditional media (Keen 2006).

Manovich makes a similar claim when he argues that "we can also say that we are graduated from 20th century video/film to early 21st century social video" (Manovich 2008: 33). Indeed, important, if tangential, arguments in relation to digital video have been articulated around Remix Culture (Lessig 2003), tied closely with issues surrounding copyright (Benkler 2006, Berry 2008) and ideas of a digital as a commons (Moglen 2001).

Within the contours of this thesis, web 2.0 remains an important concept for three reasons. Firstly, the discourses and "hype" surrounding the term were very important to the videoblogging community, and its sense of emerging identity and practice. Secondly, the technical advantages that the web 2.0 technologies offered (such as seamless RSS syndication for instance) had an effect on the development of the videoblogging platform. Thirdly, web 2.0 ironically heralded the beginning of the end for the videoblogging community. As the big web 2.0 companies, such as YouTube, started to attract users, and Twitter and Facebook became the key social networks for communication, video and photo-sharing on the web, the videoblogging community

began to disperse, and the expertise held within the community fragmented across the new social platforms.

Another of YouTube's competitors in the video platform market, at least up until their sale to Google in October 2006 (BBC News 2006), was Google Video (launched January 2005, officially closed down August 2012). The purchase of YouTube by Google is significant as it was a deliberate attempt to corner the market, but not necessarily in terms of technology. "Google's acquisition was not about bringing innovative technology into the home, as its own GoogleVideo was already running on superior software; it was about bringing in communities of users" (van Dijck 2009: 42). In 2006, Apple stopped selling Final Cut Pro as a stand-alone product, and the software was bundled into Final Cut Studio, a professional video and audio editing suite which includes *Motion, Soundtrack Pro, DVD Studio Pro, Colour,* and *Compression*.

Signifying the shift that had taken place in terms of user generated content starting to influence the media landscape, in 2006, Time Magazine designated person of the year to "you" – as in everyone, the everyday person uploading, sharing and disseminating content across the internet. In the issue, "the editors paid tribute to the millions of anonymous web users who dedicate their creative energy to a booming web culture" (van Dijck 2009: 41). Echoing Thomas Carlyle who argued that "the history of the world is but the biography of great men" (Carlyle 2008), Time highlighted that alongside stories of war and conflict (in Iraq, Israel and Lebanon), 2006 offered an alternative story, one in which participatory culture blossomed and grew into a vibrant force in the global media landscape. This shift from the individual, personal website as the main source for video content, to platform-based public self-expression and communication, shows how YouTube was a perfect fit for the ideas about a user-led revolution that characterizes rhetoric around web 2.0 (Burgess and Green 2009: 4). As the Time article argued,

> look at 2006 through a different lens and you'll see another story, one that isn't about conflict or great men. It's a story about community and collaboration on a scale never seen before. It's about the cosmic compendium of knowledge Wikipedia and the million-channel people's network YouTube and the online metropolis MySpace. It's about the many wresting power from the few and helping one another for nothing and how that will not only change the world, but also change the way the world changes (Grossman 2006).

The mass-media distribution model of the twentieth century was a "one-way, hub-and-spoke structure, with unidirectional links to its ends, running from the center to the periphery" (Benkler 2006: 179). These structures facilitated the control of a small number of big media corporations, whether private (commercial) or public (national), over the media landscape. The underlying internet protocols have affordances towards networked and decentralised ways of transferring information, and early commentators on the internet may have lauded it as an alternative distribution model, without the gatekeepers of "big media", allowing anyone with access to it, the possibility of becoming an active member of the public sphere. However, as the debates around net neutrality shows us, although the "old" gatekeepers of the media are losing some of their power, there are new gatekeepers emerging that control both access to, and interactions within the web itself, be it Google, Amazon or Facebook (for a detailed analysis of the key issues concerning net neutrality see Marsden 2010).

2007 saw the first *Video Vortex* conference, organised by Geert Lovink at the Institute for Network Cultures in Amsterdam. The conference, which ran seven workshops over five years and published two books (Lovink and Niederer 2008, Lovink and Somers Miles 2011), attempted to contextualise the developments in the emerging field of video-based media on the internet and critically engage with questions surrounding "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" (Video Vortex #3 2008). Some videobloggers were invited to the Video Vortext conferences, including Andreas H. Pedersen and Brittany Shoot (who wrote the Lumiere Manifesto), Michael Verdi, Adrian Miles and Jay Dedman.

Gradually, corporations and industry started to see the potential profit from online video distribution, and in February 2007, Netflix, the online movie-rental service, which had been posting hard copies of DVDs to subscribers since 1994, introduced video-on-demand to its subscribers (Aluetta 2014). In December 2007, the BBC iPlayer was launched, a Flash based video streaming service giving users access to BBC programmes for up to one week after broadcast. The service had been in beta since the summer, and was criticised for only working with the Windows XP operating

system.[95] After a petition signed by over 16000 people, "the government said the BBC Trust had made it a condition of launching the iPlayer that it worked with other operating systems" (BBC News 2007). In October, the BBC entered a strategic relationship with Adobe, in order to provide streaming across multiple platforms (Macintosh, Linux and Windows). This relationship was "part of the BBC's strategy to reinvent bbc.co.uk to ensure that all its rich-media content is accessible to the widest audience possible" (BBC Press Office 2007). When the iPhone 3GS (the first in Apple's iPhone range capable of shooting video) was launched in 2009, the possibility for short-form digital film went truly mainstream. The Apple AppStore[96] opened in 2008, bringing with it a massive market for film editing apps.[97]

2008 through 2009 continued to see rapid growth in the user of online video services. In terms of content, Uricchio argues that, during January 2009,

> 100.9 million viewers watched 6.3 billion videos on YouTube.com (62.6 videos per viewer) for a 43 percent market share. Fox Interactive Media ranked a distant second in terms of videos viewed, with 552 million videos (3.7 percent), followed by Viacom Digital with 288 million (1.9 percent) for the month respectively. Viewed more globally, nearly 77 percent of the total US Internet audience watched online video for an average of six hours in January 2009 (Uricchio 2009: 27).

I note here that Uricchio's focus is on consumption of online video, rather than production. In fact, towards the end of 2009, what we see is a surprising shift in the way social media use is being reported; away from participation, and towards consumption. To illustrate, in January 2009, YouTube announced a new partnership with Apple iTunes, offering users "a dynamic, lean-back, 10-foot television viewing experience through a streamlined interface" (Snickars and Vanderau 2009: 15). This announcement meant the integration of YouTube with Apple iTunes, allowing users to watch YouTube videos directly on their televisions, further blurring the distinction between online and offline content, as well as the distinction between online and offline behaviour. YouTube's expansion into "offline" media continued with the announcement, in April 2009, of a partnership with Sony "to expand its library of movies and TV shows" (Snickars and Vanderau 2009: 14). Further, "the Library of Congress, for example, has

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[95] As a publicly funded public service broadcaster, it was very odd for the BBC miss an opportunity to develop the spirit of community and diversity represented by the GNU/Linux and open web. It goes without saying that Microsoft at the time represented a monopoly on user desktops.

[96] For a critique of the Apple AppStore, particularly with regards to video artists and digital artists wanting to produce content for the iOS operating system, see Briz (2013).

[97] An app is a self-contained program or piece of software which has been designed for a particular purpose. There are apps available for both mobile and desktop devices.

already had its own YouTube channel for some years. During spring 2009, the Library announced that it would start uploading millions of clips to YouTube" (Snickars and Vanderau 2009: 14).

This shift from participation to consumerism can also be seen reflected in the 2009 update of QuickTime. After four years of no updates, QuickTime X (10), launched in 2009, was significant for moving QuickTime from being specialised tool to a social media application. In this upgrade, Apple introduced visual chapters and the ability to perform complex editing from within QuickTime itself. It also supported screen capture, the ability to record the screen of the computer whilst the user is performing other tasks, and support for capture of video and audio streams. It increased GPU acceleration and supported live streaming. This version of QuickTime had been completely re-written in order to support 64 bit audio and video codecs and dropped some of the earlier codecs. Perhaps most interestingly, however, QuickTime now allowed direct sharing to YouTube, bypassing the previous complex system of compression and codecs, essentially allowing anyone with no previous knowledge of video formats to export video *in the correct and optimised format* directly to YouTube. In other words, one expert layer of knowledge about the export of audio-visual content via QuickTime was stripped away, transforming the process of creating, uploading and sharing video to the internet.

Since 2010, online video has moved in two directions. In terms of viewing online video, increased bandwidth has meant a massive increase in real-time streaming of either live or archived data. This has made viewing content online easier, more readily available and, with services such as Netflix, Hulu, BBC iPlayer and HBO Online, has brought a much wider plethora of content available to the user. Some of these services, like the BBC iPlayer, are "free" (or, in the UK at least, funded by the TV licence), whereas Netflix and HBO online charges a monthly subscription fee. Other services, such as the UK-based BlinkBox and Apple iTunes, charges users per episode, series or film. On the other hand, sites such as YouTube allows its users to upload videos up to 15 minutes long and files larger than 20GB. Video-sharing has also moved partly out of the browser and into iPhone and Android applications, which are highly

mobile (also see Lovink [2011: 11] on what he calls "*totale Mobilmachung*" of visual culture).[98]

In February 2010, HBO launched it's Netflix rival, HBO Go (Sandoval 2010). By December 2011, ITV's online video player was estimated to have 3.6 million monthly users (Mintel 2012). Further, Blinkbox has drawn in "3 million users as of January 2012, many of whom are undoubtedly driven by access to the ad-supported free content available through the service" (Mintel 2012). In contrast, "subscription VoD (SVoD) operator Netflix is estimated… to have approximately 317,000 customers in the UK as of January 2012", whereas "competing SVoD operator LoveFilm announced 2 million members as of January 2012, and of this number, estimates of the number of streaming-only customers hover at under 1 million" (Mintel 2012).

In March 2012, QuickTime 10.2 was launched, supporting more social sharing, allowing users to share their videos instantly to either email, YouTube or Facebook but also directly to devices, such as iPhone, iPod and Apple TV. As I have tried to show, the history of QuickTime shows a codec that developed from a very technically complex software package (media player and codec), requiring expert knowledge of the requirements of formats and compression, into a simplified social media application, allowing the quick and easy processing of audio-visual data. In its final iteration, QuickTime also made sharing data across the internet very simple. What is interesting in terms of this thesis, however, is the fact that in the period between 2005 and 2009, in which QuickTime was, by any means, a stable codec, with no upgrades, the videoblogging community was at its most active. I argue that the relative stability of QuickTime was one of the conditions of possibility for the emergence and relative success of videoblogging. A lot of the discussions early on within the community were circled around the problem of negotiating a rapidly changing technological landscape. However, despite this, it is interesting that although the first couple of years were plagued by constant upgrades and iterations of the software, for the majority of the videoblogging "era" one of the most important technologies used by the community was actually relatively stable. It therefore seems that the very conditions of possibility for the videoblogging practice rests partially upon the fact that Apple froze their

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[98] For a really interesting and comprehensive analysis of the screen, see Verhoeff (2012), who argues "screens are objects, technologies, apparatuses and machines of vision, all at once. The screen is a technological device, an interface, a flat 2D surface positioned in a 3D arrangement, potentially in a 4D relationship of time and motion, a metaphor for mediation and vision, a frame for representation, a site of innovation and change: what I call a meta-morphing constant in modern culture" (Verhoeff 2012: 16).

QuickTime releases as they were in the process of modernising their hardware.[99] In other words, for four years while completing this move, Apple turned their attention away from QuickTime, allowing a period of technical stability, which created one of the conditions of possibility for developing for the videoblogging practice without the distraction of rapidly changing technical standards and software.

In 2012, two new video processing applications (apps) were launched that have been very successful,[100] and which also encapsulates something akin to the videoblogging aesthetic. Vine, allows the user to record 6 seconds of video by tapping the screen (which operates as the viewfinder) and saves the video file both to the Vine cloud app and to your camera roll. This means that the user retains a copy of their video on their mobile device, as opposed to the video content being locked down into the app itself, as is the case with another video processing app, Light, released only months before. Light creates short, stop-motion videos by recording one frame a second for approximately ten seconds. Both Vine and light are great contemporary examples of tools of interest to those fascinated with "light weight, ready to hand video documentation practices that want to seriously engage with and intersect the everyday" (Miles 2013).[101]

In 2013, Instagram, an established photosharing site recently purchased by Facebook, launched video as part of their service. This allows up to 15 seconds of video to be recorded. What Vine and Instagram have in common is that the aesthetic produced by the method of capturing video (tapping finger on viewfinder in Vine and Hyperlapse, and pressing a releasing finger on record button in Instagram video) created a similar effect to the fast-edits of early videoblogging. However, whereas it could take the videoblogger a long time to create this effect in software packages such as iMovie, Final Cut Pro or QuickTime, here the process is automated and feels delightful and easy to do. In many ways, then, the more recent applications and software packages that handles online video, have taken the videoblogging practices, automated, simplified and streamlined them, so that the videoblogging aesthetic now is available at the click of a button.

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[99] Here I refer to their paradigm-shifting move from Power PC to Intel, a process first made public at the World Wide Developer Conference in 2005. The process was completed in August 2009, with the release of the "Snow Leopard" upgrade to the Mac operating system, at which point Apple dropped all support for Power PC.
[100] Vine amassed over 40 milion users in its first year (Shayon 2014) although there is some contention about this figure, as well as a question to be raised about how many of those are active users McGarry 2013).
[101] For more on Vine and a technical comparison between Vine and Light, see Miles (2013).

Despite claims of being "profoundly different" from older forms of media (Hodson and Verdi 2006: 189), this chapter has explored how online video shares a history with other instantiations of amateur and semi-professional film and video production. As Jenkins argues, participatory culture was not created by web 2.0 platforms such as YouTube, rather, platforms such as YouTube were so quickly accepted by the mainstream because for decades groups of participatory cultures had prepared the way for the early adoption of these kinds of platforms (Jenkins 2009: 109-110).

In the following chapters I will undertake an examination of videoblogging itself, drawing on the empirical data gathered during my virtual ethnographic fieldwork. The three following chapters form three case studies; all looking at different aspects of the videoblogging practice, starting with its technical foundation. In the next chapter, then, I will be looking closely at how the technologies available to, created and maintained by the videoblogging community were conceptualised and discussed. This helps explore the emergence of a videoblogging platform imaginary. I will also argue that although this technical knowledge is necessary to gain a deep understanding of the videoblogging practice, it is not sufficient unless we also look at how these technological structures are negotiated and the conditions under which these practices emerge.

Chapter 4: Making the Videoblog Platform

In this chapter, I undertake an analysis of how the early development of the videoblogging community maps onto the early development of the videoblogging platform. I argue for the importance of a material approach to studying digital culture that not only looks at what can be observed, i.e. approaches that focus on identity, communities and lived experiences online from a social science/ humanities perspective – textual, cultural or social – but also takes seriously questions concerning the technical structures that act as conditions of possibility for the platform and practices. That is, I start to engage with the cultural and technical hybridity of my research object.

I engage with how videoblogging community behaviour and activity is situated in relation to discussions around and testing of an underlying system, with a competitive yet collaborative atmosphere geared towards the development of the platform and the community. This includes the articulation of competing and often normative ideas of how the platform "should be", and eventually the emergence of a hegemonic *platform imaginary*, that guides the implementation and content creation practices on the technical system. This imaginary is constructed mainly through discourse and computer programming code and may be supplemented through demo websites, prototypes and mock-ups. Usually, but not always, the platform imaginary is guided by a few key individual developers and users, generally overseen by the companies involved, but in many cases the companies may not even understand the platform imaginary in exceptional and intensive moments of development – here I am thinking about Twitter, for example, and how users' practices developed the @mention and hashtag[102] functionality and to which the company at first didn't pay attention to because "it was too geeky" (Gannes 2010) .

Thus, here I critically engage with *videoblogging as a technical platform*. I do this in part by looking at archived technologies, discourses and recordings of events, and secondly, through an exploration of the research data gathered during the empirical study conducted during my ethnography. As such, this chapter has two main functions. The first is concerned with mapping the development of a constellation of technologies

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[102] The early twitter platform had very little functionality for sociality and was conceived as a communications channel. The very active early adopter community therefore developed a new set of practices, such as re-tweeting (RT), mentioning (@-mentions) and hashtags (#) to make up for the lack of technical functions. These were later absorbed into code in the current system. This kind of appropriation of user innovation is very common on technical platforms (see Terranova 2004).

that, together, form the videoblogging platform. The second is concerned with how the videobloggers articulate their technical practices, which include the kinds of technologies they use, how they express their highly technical digital skills, camera skills, organizing and social networking. Running through the analysis are the technical contours of the short-form digital film, which is usually under ten minutes in length, due mainly to technical limitations, narrative practices within videoblogging, as well as social norms and practice. This informs part of the self-description, or subject position, occupied by the videoblogger, here positioned in contrast to professional experts – often imagined by videobloggers as long-form filmmakers. This process of identity-making, or narrativising of the self, can be seen in relation to what we might consider a nascent form of database informed narrative (Manovich 2001), drawn from the use of new digital tools that allows the users to cut and paste film in new ways. However, the point of these distinctions, following Bassett, is not, "to make comparisons between linear narrative as a fixed form whose moment has passed and the database as form whose moment has come, rather… narrative is an intrinsic part of a new informational economy which becomes its material and which it holds and articulates" (Bassett 2007a: 3).

There is a considerable literature on the emergence of digital culture, life on the screen, communities and lived experiences online (see for instance Turkle 1997, Kennedy 2006, Rheingold 1993, Jenkins 2006, Castells 1996; 2000, Bassett 2007a), yet it is only in recent years that focus has started shifting towards a closer analysis of the material structures that the web is built on (Kirschenbaum 2004, Berry 2011, Galloway 2004, Fuller 2003, Bogost 2012). The emergence of software studies and platform studies, network politics, tactical media and political economic studies of code and software, has meant that more attention has been given to the very structures that facilitate and shape media online. Although as Langlois et al (2009) argue, the study of computationally based systems is made difficult by the fact that often, researchers have limited or no access to what lies beneath the interface itself, and indeed in my own work I have had to familiarise myself with an unfamiliar technical discourse which is often obscure, difficult to understand and very unfriendly for non-technical researchers.

For example, companies like Microsoft employ proprietary, or closed, code for all their software packages, and, likewise, companies like Facebook and Twitter are notoriously protective of their technical systems. Within these, the abstraction of technical processes (as seen with the emergence of web 2.0 technologies), creates new

user experiences built around convenience when using the web. For instance, compare the action of posting a video on a website before the emergence of web 2.0 – copying a link, pasting the link (with the correct html) into your website or blog, then either waiting for someone to visit your site or emailing a link to this particular page (via your email) to a number of contacts, all entered by hand – with the much simpler 'one-click' embedding of a YouTube video directly onto the Facebook Timeline, instantly shared with your Facebook friends. As Langlois et al (2009) argues, this has profound effects on the experiences of the users, and should have profound effects on the way in which these technical systems are studied; "we need," they argue, "to challenge our perception of the Web as rooted within the visual aesthetic of the user interface" (Langlois et al 2009). The authors suggest a platform-based methodology as a way to uncover the underlying processes that tie the various "modular" elements of web 2.0 world together, allowing for an uncovering of how "protocols are articulated so as to channel information in specific ways and this enacts specific economic, legal and cultural dynamics" (Langlois et al 2009).[103]

This chapter is informed by the methodological innovations suggested by platform-based research to look at what Langlois et al (2009) called "beyond and below the user interface". Here I am thinking of the software studies work of Fuller (2003), Chun (2005), Kittler (1999) and Parikka (2012).[104] These approaches look behind the veil of technical black-boxes, to critically engage with the processes that go into the co-construction of a platform-based community. Here I want to draw on these insights to examine the technical and social elements of platform-based communities, to try and locate the interconnections and co-constructions of the "network" and "community". I do this by analysing the communities in question at a point *before* the "corporate colonization" takes place. In other words, I look at the constellation of technical systems and user-practices of the early adopter communities in a period of instability, before the platforms have been set in place, and at a point where individual users still have the power to influence dramatic changes on the building of the network. For these purposes, I analytically use *network* to refer to the material level of the technical-social level and *community* to refer to the socio-cultural level of the socio-technical associations that form in these technical-social assemblages. An important part of my research is to map

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[103] Further, they argue "adopting a platform perspective helps overcoming the limitation of the user worldview so as to understand broader subjectivation processes, and re-localize users with the visible and invisible elements that compose Web 2.0 worlds" (Langlois et al 2009).
[104] For additional authors, see Helmond and Gerlitz (2012), Bucher (2012) and Rieder (2012).

both the way in which the technical level, as network, is co-constructed, and yet constantly iterated by the early-adopter community who populate it. Secondly, I am interested in the way in which particular software sub-systems, or better, mediators (like apps), function to mediate the interface between the network and the community, and in some cases intensify, shape and facilitate particular forms of sociality on the network.

It is common for such systems, when they are launched commercially, to alienate the original early community surrounding its technical development, and in many cases to offer little or no feedback, or monetary rewards to the very people who were so instrumental in its early stages. Examples abound of these way of exploiting early adopter communities, Apple, for example, was heavily reliant on its early adopter community before it become successful and quickly moved to ignore them.[105] Equally, we can consider the examples of Flickr, which originally had a means for the community to take a part in its governance. This practice was also followed by Facebook and Instagram, which, in the case of Facebook, proposed to amend, and successfully voted to be removed from the company ordinances in December 2012 when they began an IPO process (Facebook 2012, Oremus 2012a, Oremus 2012b).

By mapping these early system developments, we often have access to aspects of the development of the key algorithms and APIs that underlie the system. This is crucially important because in later iterations of the systems this access is almost certainly hidden, obfuscated, or black-boxed. This is one of the problems that many software studies projects run into, and they are forced to speculate on the intricacies of the system they wish to study, e.g. Facebook, but in reality are making only calculated guesses (see Bucher 2013). In contrast, by examining these very early iterations of a platform-based community, we are able to follow the mapping of the API, to take just one example, the public debates, the code fragments, the hits and misses in design, the slow stabilisation of the protocol and so on. This is an extremely valuable approach to the study of these types of system and the building of their underlying protocols (Galloway 2004).

These early systems often have a collegial feedback loop between community and network, the network here understood, of course, as including the developers of the platform itself. As Langlois et al (2009) argue:

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[105] This was detailed by Guy Kawasaki in relation to the mailing lists he used to direct the early adopter community in particular directions or to gain feedback on products.

> commercial Web 2.0 platforms are not simply about facilitating user-produced content and carrying content across networks to large audiences or 'end-users'; rather, they are primarily concerned with establishing the technocultural conditions within which users can produce content and within which content and users can be re-channelled through techno-commercial networks and channels (Langlois 2009).

Indeed, this highlights the extent to which the software platform has to work to inculcate a sense of community in users, understood here as a form of sociality, and into their technical processes. Or to put it another way, it is when the network and the community are brought together that a socially-oriented platform can emerge. Hence, my exploration of these early adopter communities can be thought of as a method for mapping the genealogy of platforms. Again Langlois et al (2009) put it aptly when they write, "the ontogenesis of Web 2.0 is about the creation of inhabitable worlds within which users can exist and extend themselves according to specific technocultural logics" (Langlois et al 2009).

The Technical A Priori of Videoblogs

From a purely "screenic" perspective, a *videoblog* is a blog that uses video as its main form of expression. The videobloggers used a variety of blogging software, most notable Blogger, although many converted to Wordpress[106] as that platform grew in popularity.[107] Videoblogs generally featured short videos, usually between 1 - 5 minutes long, which could be viewed, commented on and downloaded by users over the internet.[108] The content of the videoblogs varied greatly, from personal diaries to news programs, sci-fi shows and more artistic videos. The videoblog structure had the author's post in reverse chronological order, the newest at the top (figure 3).

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[106] http://wordpress.org

[107] A possible explanation may lie in the fact that Wordpress is open-source, whereas Blogger is a propriatory piece of software.

[108] The ability to download videos from videoblogs was an important technical specificity. This was because the de-coupling of the video from the videoblog was a necessity for syndication, which formed the basis for dissemination of videoblogs at the time. It also stood in direct contrast to other, proprietary video platforms such as Vimeo, Veoh and YouTube, which prevented the user from downloading content. There are technical solutions to this today of course, sites such as Tubesock and KeepVid.com are some examples of clients that allow you to circumvent this.
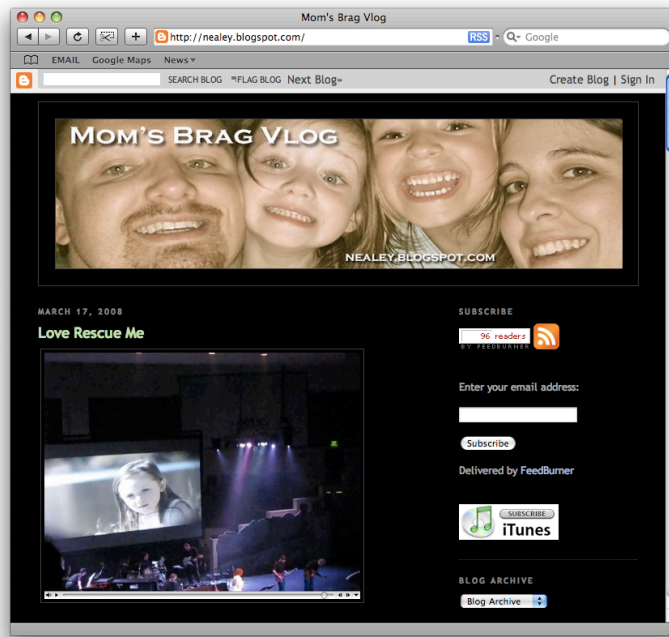
Figure 3: Mum's Brag vlog (Nealy 2008)

Like that of a blog, the sidebar of a videoblog often had additional information about the videoblogger, such as other sites they maintained, a blogroll of other videoblogs they liked or would recommend, and links to community websites, services and platforms (figure 4). Similar to a blog, the videoblog had an available archive, a profile page and a profile image.[109]
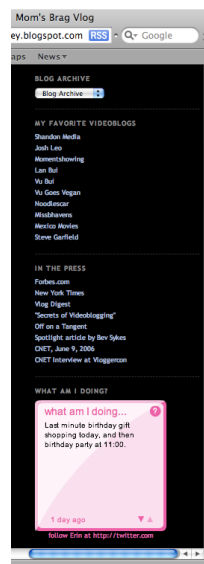
Figure 4: side bar with blogroll (Nealy 2008)

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[109] This underlying structure is of course heavily reliant on blog platforms such as Wordpress, Blogger and so on. For more information about the blog and blogging, see Walker (2006) boyd (2006b, 2007) and Ellison (2007)

The individual posts themselves contained information such as date and time the video was posted, what formats the videoblogger had made available, a short description of the video (including credits to musicians of music hosting companies), how many comments had been left, and a permalink to the post (figure 5).
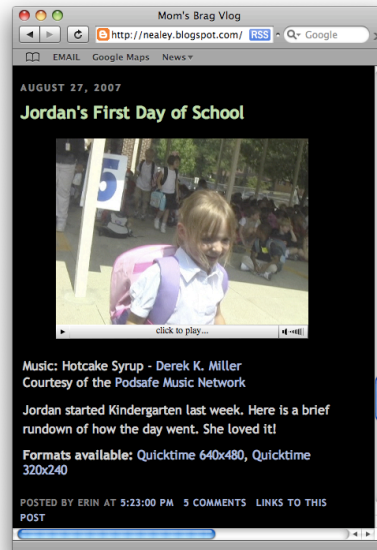

Figure 5: Typical videoblog post (Nealy 2007)

In this section, I want to drill further down into some of the technical affordances and the specifications and protocols that served to stabilise the videoblog form, at least temporarily. At a time of fervent development of technologies around video and moving images, particularly in relation to codecs (used for video compression) and operating system functions, the digital proved, for a long time, to be a moving target for online distribution, creation or viewing. By technical a priori I am gesturing back towards Kittler's (1999) work on the establishment of a common set of technical standards which serve as somewhat unquestioned foundations on which action and cultural practice might take place, a condition of possibility for knowledge in the Foucauldian sense (Parikka 2011: 1). Or as Geoghegan (2013: 1) describes it, the presupposition that a "technological a priori defines the scope and logic of distinct cultural formations and epistemes". Here, these standards grew out of a number of cultural techniques that were shared amongst the members of the videoblogging community, as Miles (2004) explained,

> in terms of codecs and picking up an earlier question about standards. I use QT [QuickTime] for everything because I do interactive work and it is the best architecture (daylight to the next one). These days for generic non interactive QT I use MPEG4 as per Apples implementation. The codec isn't great but it is

> compliant to ISMA specifications which means any mpeg4 compliant client can
> view it, anywhere (Miles 2004a).

What is important to highlight is that even though in many cases these technical

standards were "found" in some sense, because they were defaults in video software or

the common codec or format used in industry, whether film, video or software, cultural

and political contestation around standards continued to circulate. Indeed, in a similar

fashion to discussions over open source software (see Berry 2008), videobloggers

would question the use of closed codecs or software platforms.[110] For example,

Deadman argued,

> I know a big question is simply: why should I care about open codecs? Aren't
> codecs free now? Flash and quicktime are monetarily free for the most part. It's
> difficult to find arguments for this now. The concern is when either/both these
> codecs become totally dominant...and web video is the new TV for lack of a
> better word. We need an open codec to either challenge the status quo...or be a
> solid alternative (Dedman 2009).

Another important discussion over standards concerned the size of the window for the

video, that is the number of pixels in the x and y plane that made up the image. The

number of pixels determined the size of the video but also the complexity of the video

content and hence the amount of time it would take for the editor software (e.g. CPU

processor time) to export a video that could be distributed via blogs and online more

generally. The compromise between video size and quality was a perennial issue in

relation to videoblogging and defined, in many cases, the aesthetic of the videoblog.

The "typical" videoblog was distributed with a resolution of 320x240 pixels, which is

"in essence half the size of the visible portion of a standard television signal in North

America (NTSC)" (Dedman and Paul 2006: 19). These videos tended to display at 15

frames per second. In fact 640x480 is standard definition, 4:3 aspect ratio, NTSC video,

so by halving the pixels the videoblogger halves the data needing to be compressed and

sent. The 480 lines is standard definition (SD) video and anything above 480 horizontal

lines (usually 720 or 1080 for consumer videos, camcorders or cameras) is high

definition (HD) video. Settling on 320x240 pixels for the size of the video file, was then

a standard format that emerged out of these compromising technical affordances (size of

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[110] There are a number of free software or open source video codecs today, but perhaps the Ogg Theora is the one
most well known (it is mentioned 213 times on the videoblogging email list). It was made available as an alpha in
2002 but was still in beta until 22 September 2007. At the time Ogg Theora was not well supported and consequently
little used.

file, speed of processing, ease of distribution) and cultural preferences (video aesthetic, length of video, complexity of material).[111]

At the time, there were many incompatible video standards, and rapid updates, alongside the paucity of bandwidth on the internet, combined to render much video work unwatchable or at least difficult to view. It is no surprise then that the videoblogging community began to slowly coalesce around a series of informal standards in relation to their work, which due to the digital artefacts embedded in the videos also created a particular digital video aesthetic which featured high-compression and therefore pixelisation, low frame rates and often muffled or distorted sound. Miles again,

> most of the presets treat things like 'dialup' as a compression setting so that video will stream in real time at that data rate, so it has to compress very very hard to achieve this. But you're not trying to real time stream, you're progressive streaming. The difference here is that with progressive download if it takes 5 minutes to download then it will, but all the data arrives. So since you're using progressive download just accept that if people really want to see your content (and they're not on broadband) then they'll have to wait 5 minutes or even 6, for your 2 minutes of footage to arrive. If they want it, they will wait (Miles 2004b).

By progressive streaming, Miles is referring to the two major ways in which video is encoded, either as progressive, that is the image is downloaded completely as an image, rather like a photograph, before displaying the frame, or interlaced, where alternating horizontal lines of video are displayed. In the second case, the illusion of a higher resolution is made because the flipping between frames (one is the horizontal lines 1, 3, 5, 7 and so on, and then the other 2, 4, 6, 8, etc.), however the image does appear to jump and move around if our eyes catch the interlacing taking place. In the case of progressive video (and why video is marked 480p, 720p, 1080p) the image is sharper and realistic, whereas in interlaced (where video is marked 480i, 720i, 1080i) the image is send at half resolution on alternate frames. Clearly then, interlaced video will download much faster than progressive, but with markedly lower quality, and this would be *in addition* to the digital artefacts made into the video by the video compression codecs. It is therefore unsurprising that videobloggers where keen, where possible to maximize video quality and compromise on the fact that the video might not real-time stream as such, but when downloaded would be of higher quality and more enjoyable to watch as a visual medium.

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[111] Agreeing on a standard preference also became a marker of identity.

It is amazing how fast video as a function of modern technologies, rather than as a device in its own right as a video camera, has developed such that we might talk about the softwarization of digital video, that is, the almost disappearance of the "prosumer" video camera and its replacement with the mobile phone (though of course, the digital camera and the digital mobile phone remains a piece of hardware). However, during the time covered by this thesis it was not yet clear if that was a likely technical development and therefore a lot of interest focussed on the kinds of small, portable digital video cameras that could create video for videoblogs.

At the time of my interviews, only one of my informants told me they shot videos on a "professional" camera (Roxanne) and only two told me they recorded video purely on a mobile phone, for instance on a Nokia N95 (Steve and Rupert), with three others (Andreas, Sam and David) telling me they combined mobile phone with a hand-held camera. Casey, who aimed to build a career from her videoblog sci-fi show, Galacticast, was the only one to specify that she shot video on a HD digital camera. A small group told me they shot on "digital cameras" (Loiez, Juan, Jen P, Nicholas and Raymond) and the rest referred to their recording equipment as "hand-held" (Richard BF, Richard H, Mary, Markus, Erin, Daniel, Cheryl, Bekah, Erik, Paris, Zadi) specifically, either a "small, fits in handbag" (Brittany) or the seemingly most popular camera among the videobloggers at the time, the Sony Xacti digital video camera (Ryanne, Ryan, Gena, Jen G, Enric).

The Xacti became quite iconic within the videoblogging community, partially because it "looked and acted much like a traditional video camera" (Hodson and Verdi 2006: 53), but also because they were "designed to function like a tiny camcorder, with a flip-out LCD view screen and a camcorder-style ergonomic design [which made] shooting video from different angles and getting yourself into the shot much easier" (Hodson and Verdi 2006: 53). Significantly, the Xacti used digital storage, and did not rely on videotape or discs, rather all information captured was stored on a flash memory card.

26 videobloggers (out of 34, so an overwhelming majority) used a Mac operating system, whereas three videobloggers combined a Mac and Windows (Cheryl, Markus, Richard BF) and five videobloggers relied solely on the Windows operating system (Raymond, Nicholas, Adam, Gena, Susan). Amongst the Mac users, 22 videobloggers used laptops, and the rest relied upon desktops, whereas two Windows users used laptops, and the others used a combination of laptops and desktops. It is

interesting to note that Fireant was only ever released for the Mac, despite promises of making it available for Windows (Kinberg 2005, also see below).[112]

This data usefully show some of the links between the relative mobility working a laptop affords and the production of video on the go, something many videobloggers reported as being important to them (Susan, Juan, Jay, Erin, Rupert, Jen G.). There is also an interesting tension between the cultural idea of Mac users as more "creative" than PC users, and although the majority of the videobloggers used a Mac, there are clear examples of those producing not only "regular" videoblogs, but videoblogs considered "artistic" (for example, Adam), using Windows. Interestingly, this distinction wasn't really touched upon by the videobloggers, beyond a comment by Casey about the need to switch from one to another for professional reasons; "for the first year and a half, we used a PC," she told me. "However, due to the demands of our new HD camera we are currently making a switch over to Mac in order to use Final Cut Pro out of the box. Adobe Premiere Pro doesn't have the HD quality we need".

Apple iMovie (mentioned 1987 times on the email list and used by Rupert, Cheryl, Ryanne, Markus, Jay, Adam, Erin, Steve) was one of the most popular video editing software for the videoblogging community, despite being the more "simple" editing software, compared to Final Cut Pro (used by Daniel, David, Richard BF, Casey, Jen G), Windows Movie Maker and Premiere (Enric), which required more advanced technical skills. iMovie allowed the user to record video files directly from either the webcam or an attached camera (like the Xacti) or import video files from the hard drive. It used a simple editing layout (figure 6), with the captured footage on the right side of the screen, each video file resting in a window of its own. The bottom panel showed a timeline of the footage the user was editing together, and the video would playback in a large window to the left. The editing field also contained two audio-tracks, for added music or voice-overs.

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[112] I should add that some videobloggers used the built in webcam in their laptops/computers to record videos, although none of my informants specified that they did. As such, this thesis does not engage with webcams in much detail. The webcam is often conceptualized in terms of voyeurism and exhibitionism, two qualities that were never mentioned by my informants. As Tina LaPorta's work shows, "while the home represents a private space and the Web a public site, webcams become a window or an invitation to look, to gaze upon everydayness of the inhabitants of these sites. The distance between the watcher and the watched is quite clear, and those who are being watched set the stage for their own exhibitionism – to be seen is to exist" (Lovejoy 2004: 264). See also Jimroglou's feminist critique of JenniCam, which argues that "what is unusual [about JenniCam] is that it is not only the woman in front of the camera, but it is the woman behind it too. Jenni is both viewer and viewee: she occupies the hybrid position of both object and subject; she is composer and is composed" (Jimroglou 1999: 443) thus offering a "fruitful as a tool of feminist transformation" (Jimroglou 1999: 452).
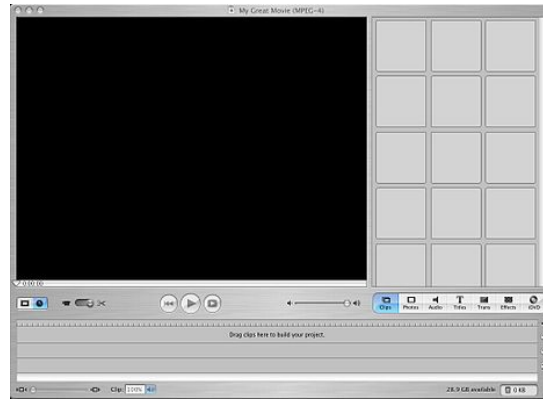
Figure 6: Screenshot of iMovie HD

Below the captured or imported files the videoblogger had easy access to photos or music stored on the laptop, as well as access to effects, title cards and the export to DVD button.

There was a sense, however, that despite being both accessible and intuitive, iMovie was an inferior piece of software compared to for instance Final Cut Pro; as Daniel told me, "once—I could even tell you which video—I was away at my parent's [without] a computer and I used iMovie on my mom's laptop. And it was a scarring experience. Yuck" (Daniel). There was also a sense that iMovie was less serious, and thus more playful perhaps than it's more professional counterparts; "I edit with iMovie" Cheryl told me, "whose effects are terribly cheesy. I frequently abuse transitions and wipes because I think they are campy and funny. What's not to love about a transition that's an ever-widening heart shape? Or a barn door? I'm a big fan of iMovie's shooting star effect because it's absolutely ridiculous. I can't figure out it's real purpose."

An unintended observation that emerged from my interviews, was the informants' descriptions of their computers. These were often extremely passionate, and sometimes the machine seemed to have replaced the television as the central technology in the living room. "It's the 'centre of attention' of the living room," Juan told me, "we not only use the computer to edit or connect to the internet, but we use it to listen to music and watch DVDs. So we use it for everything. Every time I arrive home, I turn it on and put music on." At this point, I wondered if Juan and his wife had a TV at all, which he confirmed; "the TV is in our room. We watch A LOT of TV. I'd say minimum 3 hours a day. But, if we have friends, we do everything in the living room WITH the computer, not only listening to music but watching videoblogs or videos from YouTube, etc." In other words, the computer and the content found on the internet

is increasingly, for Juan, competing with "traditional television" for the attention of the viewer.

It did appear as though the videobloggers saw their computers as almost more important than their cameras. They often highlighted the computer within their living space, calling it a "centrepiece of the room" (Steve) or "pretty prominent. You see my computer set-up as soon as you enter my home" (Zadi). Describing their work space, Ryanne also said "we spend most of our time in that room. It's also connected to the kitchen, there is no wall separating it, so we eat and work on our computers, it's quite nice". In other words, the computer had in many ways replaced the television as the centrepiece of the videoblogger's living space. In many ways, this is reminiscent of Ballard's prediction from 1984, that

> everybody will be doing it, everybody will be living inside a TV studio. That's what the domestic home aspires to these days; the home is going to be a TV studio. We're all going to be starring in our own sit-coms, and they'll be strange sit-coms, too, like the inside of our heads. That's going to come, I'm absolutely sure of that, and it'll really shake up everything… (J.G. Ballard 1984).

More importantly, the videobloggers' focus on their computers highlight the fact that the practice can be seen as one of the first instances of computational visual media – once the videobloggers converted to a fully digital video camera, i.e. with no tapes, videoblogging was a truly digital practice; with the content captured, edited, produced, disseminated and consumed entirely on a digital platform.

Videoblogging as Technical Constellations

Franklin (1990) suggests that thinking about technology as practice "links technology directly to culture, because culture, after all, is a set of socially accepted practices and values" (1990: 15). Moreover, Franklin suggests that "well laid upon practices also define the practitioners as a group of people who have something in common" (1990: 15). Further, she argues that "the experience of common practice is one of the ways in which people define themselves as groups and set themselves apart from others" (Franklin 1990: 15). In terms of the videobloggers, this *setting themselves apart* is perhaps most clearly seen in their attitudes towards technology and video platforms, and one of the issues I want to spend some time on to show how video technologies and platforms developed in a crucial time between 2004 and 2007.

In the next chapter I will be engaging with the videobloggers' processes of self-identification, but in the context of this chapter, what is interesting is the extent to which both the self-identity of the videoblogger and the platform technologies were continually contested by the participants. Even as the technologies began to encode certain practices, the generally high technical competence of the videobloggers meant that they could always choose to reject or unpick a particular delegation of their practice from the platform. This placed the videobloggers in an interesting position of power in relation to the platform developers (who also included the videobloggers themselves). Thus, the developers often had to woo the videobloggers and thus enrol them into using their systems by making the platform technologies themselves "looser" and hence more customizable. This also meant that the ability for this platform to create any sense of lock-in, or loyalty, was drastically diminished – which also potentially lessened any valourisation strategies by the platform developers. This looser, open development method has resonance with free and open source software, and it is certainly the case that videobloggers had a relatively sophisticated understanding of, for example, intellectual property rights. YouTube, on the other hand, with its flash-based technologies and practices was swallowed into Google where it developed into a much more mainstream short-video platform.[113] YouTube is also more clearly structured around a traditional notion of what video "should be" in as much as it is structured heavily around "hits", internet memes, popularity and "likes" (Burgess and Green 2009, Gerlitz and Helmond 2013).[114] Videoblogging, however, remained much more focussed on the personal and the hand crafted, with the short-form digital film as exemplar. It also remained a marginal practice for a long time, although recent years have seen the success of a younger generation of videobloggers who are creating global brands for themselves, see for instance Michelle Phan, a "beauty vlogger [with] 6.7 million subscribers… who posts tutorials about makeup and life advice on her channel" (Kessler 2014) or Philip DeFranco, a news-based comedy channel described as "Jon Stewart-esque" (Kessler 2014). These vloggers have taken on many of the first generation's technique and practices.

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[113] Of course, "open" platforms also have the possibility, and frequently attempt, to monetize their services, see for instance the success of Ubuntu and the Android operating systems.

[114] YouTube famously attempted to incentivise their users in other ways. The YouTube revenue-sharing program, which was launched in 2007, was a big incentive for people to distribute their content on the platform. "Once a creator signed, Google would load up the channel with advertising, take a 45 percent cut of the resulting revenue, and hand over the rest. For many YouTube creators the money was an incentive to keep going but wasn't enough to live on. They still had to hustle" (Gillette 2014). YouTube launched a new incentive program in September 2014 (Kafka 2014).

A key technology in the technical constellation surrounding videoblogging, was Feedburner, which was founded in 2003 by Dick Costolo (the current CEO at Twitter), Eric Lunt, Steve Olechowski and Matt Shobe, and launched in 2004. The importance of Feedburner lies in its function of taking any website address and generating an RSS feed for the user. RSS (real simple syndication) was the main technology for "pulling" data from the web and down onto a computer. Feedburner was the first company to turn this process into a user-friendly experience, and provided the members of the videoblogging community with the ability to generate an RSS feed from their videoblog, which could be picked up by content platforms such as Fireant or iTunes. Feedburner became hugely important in the distribution of videoblogs, and a number of my informants told me they relied heavily on their "feeds" for not just distributing, but watching videoblogs, for example, "I distribute my videos as an RSS feed" (Cheryl), "they show up in my feed reader" (Ryanne), "I follow also some RSS feeds" (Loiez). The importance of RSS feeds, and Feedburner in particular, to the videoblogger, could perhaps be summarised by this email exchange from September 2005, after a new videoblogger announced her arrival in the vlogosphere. Within 15 minutes of posting, there was a reply from the community; "I went to your site, but I couldn't find your RSS feed in order to subscribe to your videoblog" (Kinberg 2005).

Feedburner was thus technically a necessary link in the distribution chain of videoblogs, and in some senses it was *the* mechanism for linking content between the videobloggers and their audience. Feedburner was later acquired by Google in 2007, for a reported $100million (Arrington 2007). However, with the rise in real time streams like Twitter, RSS is no longer of such great importance to most websites, who use push notifications instead, and the technology has been marginalised by the large tech companies.[115]

Steve Garfield declared 2004 to be "the year of the videoblog" (Garfield 2004), and although some videos had been posted online prior to that (see Kontras 2000 and Miles 2000), 2004 really did mark the beginning of videoblogging. In the period between 2004 and 2007, the videoblogging community went from a small group of enthusiasts to a vibrant community of users, centred around the Yahoogroup Email list. The email list was established on June 1st 2004 and is going, though with very little

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[115] As a possible competitor to YouTube, it is hard not to speculate that Google buying Feedburner ensured that no alternative to the streaming video platform that they were developing existed. Indeed, on May 26th 2011, Google deprecated the Feedburner API, and in October 2012 it shut the API's down. The service is no longer supported and is effectively a legacy system heading toward eventual shutdown.

activity. As of the end of September 2014, 79601 messages had been posted to the list, the most active period being between December of 2004 and August 2007. This period saw the list receiving >1000 posts per month, with June 2005 receiving the highest number of posts (2974 posts). If volume of posts can be seen as an indicator of "community participation", it seems clear that this period was the most active (figure 7). Later years have seen months of merely 3 or 4 posts.[116]

Message History

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2012	8	16	5	13	4	14	4			44	3	
2011	59	47	72	38	104	11	10	75	33	65	135	22
2010	283	262	89	320	160	207	134	72	63	79	295	66
2009	379	246	347	302	168	207	178	249	227	343	293	167
2008	995	926	518	574	265	437	442	400	306	434	478	374
2007	1778	1412	1521	1141	830	1119	1155	1114	757	840	763	752
2006	2257	2114	1876	2481	2212	2051	2416	1671	1790	1609	1399	1422
2005	1967	1774	1660	1751	2346	2974	2899	2951	1926	2357	2370	2861
2004						224	264	541	307	282	422	1078

Figure 7: Number of emails posted to the videoblogging email list (June 2004 – November 2012)

The email list occupies a crucial position in relation to videoblogging and the videoblogging community. It functioned as the initial meeting point for the videobloggers, a digital *agora* in which the community gathered (however asynchronously), and it acted as the main communication channel between the early members. On the list, the videobloggers would discuss their equipment, cameras, codecs and working practices as well as their engagement with a selection of third-party applications, such as Fireant and Feedburner.[117] It can thus be seen as part of the videoblogging platform – at least in as much as the rest of the videoblogging platform at this point was relatively underdeveloped and dispersed, whereas the email list was stable. In other words, from an ethnographic perspective, the list was very much the public hub of the videoblogging community, like a café, lobby or meeting place, where ideas were exchanged, expertise sought and shared, problems discussed and arguments had;

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[116] Table retrieved December 6th 2012 from http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/videoblogging/
[117] However, as has been pointed out "the Videoblogging group is about far more than the technologies necessary to videoblog." It was also a place for people to discuss ideas, theories and form friendships, but also a place to discuss, disagree and argue; "people will come here with incompatible ideas about what videoblogging will be to them, ideas that clash with some fundamental beliefs about what videoblogging is to the established/vocal crowd here. That's fine and groovy" (Watkins 2005).

> There were the technical people that were solving problems and then there were guys like me that was more about just trying to have fun and get people to think of ways of making video that they had never thought of before. When Michael and Ryanne would come up with these settings, they would then tell everyone how to do it and it would solve everyone's problem. Then everyone's quality automatically just would go up overnight. That was the cool thing about the group (The Web Ahead 2014).

The list also served a technical purpose, as a repository of knowledge, an archive of problems and solutions, and thus a very useful source of information for new members.[118]

The list is a standard public email group, with an open, accessible archive of every post written since 2004. As is standard with most Yahoogroups, the software allows additional functionality (beyond email), such as a public calendar (in this case not enabled by the moderators), a polling system (used a number of times between 2005 and 2007),[119] a links section (also quite heavily used, though entries are undated, so it is difficult to assert when this was actively in use) and finally, members have access to a database-area, where they can post additional information or data. For instance, in the database-area, the videoblogging group has four sub-groups; i. *Videoblogging directory*, a list of every videoblog in the vlogopshere catalogued at the time (95 entries); ii. *Giving back* a smaller sub-set (six entries) where some videobloggers have offered services to other videobloggers, for example, as one member posted; "I will happily whistle, record and email an mp3 tune for anyone on this list (kindly indicate 'mood' or public domain tune, and length)"[120]; iii. *Birthdays*, a list of member's birthdays (12 entries); and iv. *Location,* contact list (10 entries), containing information such as email address for user, what platform she uses, software usage, country, state, videoblog or company name and phone numbers.

The information posted in this database area is an interesting indicator of the kind of role the list played in the early days of videoblogging. Only a few entries were made in 2004 and some in 2005, and this kind of activity never became the norm among

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[118] From a media archaeological perspective, the list presents the researchers with a rich archive to explore. It would also be interesting to conduct further research into this archived data using a variety of Digital Methods (see Rogers 2013)

[119] For instance; on May 25, 2005, there was a poll asking "How do you watch videoblogs?" that received 157 votes (see https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/videoblogging/polls/poll/1191088?pollType=ENABLED&sortOrder=DESC&orderBy=DATECREATED). Another poll, from December 2007, asked "Do you prefer personal or commercial video blogs?" This had 13 votes. (see https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/videoblogging/polls/poll/1972053?pollType=ENABLED&sortOrder=DESC&orderBy=DATECREATED)

[120] https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/videoblogging/database/4/edit

the members of the community. A possible explanation for this, could be that "most people define videoblogging as having control over the production and distribution of their rich media work" (Enric). This indicates a paradoxical distrust of public web resources the videobloggers do not directly control themselves. This emphasis on control could also translate into control of personal and potentially sensitive information, like birthdays and geographical location. And so, although many videobloggers displayed this information quite prominently on their own videoblogs, they would hesitate to enter it into a public/ corporate system like Yahoo.

It is interesting to go back to the first 1000 messages on the list, as this affords a snapshot of a community in very early development. For example, the second post to the list immediately mapped out the technical challenges faced by the videobloggers and the poster articulated some of the technical issues facing anyone wanting to post video on the internet in 2004; "i. Technically, the process takes too long (capture, import, optimize, write some HTML, post); ii. Existing servers don't allow much bandwidth and storage space. You'll either get screwed because too many people watch your posts, or you have to erase your archive video because you're out of space; iii. What is the language of videoblogging? Is it little movies? Or moments from your life?" (Dedman 2004).

These thoughts were a continual refrain in the conversations about the practice of videoblogging that followed, namely production, storage and content (see for instance Scalin 2004, Petertheman 2004, Rice 2004 for only a few examples). Of course, the technologies available to non-professional media creators at the time were limited, under-developed and expensive. It is also important to note that these discussions were taking place pre-web 2.0. In fact, the videoblogging community itself pre-dates what has come to be known as the social web (Lovink 2012).

Discussions around the definition of videoblogging were quite popular on the email list, and many videobloggers made videos discussing their view on the topic (see for example Verdi 2005 and Liss 2006b). Although the majority of early videos fell into what I categorise as "personal", one videoblog in particular distinguished itself as being part of defining online video as something distinctive and new. Rocketboom, founded in October 2004 by Andrew Michael Baron, parodied traditional newscasts and presented quirky stories, often technology related, in a light and refreshing manner. Rocketboom was originally hosted by Amanda Congdon (from October 2004 – July 2006), though over the years it has had a number of presenters, including Joanne Colan, Mememolly

and Keghan Hurst. Over the course of 2004, Rocketboom grew exponentially, probably helped by being featured in a playlist during Steve Jobs' 5th generation iPod presentation for Apple in October 2005. By December 2005 Rocketboom could report that "at a cost of about $20 an episode, they reach an audience that some days is roughly comparable in size to that of, say, CNN's late, unlamented 'Crossfire' political debate show" (Mackey 2005). In September 2005, Business Week covered the faux news show in a magazine feature, arguing that "the Internet is coming alive with a mix of video, from the polished parody of Rocketboom to the raw interviews of reporters" (Business Week 2005).[121] Rocketboom was one of the first videoblogs to 'break out' and find popularity beyond the videoblogging community. For instance, it was famously featured on American TV drama CSI in February 2006 (Scoble 2006).

In October 2005, Apple announced that they would start distributing video "podcasts" in their iTunes store. This distribution network would be available to anyone, both amateurs and corporations such as Disney. This is important because it opened up the distribution of content on the internet even further and simplified the process. Content creators no longer had to learn about RSS syndication or the technical specifications of particular codecs in order to distribute their content on the internet.[122] Apple now supplied an iTunes-ready format and provided all the technical means necessary for distribution through their "music" store.[123] Of course, this was duly noted within the videoblogging community, summed up by one user;

> Now that iTunes etc is making videoblogging/podcasting popular... new people are coming in who don't really care of what came before them. And that's their right. So those of us who have been around, we know who we are. Isn't it cool it getting so out of control? It's really happening (Dedman 2005a).

One of the main consumer technologies developed by developers closely tied with the videoblogging community, was an RSS video player called Fireant (first beta released in 2005).[124] Fireant was a desktop application that subscribed to RSS feeds and allowed you to play videos on the desktop. As explained by one videoblogger, "the point of

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[121] These "raw" interviews included footage and rapports from videobloggers such as Zadi Diaz and Steve Garfield.
[122] Of course, Apple too was keen to embrace online video throughout its networks, codecs and technology platform, and thus cement their control of the "media hub" they controlled with iTunes. It is also important to note that little commercial video or film was available at the time due to licensing issues by the film and television industry who were terrified of a Napster-like collapse of their industry. This helped fuel consumption of videoblogs and related video resources on the internet.
[123] It was also a way for Apple to experiment with video and film delivery and distribution systems without waiting for the film and television industry to give them permission to do so. For example, early video did not make use of Digital Rights Management (DRM), which simplified the technical systems.
[124] Fireant, gets its name from a recursive joke often found in computer science and programming circles. Fireant actually stands for Fire Ant's Not TV (this is similar to the recursive slogan for GNU: "GNU's Not Unix").

using an in-computer aggregator program like Fireant" would be the added benefit to the user of "new video (and other) posts are automatically downloaded" (McLaughlin 2005b).

Figure 8: Fireant RSS videoplayer with pre-selected channels

Fireant came with twenty pre-selected video channels (Figure 8),[125] including the incredibly popular and successful Rocketboom, but the user could subscribe and unsubscribe to however many other channels she wanted. The pre-selected channels were among some of the more popular videoblogs within the community, and featured videobloggers who were very active in the community. Some of these (like Jay and Ryanne) had also been part of developing Fireant, as well as being early beta testers of the technology. In fact, many of the announcements about Beta updates to the Fireant software, were made by non-programmers/members of the community. In return, these videobloggers made frequent videos promoting Fireant, so in a sense there was a kind of gift economy within the community at this point (Mauss 1970, Hyde 2007). The

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[125] I asked Jay, one of the developers of Fireant about the preselected channels, and he told me that; "the feeds we chose for Fireant were at first all the ones that existed! Difficult to imagine. We would add feeds as people made them…Then as there were more and more RSS feeds, we kind of just chose a set of feeds that had a mix of content so a new person could get a sense of the excitement we all felt. It certainly wasn't scientific or well-planned. In those days, we were kind of flying by the seat of our pants" (Jay, additional interview). This demonstrates the way in which early development is marked by uncertainty and tentative development, which again points to the way the platform was still under construction. The comments also reveal the trial and error way in which decisions, both technical and social, were being made.

early adopters would also be defensive and protective about the Fireant software, pointed out by one videoblogger in a response to a general outrage at the Beta version of Google's videoplayer, which was launched in June 2005 and which – according to one videoblogger – had "disappointed me. If Google were here with me in this room right now I wouldn't speak to it" (Quirk 2005); the response, "but it's BETA, baby! Remember when beloved Fireant was in BETA and how defensive we'd get when folks went off on it?" (McLaughlin 2005a).

The functionality of Fireant was summarized by one of the founders, Josh Kinberg, in an email in July 2005. He explained that Fireant allowed the user to "subscribe to any RSS 2.0 feed, with Bit Torrent built in. It could playback any media format, as well as sync media to iPods or Sony PSP. Fireant allowed you to organise your content with tags, had built in Yahoo! video search and its "integrated directory of videoblogs [was] constantly improving and expanding" (Kinberg 2005). It further allowed for the import/export of OPML and allowed the user to "preview anything before downloading, or schedule automatic download and notifications of new content" (Kinberg 2005). This last comments also highlights how "techie" the discourses and interests were amongst the videobloggers at this early point and shows how the videobloggers were a combination of videomakers and hackers, and that the technical was seen as an essential component of the videoblogging practice.[126] More so, perhaps than the aesthetic or cultural content.[127]

As can be seen, the various functionalities of these early implementations are similar to the promises of the web 2.0 platform (cf O'Reilly 2005). At the time, RSS 2.0 was seen as the future of media distribution on the web. Tags allowed the categorisation of content into different taxonomies of media, as well as the increased usability of the archive. It is also interesting that Kinberg emphasised that Fireant "can playback any media format" – this was clearly in competition with YouTube, which was criticized for taking whatever format the user uploaded and converting it to Flash, a format shunned by the videobloggers due to its perceived low-quality and because it was a closed format (see more on this below). It also distinguished Fireant from iTunes, which had specific requirements for what format could be uploaded.

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[126] While reflecting on the videoblogging practice ten years later, one videoblogger said that the "community was largely fuelled and glued together by our excitement about the newness of it all. It wasn't about the content. We were video hackers" (Howe 2014).

[127] Although it had always been a part of the videoblogging discourse, there was, however, a clear shift towards focusing on content at a later stage, linked with the stabilization of the technological platform.

Fireant made changes to its functionality and features on a regular basis, incorporating feedback from users and staying in close dialogue with the community. The developers wanted testers and encouraged the users to push the software to its limits; "bang on it. Try to break it. We want your feedback" (Kinberg 2005). The co-dependent relationship between Fireant and the videoblogging community can be seen further in this email from Kinberg in June 2005), which also highlights the language of excitement felt within the community at the time,

> Many of you have helped us test Fireant and we thank all of you for your help, advice, and suggestions. We listen to and carefully consider all of them. Videobloggers are really the power under the hood here, and we thank all of you for your energy and passion (Kinberg 2005).

Here, Kinberg deliberately positions the videoblogger as a crucial actor in the development of Fireant, calling them "the power under the hood", who have "energy and passion". Fireant, gratefully "listen to" and "carefully consider" all their "help, advice and suggestions". Fireant assisted the videobloggers in getting their videos out there, but the videoblogger reciprocated by promoting Fireant on their videoblogs.

Interestingly, despite its seeming popularity, only a few (Erik, Erin, Richard BF, Ryanne) specifically mentioned using Fireant in their interviews; "I have like almost 200 feeds in my Fireant and I'm so behind" (Ryanne). When asked how he watched videoblogs, Richard BF told me "on my computer, through Fireant. I need to be able to comment right then". Of course it is possible (and likely) that more videobloggers actively used Fireant, yet it is interesting that even at this point, there wasn't a very vocal follower support for it.[128] In fact, when Apple released Version 4.9 of iTunes in June 2005, some videobloggers opted for using this as their main video aggregator (Andreas, Richard H). Another reason for this might be the release of the 5th generation iPod in 2005, which allowed mobile video playback. Amongst my informants, six (Roxanne, Raymond, Nicholas, Cheryl, Jen P, Markus) reported watching videoblogs on their iPods, which means they were referring to at least a 5th generation iPod Classic as it has come to be known.[129]

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[128] Fire Ant never made it past its 4th Beta update, but the software is still available for download. In a pertinent moment of nostalgia, perhaps, it still comes with the same twenty preselected channels of Videobloggers, although the links sadly no longer work.

[129] The video iPod was a rather odd hybrid device when it launched, not being very suitable for video or film watching, as it had a 4:3 aspect ratio. Of course, with hindsight we see that Apple used this as a means to develop video capacities which were later to emerge in the iPod Touch and the iPhone.

Blip.tv (founded in 2005) was one of the most popular video uploading sites in the videoblogging community, and successfully convinced many of the videobloggers to stop paying for their own video hosting; "I found people using Blip for free, and that solved my billing/bandwidth issue," Rupert told me.[130] Blip.tv was founded by Mike Hudack, Dina Kaplan, Justin Day, Jared Klett, and Charles Hope in 2005. The founders were all members of the email list and the site was announced there in May 2005 with a short message from Hope: "Here's blip.tv, a beta site that features vlog hosting and aggregation of external RSS feeds. Please take a look and kick it around!" (Hope 2005). Immediately, there were responses from the community raising technical concerns;, "I'm kinda confused as to what it's doing other than aggregating videos and sticking them on the main page. It appears to pull from certain feeds, but I don't see any place even after logging into submit a feed URL. You can submit individual videos it appears" (Sharp 2005a). Hope replied within minutes, "It is confusing, I'm sorry. You can add stuff with the 'Add content' link in your user info, on the right side. It has just been made more prominent" (Hope 2005).

As can be seen from the above exchange, the input from the community directly influenced some design decisions on the blip.tv website. This shows how the *socio-cultural* level (community) can strongly influence the *technical-social* (network) in these early phases of development of a platform. Amongst my informants, five (Paris, Brittany, Bekah, Andreas, Ryanne) directly indicated that they hosted their videos on blip.tv. Other sites mentioned were Dailymotion, Videobomb and Videosift (Loiez), Vimeo (Steve) and some merely stated they used a number of uploading sites: "We upload our videos to a large number of video-sharing sites" (Adam).

Blip.tv – now Blip – is still running today, featuring a plethora of web-shows, but the videoblogging community that helped grow the business back in 2005-7, has largely abandoned it. Blip continued to hosts many of the early videobloggers videos for years, so for a while these archives remained relatively intact. The latest entry for any of my informants on Blip was in November 2011. In November 2013, however, Blip wrote to the members of the videoblogging community and told them they would no

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[130] OurMedia.org was another site of interest to the videoblogging community. Founded by J.D. Lasica and Marc Canter in 2005, it acted as a front-end for Archive.org, which is where the videos they point to are hosted.

longer be hosting their videos. They gave the users 30 days to download and back up any content they might want to keep, and then Blip deleted the rest.[131]

Freevlog.org was created by two videobloggers, Michael Verdi and Ryanne Hodson, in 2005. This site was intended to be a resource for videobloggers, and it hosted tutorials on video editing, compression, how to take a screenshot, uploading and hosting. Freevlog was one of the main sites around with the community gathered in these early days of videoblogging and provided many services to the community.[132] To illustrate, at the time, small rectangular badges could often be seen on the sidebar of any videoblog, promoting sites they approved of, such as Blip.tv, Ourmedia.org and Fireant, and the videobloggers would also have their own badges and display the badges or their 'friends' (figure 9).
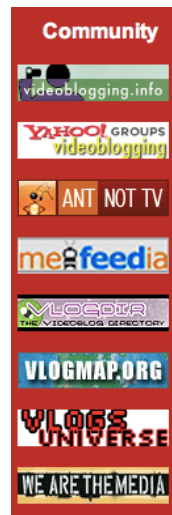

Figure 9: badges promoting community sites from freevlog.org

These badges could easily be generated on the Freevlog site. They came in two different styles and sizes, and could be generated using quite simple computer code, often

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[131] I tried discovering what happened to Blip, but the company is secretive about business decisions. They no longer partake in community conversations on the email list, and rumour has it the company suffered a similar fate to Fireant. Jay told me, "Blip had a similar experience. I don't think any of this is public, but I know the original founders had a huge fight last year. Their shares were all diluted after their last round of funding and they lost control of the company. I think only one of the original guys still works at blip. I assume the current owners are trying to mainstream it in order to sell it" (Jay, additional interview).

[132] "When the Apple store opened in New York, down on Prince Street, we were doing these events down there where they were asking us or we asked them if we could come and talk about videoblogging. And they were like, 'Yeah, sure, no problem.' So we would try and explain what we were doing to people and we would have a whole crowd of people off the street, they all had their Macs, everyone seemed interested and excited but it was so complicated trying to explain to them how to do this… Film it on your camera, import it into iMovie or Final Cut, you have to edit it, you have to export it in this certain way, you have to take a screenshot and you have to embed that, you have to link this, you have to hand code this RSS feed. I mean, it was just so crazy. That's when Ryanne and Michael made a site called Freevlog. And that really I think was the point where videoblogging started really spreading fast" (The Web Ahead 2014).

supplied by the company site wanting promotion. Freevlog actually embedded these snippets of code in the sidebar of their front page, so anyone could grab it and put in on their videoblog.[133]

Anyone with basic understanding of HTML would be able to take this code, change the content of the <href> (hypertext reference, or web-link) tag to their own webpage, upload a small gif to their website and change the <img src> (image source) tag to their own image link, and thus create their own badges. The videos on Freevlog almost exclusively featured Verdi and Hodson (themselves prominent members of the videoblogging community) and became an important resource for new videobloggers. Freevlog can be seen as a kind of community magazine (zine), similar to those used and developed by previous communities of practice; such as the Raindance corporation's publication, *Radical Software,* with its ties to the Guerrilla TV movement, and the Whole Earth Catalogue, with its links with the web community, the Well (Turner 2008, Rheingold 1993).

The grassroot media directory Mefeedia launched in January 2005 with 617 videoblogs listed. In January 2007, Mefeedia.com listed 20,913 vlogs, showing that amateur, independent videoblogs (i.e. not vlogs on YouTube) were still gaining in popularity. Mefeedia is still an internet media-feed company, aggregating feeds from sites such as Vimeo, Hulu and Vevo, as well as acting as an umbrella company for a range of internet companies, supplying video production tools that, in their own words, "provides video tools for advertisers and publishers designed to let you focus on what is being watched, not how" (Mefeedia 2014).

Although this thesis is not concerned with YouTube directly, it is impossible to discuss the social media landscape surrounding the videoblogging community without mentioning the ways in which this hugely successful and influential platform intersected with the videoblogging community. Plenty of interesting work has been carried out already on YouTube itself, both as a platform, as a medium and as a social media ecology (Burgess and Green 2009, Lange 2007, Lovink 2008, Lovink and Niederer 2008, Lovink and Somers Miles 2011, and Snickars and Vonderau 2009, also

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[133] The code was quite simple:
<!-- BEGIN FREEVLOG BADGE -->
<img src="/web/20051126023358im_/http://www.archive.org/download/FreevlogBadge80X15/freevlog_badge_80x15.gif"title="Create A Videoblog For Free">
<! -- END FREEVLOG BADGE --> (Freevlog 2005)

see chapter two). I will, however, briefly outline the way YouTube related to the videoblogging community at this point, and outline some of the issues that were raised by the members.

It might have seemed likely that the videobloggers would celebrate the launch of YouTube; an easy to use, free for all video sharing site, which offered to solve many of the technical and social issues the community had been discussing over the course of the past two years. However, instead of being conceived of as a solution, YouTube was quickly conceptualised as a competitor, despite Steve Chen (one of the three founders of YouTube) posting a personal message about the launch to the email list in May 2005 (Chen 2005).[134]

The initial reaction from the community concerned formats, and particularly YouTube's decision to "convert… on the back-end, video submissions to a flv. (flash video) file which is a Sorenson-customized mpeg4 codec" (Chen 2005). For a full explanation of the YouTube codec, and the details of the various codecs used by that site, see Cubitt (2008).[135] The reactions ranged from a disappointed "everyone is doing Flash..." (Dedman 2005b) to the more dismissive; "Flash gives me hives" (JohnGaltsJournal 2005). As Cubit (2008) points out, "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" (Cubitt 2008: 46).

One of the technical limitations felt by the videbloggers early on, was the fact that producing the videoblogs took such a long time (Dedman 2004). With the launch of YouTube, however, this problem became re-conceptualised as an advantage, and got adopted as one of the key factors when defining videoblogging versus simply "posting videos to YouTube".[136] The fact that it *took a long time* and therefore produced a *higher*

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[134] He wrote, "[We] just launched a new video blogging service at www.YouTube.com. Many of the same questions being asked here, we had also asked ourselves as this is still a nascent area for technology. Given the state of the technologies that video blogging depends on is still in developing stages, we had to answer the questions within these limitations… currently, we feel that bandwidth and storage is not the problem. The biggest obstacle is getting people to learn how to take videos and getting them onto the site" (Chen 2005).

[135] "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" (Cubitt 2008: 45).

[136] "When YouTube started… they did everything we didn't want to them to do, sort of. [Laughter] But it all turned out. In the end, it was actually... sometimes I think, 'Man, they just saw way further than we did.' They had things like... the problem we were trying to solve with the RSS feeds and the downloading the videos, like Jay said,

quality product than videos uploaded to YouTube,[137] became one of the defining factors for the videobloggers when attempting to delineate themselves from the rapidly growing community of YouTubers. The videos posted to YouTube were considered to be of a lower standard than the videos produced by the videobloggers. When I first signed up to the email list (in August 2005, six months after the launch of YouTube), I received plenty of encouragement from other videobloggers, but also quite clear warnings about using YouTube (which was where I had initially posted my videos, for the same reasons as "everyone else": it was really easy). One of my first replies said: "congrats on the videoblog. I suggest you check YouTube's terms of service. They're pretty oppressive. I would suggest Ourmedia and or Blip.TV. They respect the creative commons[138] (or copyright) you assign to your work" (Verdi 2005). Here, the language used is revealing; YouTube is "oppressive" whereas Blip and Ourmedia "respect" whatever license "you assign" to "your work". Clearly, the videobloggers had a strong sense of in-group/out-group, with the individual videoblogger encouraged to follow community norms and values.

Some, however, did see the potential of YouTube for reaching a wider audience; "video can often receive mass attention if it becomes viral and contagious. Thousands or even millions of people will participate in spreading worthy video clips and try to create video clips that can garner such awesome attention on the Internet" (Sullivan 2005a). Even here, though, the language and opinions varied, from seeing the potential YouTube offered the videobloggers in getting their work out to a much wider audience, to (again) a scepticism about control of content. Viral videos described as being "worthy" and gaining "awesome attention" – clearly showing an understanding of the limited reach of individual videoblogs at the time. There was also a strong awareness of the economic potential of YouTube in terms of the massive potential for "advertisers" to

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overnight. One of the things that YouTube did at the beginning was, they were like, 'We're going to make sure that the videos play automatically right away no matter what.' So the 'no matter what' meant it had the crappiest quality in the world. It was like, a huge step back in quality and that was one reason why we didn't ever want to use it at first. Because it just made your videos look like crap… All of a sudden, there were all these people who had never even thought to watch a video on the internet. Like, why would you even try to do that? They now had a reason to see video on the internet and they were like, 'Oh, I need, whatever, a Flash player. I need a QuickTime plugin. I need a whatever plugin I need to see this stuff'" (The Web Ahead 2014).

[137] Other hosting sites, such as Veoh and Dailymotion would soon feature within this discourse too.

[138] Although this thesis does not go into the details surrounding the creative commons licenses in much detail, it might be worth mentioning that these licenses, in particular the "Attribution-ShareAlike (CC BY-SA)" and the "Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike (CC BY-NC-SA)" licenses were used by a number of the videobloggers.

move in and profit from "the millions of workers who sit in front of computers all day" (Sullivan 2005b).[139]

The concerns about YouTube within the videoblogging community at this point, were mainly related to technical issues, such as quality of videos, formats and codecs, however, they were also concerned about ownership and branding,[140] as well as being able to get content back out of YouTube after uploading it.[141] "I don't get what people like about [YouTube] with their crazy terms of use where you basically give your work away to them" (Verdi 2005a). The discourse surrounding YouTube is telling, their service is "crappy", they "brand" your videos with "their" logo, they "lock" your content down, their terms of service are "crazy" and "you" end up giving "them" your work for free (Verdi 2005a). However, one response perhaps clarifies why YouTube – despite these concerns within the videoblogging community – became as successful as it did. As Webb argued, "it works, works fast, and users are generally willing to sacrifice quality and freedom for 'just working'... They also remove the 'what version of plugin XYZ am I running' headache" (Webb 2005).

Here, in trying to explain why YouTube appears so easy to use, Verdi and Webb develop a discourse of "us" versus "them", where there is an assumed superiority about the videoblogger's technical understanding and aesthetic sensibility: the YouTuber, or the "average user" – i.e. *not* a videoblogger, who is technically proficient – is "willing to sacrifice quality and freedom", for a user experience that "just works". The videoblogger, on the other hand, is up to date with the technical developments going on – they "actually follow these things and care" – and so the rapid changes in codecs and format "isn't an issue" (Webb 2005). Here we can clearly see the construction of a discourse that pits YouTube on one hand and the videobloggers on the other in terms of different cultural practices, distinctive to each. YouTube's focus on content that attracts audiences, with video that is low quality (in technical as well as cultural terms), in order

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[139] A later email on the list referred to "some of the nutty Youtubers who… were talking of getting several million viewers for their videos. It's nuts" (Dedman 2007), a comment tempered by the more sober comment that "before anyone chokes on their milk and cookies, it's probably worth pointing out that several-million viewers tends to be a one (or, if you're lucky) two-time thing – but yes, you're looking at people who enjoy a baseline five-figure viewership per video" (Day 2007).

[140] As Menotti (2011) argues, "through the embedded video, the whole of YouTube infiltrates a separate webpage. In this way, the invasive platform reinforces its authority over the works; an implicit form of control that is made explicit by its capacity to ban user accounts, take videos offline and block access of certain countries" (Menotti 2011: 77).

[141] Despite being lauded as one of the most successful web 2.0 start ups, Uricchio argues that, quite reversely, "while YouTube's economic model is indeed predicated on participation, it fails the "2.0 test" since users may only upload — and not download — its videos" (Uricchio 2009: 25). The ability to download videos might not seem like a deal breaker for the average user, but within the videoblogging community this was a clear issue, especially for those wanting to use Fireant to watch videos.

to attract advertisers, corporate sponsorships etc, whereas the "craft" of the videoblogging community lies in being able to negotiate a complex technical constellation. There was no further engagement from YouTube towards the videoblogging community.

As can be seen, at this time YouTube was quite well understood, albeit not particularly well liked within the videoblogging community. YouTube began to be positioned as the "enemy" of the videoblogging community, the *other* against which the videobloggers measured themselves. The videobloggers chose to host their videos on sites such as archive.org, ourmedia.org and blip.tv, or even pay for their own hosting and domains. The latter would sometimes cause complications, however, like Rupert Howe's failure to keep his site going after being mentioned in the New York Times (see introduction), but in general these issues were accepted as part and parcel of retaining complete ownership of their content. This individualistic, and sometimes libertarian leaning formed part of the subject position of the videoblogger and the articulation through which their cultural practice was often expressed.[142]

There are a number of events created and run by the videoblogging community in the years between 2004 and 2009. Due to limitations of space, I can only mention a few here. In a move to develop the community activities, but also raise the public profile of videoblogging, in June 2005, the videoblogging community arranged and hosted the first Vloggercon, advertised as "not your average tech conference."[143] The two-day event was held in New York, included speakers such as email list co-founder Peter van Dijck, Rocketboom-founder Andrew Michael Baron, J.D. Lasica and a number of the core videoblogging community members.[144] On a panel called 'Tools', a group of developers were presenting their various apps to an audience of videobloggers (Hodson and Van Every 2005). John Kinberg presented Fireant, which was already a

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[142] This tension is reminiscent of Pierre Bourdieu's work on the sociology of photography, where he states that this relationship is "a mediate relationship, because it always includes the reference to the relationship that the members of the other social classes [in this case, YouTube] have to photography [in this case, videoblogging]" (Bourdieu [1965] 1991: 132). Bourdieu argues that one class of photographers' relationship to photography is a different relationship than that of for instance the *petit bourgeois* – whereas the peasants "senses the particularity of his condition", Bourdieu argues, the *petit bourgeois* "seek to ennoble themselves culturally by attempting to ennoble photography" (Bourdieu [1965] 1991: 132). He further argues that the *petit bourgeois*, "find within the disciplines of the sect that body of technical and aesthetic rules of which they deprived themselves when they rejected as vulgar the rules that govern popular practice" (Bourdieu [1965] 1991: 132). Thus, the rejection by the videobloggers of the technical and aesthetic qualities associated with posting videos to YouTube becomes not only part of the very definition of the easy technical and low quality aesthetic that make videoblogging somehow *better*, or more "noble", it also cemented YouTube as videoblogging's *other*.
[143] http://vloggercon.com
[144] For a full list of speakers, see
http://web.archive.org/web/20060615065257/http://www.vloggercon.com/?page_id=10

darling of the videoblogging community, Graham Stanley presented the idea hosting/ distribution platform *V blog central* and Daniell Krawczyk outlined the premise behind *Digital Bicycle*, a service that compressed videoblogs into a video format with high enough resolution to be (re)playable through broadcast tv. Digital Bicycle were "not just connecting individuals to individuals," Krawczyk claimed, and videoblogging was "not just about one person making and others watching, but other people outside their community watching it" (Hodson and Van Every 2005, see also Gauntlett 2011).

On reflection, one of the most interesting speakers of the panel was Jakob Lodwick from a small start-up called Vimeo. Lodwick explained how, in 2003, a friend had suggested that he start making weekly video updates, which he did. However, as he didn't enjoy talking to the camera, he started making more creative pieces, staying behind the camera, editing the footage into short films. Lodwick developed a program that allowed him to automate the editing process. By adding metadata such as dates, location and tags, Lodwick used SMILE technology[145] to automatically edit clips together, in sequence, with added background music. The videos would be spliced together by date (e.g. play all videos from the past month), location (play all videos from New York) or tag (play all videos tagged with 'girlfriend') – creating an automatically generated, continuous algorithmically generated database narrative.

One could speculate as to why the iteration of Vimeo presented by Lodwick in 2005 never made it out of beta. The company he chose to develop instead, has become one of the most successful video platforms on the internet. Although Lodwick is not longer working for the company (he now runs Elepath, a company developing iPhone apps), Vimeo is one of the largest video platforms on the internet and announced in November 2013 that they had reached 100 million users with 400K paid subscription (McGee 2013).

In June 2007, the videoblogging community organised *Pixelodeon*, "the first independent video festival" (Lange 2009: 87), held over a weekend at the American Film Institute in San Francisco. The event combined speakers and presentations, workshops and social gatherings with screenings of videoblogs, all curated by members of the videoblogging community. The Vloggies were the videoblogging community's award show, which was first held in San Francisco in 2006. PodTech produced the event, but it was the brainchild of Irina Slutsky and many of the videobloggers were

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[145] This type of technology has not become part of what we think of in terms of streaming media that autoplays the next video or episode, Here, I am thinking about YouTube playlists or Netflix' autoplay features.

both nominated and won awards at the event (including Casey, Roxanne and Ryanne).[146]

In 2008, the activity on the videoblogging email list started to wane, and by early 2010 the list was receiving fewer than 100 emails per month. By late 2014 the list is receiving less than 100 emails per year (total of 45 emails were sent to the list in 2013). On June 1st 2014 the list's ten year anniversary was marked with a sudden burst of activity. "Happy anniversary!" Richard wrote, "The Yahoo group and my video blogging experience was (is) a highlight of my life" (Hall 2014). "It was wonderful to enjoy that brief period of collective excitement," Rupert wrote, "I would like it if I could find a similar group of video hackers, experimenting with the new technology that's available to us now" (Howe 2014). "Remember my life in five second increments?" Susan laughed, before updating the list on her kids achievements that year (Pitman 2014). Mostly, the comments reflected how far online video has travelled since 2004; "online video is EASY now. What's video (and tech) going to be like in 10 more years? Yikes!"(King 2014), and how the videoblogging experience had impacted their lives; "I went on to use my videoblogging skills in several jobs, and have managed to keep most of my archive together on my YouTube channel" (Straughan 2014).

The anniversary also meant reflecting on what happened to the community and how and why it dispersed;

> It's interesting as group of people with the shared common goals of posting video on the Internet in an easy way and in some cases, not all, wanting to monetize that content we were a very active group. Once uploading video became pretty effortless our activity as a community became less. Coupling that with Twitter and Facebook making it even easier to find and share information about web video the group all but stopped (Street 2014).

I asked Jay what happened to Fireant. He told me the project, which had started as a "fun project… just a RSS reader for video… Cool for our community but not a big deal" (Jay, additional interview), had grown and reached its tipping point, when one of the founders suggested bringing in some "business guys he knew. We agreed because it seemed either we went after money or the project would die off… Ryanne and I moved to SF to be closer to the action. It was indeed heady times. YouTube was just bought for $1-billion" (Jay).

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[146] There was a big contention in the community in 2007 over trademark rights to the "Vloggies" brand, when PodTech claimed ownership over it and subsequently fired Irina Slutsky. Whether the Vloggies should "belong to the community" or be owned by a company were hotly discussed on the videoblogging list (see Nichols 2007, Furrier 2007, Watson 2007 and Meade 2007, or the full discussion thread at https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/videoblogging/conversations/topics/62872).

Perhaps the different attitudes was part of the problem, but it didn't seem to Jay as if anything was happening to further the appeal of Fireant. "Again, I didn't think we'd get rich, but I didn't have a better plan. Ryanne and I were busy putting on Vloggercon SF, Pixelodeon in LA, and having fun in the community. My main job in Fireant was working with users and helping improve features. I went to only a few meetings with VC's" (Jay). It is interesting that Jay, a seminal member of the videoblogging community, someone who had quite an idealistic view of videoblogging, told me he "never quite understood what happened" with Fireant. When the project failed to raise money, it became apparent that Fireant was in financial trouble (Jay).

As Jay told me, "none of it seemed real… Yeah, I think everything that happened during that period makes sense now that time has passed. But while it was happening it was very confusing". After some time, the co-founders worked together to make the project sellable and pay off debts. Jay remarked,

> I helped Josh find a buyer for the technology we built. After the sale, we paid off all debts they had incurred. I certainly didn't see but a little bit of money for those several years of work. Never did find out exactly how it all was spent (Jay).

Despite the failure of Fireant to take off, Jay remains reflexive of his own part in the mistakes made. "If I had to do it all over", he told me "I would have open sourced the project. Have fun until it wasnt fun anymore. I was guilty of falling for the dreams of making it big. Ha ha. Good lesson to learn" (Jay).

It is perhaps useful to think of Fireant as "dead" media, or what Hertz and Parikka (2012a) call "zombie" media – "the forgotten, out-of-use, obsolete and judged dysfunctional technologies" that help us "understand better the nature of media cultural development". In other words, Fireant, though no longer in active use, and perhaps never as widely enjoyed as its developers would have hoped, serves as a "living dead of media history" (Hertz and Parikka 2012b: 427). Hertz and Parikka point out how zombie media is never truly dead, but creeps back up in later instantiations of technologies, and thus is "resurrected to new uses, contexts and adaptations" (Hertz and Parikka 2012b: 429). Significantly, Fireant had many of the functionalities that were later adopted by other video sharing sites, such as YouTube (for example, the ability to comment on videos directly in the player). Yet, it's biggest problem was that by automatically downloading every video in a user's RSS feed, the user ended up downloading such a large amount of data that it became unmanageable, both in terms of

storage space on the user's hard drive and in terms of being able to consume that much media (eg Ryanne having almost 200 feeds in Fireant meant she always felt 'behind'). This issue of storage was already a problem, and being a pre web 2.0 technology, Fireant nor any other videoblogging technology, quite managed to resolve this until prices brought bandwidth and storage costs down over the following six years. But then that was too late for the practice and the community.

This chapter has mapped the technical constellations surrounding the videoblogging platform. I have outlined a number of applications and sites that formed around the videoblogging community, and given some of the technical foundations for the practice. The chapter started to develop a sense of the videoblogging identity, as seen in relation to these technical instantiations, and in the next chapter, I want to look at some of these issues is more detail in relation to the *practice* of videoblogging. For example, how did the videobloggers construct certain discourses around their sense of community and identity? I also want to explore more fully the concepts and meanings used by the videobloggers in defining their practice, as well as delve more deeply into the idea of the videoblog as intimate technology and quotidian practice.

Chapter 5 – Videoblogging as practice

> This is why good videoblogs are so personal, because superficially they look
> like they're about a subject, but in reality, they're about the videoblogger
> (Richard BF).

Although television and videoblogging are different kinds of media, produced,
distributed and consumed in different ways, and have differing political economies, they
do share certain similarities in terms of the way they are appropriated by the user. Thus
I argue that, like television, the videoblog structures meaning for the videoblogger, as
well as challenges the tension between the public and the private.

Silverstone (1994) carried out extensive research on the relationship between
television and everyday life practices, and his work is a strong influence on this thesis.
However, in this chapter, I am using Couldry's notion of media as practice as a starting
point for thinking about what videobloggers do with media. Crucial to Couldry's theory,
however, is not only the question of what people *do* with media, but what people *say*
they do with media and what it means to them.[147]

Silverstone (1994, 1999a) and Couldry (2004, 2012) are unmistakably
influenced by the writings of writers like de Certeau (1984). His critique of the practice
of everyday and "defence of its creative potential" (Bassett 2007b: 43) is highly
influential on anyone interested in the intersection of everyday practice, particularly for
the way it "reaches beyond individual experience and action towards the
(transcendental) ground of everyday practice and includes a defence of 'ordinary'
language" (Wild 2012: 3).

Drawing on the work of Ann Swindler, Couldry argues that a theory of media as
practice is concerned with analysing two "publicly observable processes", namely
practices and discourse. Here, practices are understood as "routine activities" as
opposed to "consciously chosen actions" – in other words, actions that are unconscious
and "un-thought" in character, as opposed to "consciously chosen actions" (Couldry
2004: 121). Discourse is understood not only as the things people say, but "the system
of meanings that allows them to say anything at all" (Swindler, quoted in Couldry 2004:

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[147] Clearly, the emphasis on practice in the study of media does not start with Couldry, nor is it unique to the study of
media. De Certeau famously theorized the practice of everyday life, exploring the "relation between the spatial and
signifying practices" (De Certeau 1984: 105) that make up our quotidian experience of the world. His notion of the
practice of everyday life, strongly influenced theories of media consumption (and with new media, theories of media
production). See also Lefebvre (2002), Morley (2002) and Morley and Silverstone (1990).

121). I am interested in the way *videoblogging as practice* is, as Couldry says, "un-thought" in character, in other words, in what way the practice of videoblogging can be seen to form part of the everyday life of the videoblogger. In order to do this, Couldry argues that we must retain an "openness" towards the practices people perform, i.e., in the case of this thesis, not pre-conceive of the videobloggers as either "artists," "media producers" or "amateur journalists". Instead, by observing their practices, and by listening to how they articulate their practices, we are able to gain a more accurate picture of the practice of videoblogging.[148]

In this chapter, I will ask the following specific questions, adapted somewhat from Couldry's more general queries; (1) what types of things do the videobloggers do in relation to videoblogging; and (2) what types of things do the videobloggers say in relation to their practice? (Couldry 2004: 121).

A useful way to explore videoblogging is by applying Roger Silverstone's (1994) methodological insight to attempt to uncover what he calls the "double articulation" of media. This takes account of both the material social practice and cultural content of the media under examination. In this case, there is, firstly, the activities of the videobloggers themselves, and how they use videoblogs in and around their everyday activities. For instance, space and time are described as changing perceptually when the videoblog mediates the videobloggers life. Secondly, it is important to analyse the content of the videoblogs, the extent to which they articulate a narrative, metaphors and stories about the videobloggers life, identity and body.

There is nonetheless a tension here, between Couldry's conceptualisation of the "un-thought" in relation to everyday life practices – which in some sense is centred around the achievement of the everyday in itself – and the way I use "un-thought" to refer to the videobloggers creative practices. It is also a methodological issue of how to get at individuals' "un-thought" practices – if they are un-thought they are also possibly not self-reflexive – and when asked to describe them, they are by definition no longer "un-thought". Here, then, having engaged with a long period of participant observation becomes useful, as I was able to draw on both what the individuals were saying they

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[148] In her exploration of amateur home-movies in the bourgeois family, Zimmermann (1995) discusses the complicated relationship between discourse and practice. She argues "the complexities of the relationship between discourse, which often presents itself as even, uninterrupted, and organized, and practice, which is much more unruly, and contradictory, erupt when we consider the myriad of relations between amateur-film discourse and actual amateur filmmaking. While these theoretical issues are tempting to analyse, their empirical answer is bound by the availability of amateur film" (Zimmermann 1995: xiv). Equally, this investigation into the practice of videoblogging is bound by the amount of material available. This is in part a methodological issue, discussed below.

did, and my own experience of doing it, gaining a much richer understanding of the practices of videoblogging. This is not to claim that this practice of reflexivity lie only within the expert domain of academia, rather, the videobloggers themselves were constantly and intelligently reflecting on their own practice. For example, observing the high volume of posts on the Vlog Theory email lists, one can see discussions and reflections on videoblogging were participated in regularly.

The point, rather, is that we need the perspective of practice to help us address how media are embedded in the interlocking fabric of social and cultural life (see Couldry 2004: 129). This allows us to get a different understanding of how media practices are "differentially ordered for those with ready access to media resources… and for those without" (Couldry 2004: 129). In other words, doing things with media isn't "one thing" to "all people": it is a different thing depending on the context in which you do them. So, for instance, although Henry Jenkin's concept of "participatory culture" (2006) acts as an anchoring term for a variety of activities and practices performed by individuals across the world, "participatory culture" isn't one thing to everyone. Seen through Couldry's lens, "participatory culture" is a diverse practice, with a variety of practices (be it blogging, videoblogging, tagging content on Flickr, Instagram or Tumblr, or actively or occasionally contributing to the constantly evolving content of Wikipedia) that inform and illuminate it. Further, "participatory culture" also provides a structure under which people can create discourses for understanding and articulating what they do.

This chapter investigates how the subject position of the videoblogger was discursively constructed through the email list and more concretely asserted as an identity and a set of practices in the interviews. I explore influences on the videobloggers, and what inspired them to make their videos. I also look at how the videoblogger uses space and place in their practice, and how they mediate that space. In the final section, I look towards questions of time and temporality in relation to videoblogging by exploring how ritual and habit are both lived and mediated by videoblogs.

Many of the definitions and explanations explored in this chapter are taken from the interviews with the informants, thus providing an overview of the debates that were taking place within the community at the time. This analysis was done through a formal coding of the videos submitted, as well as a discursive analysis of the interviews. Despite many self-defining as "artistic" or "experimental" film/video-makers, in terms

of a more formal theory of aesthetics, most could also comfortably fit in a category of autobiographical, or personal video-making.[149] This resonates with the idea of videoblogging as a personal practice, drawing on influences such as home-movies (Zimmermann 1995) and scrapbooking (Hof 2006, Burgess 2008), which uses creative and artistic tropes in their work. However, few, if any, videobloggers have any institutional support or links with the traditional Art world, galleries or such like. However, there have been moves towards film-inspired screenings and short-film festivals, such as Pixelodeon (2007) in San Francisco and award-type events, like the Vloggies (2007).[150]

Becoming Videoblogger

This section explores the subject position of the videoblogger, as co-constructed around the technologies that make up the videoblogging platform. Here I develop a form of analysis through which "demands and claims for the reconsideration of human possibilities within cultural formations and cultural bodies… combine with or take up technology in *new* ways" (Bassett 2007a: 108). That is, to explore videoblogging as it is "lived and as it is written and told" (Bassett 2007a: 108).

As was defined in the introduction to this thesis, a *videoblogger* produces and maintains a videoblog, and is also likely to self-define as a "videoblogger". One of the main distinctions between someone posting videos to YouTube and a videoblogger, is that the videoblogger maintains her own (video)blog, usually individually designed, with custom blog-rolls (or vlog-rolls),[151] archives and about pages, where they post videos between three times a week to once a month. Compared to the relative ease with which people adopted blogging at the time (Walker 2006), videoblogging required quite a high level of technical competence and knowledge. In contrast, someone who posts videos on YouTube, will often define him/herself as a Youtuber or 'Tuber (Lange 2007, Burgess and Green 2009). Amongst the videobloggers I interviewed, they generally all said they felt part of the videoblogging community, and all were subscribers to the

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[149] The use of quotation marks here is not meant ironically, or as a comment on informants self definition, but rather to signal that the text is drawn from the interviews and email corpus.

[150] The uncertain register of videoblogs was a constant source of debate within the videoblogging community during its early phase. Whether the videoblog was a documentary, reportage, short-film, artwork or as one videoblogger put it, a genre in itself (Richard BF), was never really settled until YouTube created its own notion of a "YouTube video" which is now a commonplace form. However, at the time this was far from settled.

[151] See chapter 4, for more on this.

videoblogging email list, around which the community was mainly situated. The videoblogging list was also followed by a number of people who were not formally "videobloggers" who would occasionally post to the list.

Indeed, the practice of videoblogging also problematizes the relationship between the public representation of the self and the videoblogger's notion of private identity and security (Lange 2007). Videoblogging is both a private practice, carried out, mostly from within the confines of the home, and at the same time a public practice, both in terms of the availability of the videoblog to the internet as a whole and as a practice existing within a public community of users. Although this chapter is interested mainly in the *practice* of videoblogging, it is important to note the sharable nature of videoblogging and how this sharability often took place within a self-referential community of interest, rather than shared as a public or wider community public practice (see Silverstone 2006: 91).

The majority of my informants emphasized the way in which videoblogging was a personal, quotidian practice, a way to narrativise their lives and archive experiences for the future. There were of course other, separate discussions going on in the community at the time, about copyright, remix culture and the relationship between amateur and professionally produced content. Issues around copyright, for instance, were often discussed and debated within the community. In the videos themselves, however, the representation of the everyday and the much-celebrated intimacy between videobloggers who may not have met in "the real world," helped forge deep emotional bonds and friendships due to the intimate nature of the videoblog.

Many of my informants were reluctant to self-identify with a specific genre or category; for example, they would say their videoblog could be considered both an art project and a personal diary.[152] There were no unambiguous *types* emerging at the end of my interviews, and instead it was more fruitful to look more closely at *how* they described their practices, as well as examining the videos themselves.

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[152] Lange (2007) and Burgess and Green (2009) have understood videoblogging through somewhat fixed definitions of online video, vlogging and videoblogging. However, from the very beginning the videoblogging community showed clear resistance towards creating a unified definition of what videoblogging was or should be. Indeed, it has been useful to listen to the actors themselves disavow fixed definitions. Thus I think it is helpful to think about videoblogging starting as an *empty signifier* which helped enroll video and film makers into a shared set of practices and which slowly began to coalesce around shared practices, technologies and aesthetics.

Videoblogger	Self-defined type
Zadi, Steve, Raymond, Brittany, Bekah, Cheryl, Gena, Juan, Richard H, Susan, Ryanne, Rupert, Richard BF, Mary, Richard H, Adam	Personal (diary, short personal documentaries, autobiographical)
Sam, Mica, David H, Adam, Brittany, Andreas, Daniel, Jay, Jen P, Markus, Loiez, Charlene, Paris Bekah	Art (experimental films/videos, patafilms, arty junk, short experimental non-fiction videos, videopoems, animation, abstract, arts and crafts projects)
Andreas, Erin, Jay, Jen G, Juan, Mary, Richard BF, Charlene, Gena, Paris	Everyday life (home video, video scrapbook, moments, daily video snapshots)
Mica, Jen G, Nicholas	Documentary
Erik, Enric, Juan	Internet TV (short films for the internet, reality show)
Adam, Casey	Comedy

Figure 10: Table of videoblogger's self-definitions

Of my thirty-three informants, fourteen self-identified as making art (Sam, Mica, David, Adam, Brittany, Andreas, Daniel, Jay, Jen P, Markus, Loiez, Charlene, Paris, Bekah) or "artistic" (Charlene) videos. One called it "arty junk" (Brittany). Paris told me "I consider my vlog a studio space or workshop, I use the blog mechanism to help me apply some order to the ideas that come tumbling from my head". Daniel called his practice "experimental personal film(?)making" (original formatting) and Jen P told me she makes "short experimental nonfiction videos… about everyday life that attempt to shift the ordinary into something novel or to make the unnoticed bigger or more profound" (Jen P). Charlene said her work was "generally more artistic and it contains pieces that are from my daily life and pieces of little art ideas or sketches". Three identified as making documentaries (Mica, Jen G, Nicholas). Two informants called their videoblogs "short films for the internet" (Erik, Enrik) and one "short personal documentaries" (Cheryl).

Ten videobloggers told me their videoblogs were about their "daily" or "everyday life" (Andreas, Erin, Jay, Jen G, Juan, Mary, Richard BF, Charlene, Gena, Paris), for example, Paris told me her videos were "everyday moments that make up your life, that can give a western audience some perspective into Iranian life" (Paris).

Andreas told me his videoblogs were "video snapshots on my daily life" (Andreas). The term most commonly used by the informants to describe their videoblogs, was "personal". Sixteen videobloggers said their videos fell into this category (Zadi, Adam, Steve, Raymond, Brittany, Bekah, Cheryl, Gena, Juan, Richard H, Susan, Ryanne, Rupert, Richard BF, Mary, Richard H), meaning they "fit under the giant umbrella of personal videoblogging" (Bekah). Bekah further added that she saw "each video… like a little arts & crafts project that I get attached to, and because they are usually personal in terms of subject matter".

To illustrate what they meant by "personal", some added that their videoblog acted as a "diary" (Susan) or as "moments… intimate, personal experiences of my life, my work, my relationships, my spirit, all captured in moments" (Mary). One person likened the practice of videoblogging to "home videos" with the added element of being "edited and a little more polished and hopefully more pleasant to watch. These are moments from our family life and I like to think of them as a video scrapbook of our memories and times together" (Erin). As seems clear, there was quite a lot of overlap between these categories, with few defining themselves within just one type. Further, it seems that many of these descriptions, although consistent, could easily be collapsed – where describing a videoblog as "personal" might just be another way of saying that their videoblogs were stories from their "everyday life". Equally, terms such as "home movies" and "scrapbooking" have been shown by others (see for instance Burgess 2008) to be terms used quite frequently when describing social and personal activities online. As Hof (2006: 364) argues, "scrapbooking exemplifies how an everyday cultural practice can magnetize and mobilize people through a community of practice". It seems therefore, that a majority of the videobloggers interviewed for this thesis, fall within the category of producing "personal" videoblogs, in other words, *not* producing content for public circulation as such. "Artistic" and "everyday life" were the second largest groupings. One notable counter-example was Casey, who told me she produces a "sci-fi comedy show" aimed at earning her and her partner a living.

Even those initially telling me their videos weren't "personal," but rather "artistic" or "experimental", for instance telling me their videos "don't often feature people at all" and instead featured "objects or shapes or landscapes or movement" (Jen P), admitted that even these videos were on some level personal to them. "Sure, almost all of them, on some level. It's all an ongoing process of watching, incorporating, chewing up, spitting back out" (Jen P). One videoblogger further problematized this

idea of personal media by stating that his videos "are personal because they are all me (created by me, dealing with my life) but they are not personal because they don't deal with personal matters" (Andreas).

Many of the videobloggers thus defined their practice as falling into the category of personal media: "these are windows into my life, small windows into a mood I might be in, or it may be the result of me playing around with the computer" (Raymond). Raymond further told me "I guess I am the protagonist in my videos". Adam told me the "12" nude plastic doll" that features as the protagonist in his videoblogs, is in fact "my thinly veiled doppelganger" (Adam). A few users expanded on this idea of themselves as protagonists in their own videoblogs,

> I suppose I am the protagonist. Occasionally I might make a friend or a pet the protagonist. Why me? Well, because I'm making videos about my life, so I'm the natural choice. If I switch to someone else, it would be because I want to highlight them or am making a tribute to them. Or because I want to try to see/show the world through someone else's eyes (Cheryl).

> Yes, My wife and I. Everything we show is based on our point of view. Although, I have to say that we don't touch political or religious themes. Our videos are of 'normal moments of life'. And we are the protagonist because we want to show our families (and friends) the things we do here in Los Angeles (Juan).

Richard BF conceptualised videoblogging as a genre in itself, and attempted to outline this for me, stating,

> I consider videoblogging a genre, so I guess they fit themself. I would describe what I do as 'I carry my video camera with me wherever I go, and if I see something interesting, I'll shoot it and put it on the web. It's like what people do with a camera phone, but I also talk into the camera. It's like a video diary, but the whole world can see it' (Richard BF).

Other videobloggers were less interested in any kind of definition,[153] as Markus wrote, "I don't have an interest in defining video blogging. I don't want to define it. It's like writing" (Markus). Indeed, Erik explained he "intentionally attempt to avoid getting pinned into something that is easily describable" and Raymond told me he tried to "avoid the boxes, putting my work into this or that narrative tradition". This resistance to being 'put in a box' was echoed by Markus,

> The quest to define video blogging has been going on since it started and it's the videos themselves that define it, not people, not critics, academics or anyone else. Just the videos. And even then, people still want to describe it, box it,

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[153] See also Michael Verdi (2005b) *Vlog Anarchy*, which is a call to arms against closing the practice down in restrictive definitions.

> corner it and catch some of it, maybe. I don't know. Is this how it was for the early days of television? I think we are still discovering what television can do and be (Markus).

The informants explained themselves and their narrative practices in ways that *automate* their identities. This raised questions of "how might life stories be archived, edited, and reassembled in forms influenced and constrained by the architecture of the system, by users who may in the end narrate or refuse the tale" (Bassett 2007a: 110). This is connected to the *storage* dimension of videoblogging and its related archival practices – it should be noted that informants were extremely cognizant of the problems of digital storage and backup and the dangers of losing archival material (see Kittler 1999, Ernst 2013, Parikka 2012).

People take photographs for a number of reasons, including "to construct personal and group memory; in order to create and maintain social relationships; and for the purposes of self-expression and self-presentation" (Gye 2007: 280). Indeed, the idea of "self-expression" and "self-presentation" is reflected in videoblogging practice, here demonstrated by Cheryl, explaining her motivations for videoblogging. "Videoblogs," she told me,

> are a means of productive self-reflection. A way for me to live an examined life and have something to show for it. And a way to re-story my life… It's a valuable record too (Cheryl).

Here, then, Cheryl actively uses her videoblog to 'live an examined life', to reflect on her actions and learn something from her experiences. This notion is deeply philosophical in construction and is reminiscent of Socrates, who thought "the unexamined life is not worth living" (Plato Apology 38a 5-6, 1966). Cheryl also points towards memory as a technical effect of media, stating that her videoblog gives her "something to show for it"; a "valuable record" of her lived experiences.

This notion of creating a record of ones life has been seen as one of the motivating forces behind amateur photography. Drawing on Bourdieu, Gye argues that "the *desire* to photograph is not a given—it is socially constructed and culturally specific" and that "the rise in its popularity can be directly attributable to the emergence of a correlation in the public imagination between photographic practice and private memorialization" (Gye 2007: 280, italics in original). As Bourdieu argued, as "a private technique, photography manufactures private images of private life . . . Apart from a tiny minority of aesthetes, photographers see the recording of family life as the primary

function of photography" (Bourdieu [1965] 1991: 30). This is echoed in Erin's comments about her videoblog,

> These are moments from our family life and I like to think of them as a video scrapbook of our memories and times together. This will be something I'm sure I will cherish in years to come (and hopefully my children will too!) (Erin).

Jay articulated the way his videoblogging was conceived of as a way of archiving life, but also to provide some sense of narrative connections and meaning. He told me his "videos are really just an exploration of moments I live through. You know, most of life could be said to be very mundane, while it could also be said that every moment is full of meaning" (Jay). Jan, a freelance sound designer, with a particular interest in audio (she submitted her interview to me as an audio file rather than as text), used less definite language in her description of what a videoblog is, saying, "video blogging is anything I want it to be" and "it's making something of beauty and sharing it with the world". This lack of a clear definition is reflected across those of the informants defining videoblogging as "art" or "experimental video".

Similarly, Juan said he was creating a "visual archive of my life", taking a camera with him everywhere "because I like to keep track of my life on video. I want to be able to 'see' my life how it was, and not only have a memory of the moment" (Juan). Cheryl shared this view, "I would say that the videos are short, personal documentaries that I use to share my life experiences," she told me. "Together they make a longer documentary of the journey of my life, from the silly or mundane to more profound experiences" (Cheryl).

Some videobloggers saw videoblogging as a sub-genre of blogging, and utilised quite technical language to describe it,

> It's like a web page, but it's a log where people have a linear list of posts. A video blog is a variation on that where you have a linear list of videos and they are usually associated with some text and a traditional thing with video blogs is that they have syndication so that you can use an RSS reader so you can use RSS with enclosures. To me it's kind of a technical bit to define it technically (Richard H).

Enric, too, defined his practice in quite technical terms,

> Videoblog: Video in a blog format with entries in reverse chronological order that can be syndicated for distribution. The creation and distribution of the videoblog is personally controlled by the videoblogger(s) without approval required from any media gatekeeper (Enric).

Thus, control over content, both the production process and the distribution across media platforms, was as important to the Enric as the content of the videos or how they were displayed in the blog, as he explained,

> most people define videoblogging as having control over the production and distribution of their rich media work. Having no gatekeepers for making and distributing vlogs. This is not explicitly defined, but through their actions of talking about the process of making vlogs on their own, where it gets distributed to, how to control and get information on syndication (distribution), concern and action on unauthorized distribution by (Enric).

This definition of videoblogging as "control over production and distribution" and "having no gatekeepers" was clearly influenced by strands running through the open-source and free culture movement (Lessig 2004, Raymond 2001, Stallmann 2002, Berry 2008, see also Miles 2006). Many articles on sites such as Techcrunch, Digg and Gawker were very influential on the videoblogging community, and it seems that a lot of the articles produced at this time were influenced by the work of Lessig (2003), on copyright, code and law, and O'Reilly (2005) on web 2.0.

Space and Place for Videoblogging

Silverstone (1994) emphasised the important and contradictory nature of the home in relation to media.[154] At once a secure space, the home also acts as a protection against the world outside; "the home, as the shell around the body […] and as the walls around the family, articulates this defensiveness even as it offers security. The domestic space is thus forged dialectically, as a contradiction" (Bassett 2007b: 45). With this in mind, and remembering both that Silverstone would have envisaged the media as entering into the home, as opposed to being projected from the home, and Couldry's notion of "un-thought" practice (2004), the *videoblogger at home* becomes an interesting avenue for exploring the videoblogger's relationship to the home.

It is interesting to think of the videoblogging practice as an early instance of *everywhere computing*. The ubiquitousness of mobile computing which today allows us to interact with each other anywhere and any time, via our devices, was quite avant-garde at the time the videobloggers were experimenting with mobile devices such as the Nokia N95 (which looked like the Sony Xacti, but provided a lower technical standard,

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[154] The home is further problematized in relation to electronic media by Meyrowitz (1986), who argues that "developments in media are giving rise to a 'relatively placeless' world" (Moores 2007:1)

made up for by having access to the internet). Yet, there were many videobloggers who still preferred to work from within the home, and whose videos reflect the domestic.

Of my 33 informants, 17 told me they recorded their videos either at home (e.g. Paris, Sam, Bekah, Daniel, Casey, Andreas, Brittany, Adam, Charyl, Jen P) or a variant of the home, "home office" (Zadi, Markus), "home studio" (David), "home/ on location" (Enric, Jen) or the more general "home/out" (Mica, Raymond). When it came to editing the videos, the overwhelming majority (all but one) told me they worked from home. When asked to specify, they told me they edited (and uploaded) their videoblogs at home, usually from the bedroom, or a space characterised as a "studio" or "home office". An example of this was illustrated by Andreas, a 25 year old student from Denmark, who, when describing to me "where his main work computer was located in relation to the rest of the room it was in,"[155] gave me the following, detailed description,

> It's on my work desk. The desk itself is filled with various papers and trinkets. When working I'm staring into the wall, but one of two windows in the room are on the immediate right. Directly behind me is my bed and to the right after the window my bookcase it sitting (I need to buy a new one, this one is overflowing - I even placed a smaller bookcase on top of the actual bookcase). To the left of the desk I have my tv and behind that the kitchen area begins. Behind me and to the left I have a small table with some chairs. Usually the table has either more papers or laundry sitting on it (Andreas).

What struck me immediately about his description was how the space he uses for working on had invaded (or was invaded by) domesticity, most notably his laundry and his bed. Further questions revealed that "I do everything from my apartment" and that "everything is jumbled together on the same desk and the same computer". The fact that Andreas (at the time of the interview) was a student working freelance perhaps explains this feeling of living in one room from where everything necessarily needs to be done, but he was not the only videoblogger describing this to me. Adam, a self-employed 28 year old from New York, stated that "my bedroom doubles as my office" (Adam), and Brittany, 24 from Boston, explained; "my desk is in my room, which sort of doubles as my office at home". Jen P, a 33 year old professor of arts, told me she, too, works from "a converted bedroom" (Jen P).

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[155] The detailed description asked for in the interview was an attempt to bridge the gap created in the shift from a "standard" to a virtual ethnography. I didn't want to ask the participants to send me photos of their home, as this may have seemed intrusive, which is why I asked them to describe it instead. However, two of the informants did in fact send me photographs, whereas two others referred me to photos on their Flickr accounts in which their offices were depicted.

Amongst those videobloggers who self-identified as "artistic", the demarcation of a space to videoblog was more prominent than amongst those who self- identified as making "personal" videoblogs. David told me he works from a "modified attic space" and Erik, a 31 year old American based in the Netherlands, told me "I have the entire attic space to myself, along with the washer and dryer. It's great".

Generally, an interesting finding to emerge from a few of the informants, was the lack of a fixed space within the home from where they videoblog. Facilitated by laptops and small, portable equipment, those who didn't indicate that they had a dedicated "office-space" or "studio-space" in which they worked, told me that one of their reasons for videoblogging was that it was something they could do "anywhere"; "in the house, classroom, office, car, restaurant, grocery, wilderness - everywhere!" (Cheryl). Jay told me he produces videos "wherever I am. I have a camera right in my pocket". He also told me he "record[s] everywhere.. and then edit on my laptop. usually at home, but could be anywhere" (Jay). Similarly, when asked where his computer was located in the house, Daniel told me "it roams freely". "Sometimes I bring my computer - a laptop - into the living room and do work out there," Brittany told me. She had indicated she worked mainly from her bedroom, so explained that "mostly, especially for editing, which requires external hard drives, I'm in my room". In other words, it was the technical requirements of an external hard drive, not as mobile as a laptop, which caused Brittany to work mainly in one space.

A comment made by a couple of female videobloggers was the importance of being "comfortable" whilst doing it. This was illustrated by Susan, who told me videoblogging, "forms part of my every day life, because when I get home from work, I recline back in my lazy boy chair, and there's my laptop waiting for me beside the chair." Similarly, Cheryl told me "I have strategic power strips located around the house - in the dining room and near the comfy LazyBoy chair" which allowed her to "move to where I'm comfortable" (Cheryl).

Charlene, a 37 year old film editor living in New York, told me she usually edits videos on the kitchen table. "Hmm. If I'm at the kitchen table, I'm facing a wall with 2 windows on either side. Fridge to my right (it's a very tiny kitchen). Stove behind me. The living room is also behind me" (Charlene). From her own description, Charlene was working in a domestic space, surrounded by everyday things, like the fridge and the stove. Charlene's video, *Dear Tesla* (Rule 2005) illustrates this domestic space mediated through her videoblog. The video shows her sitting in her kitchen eating

spaghetti, talking, with her face reflected in her toaster. This mediation of household objects and domestic space is also the theme of some of her other videos, for instance *Quarterplus* (Rule 2005), which features her attempts to kill a cockroach that has hidden in a cupboard (figure11).

Figure 11: Quarterplus (Rule 2004)

Charlene's extensive use of lighting and sound effects contributes to an eerie atmosphere that defamiliarises her home into a strange space – much like the space she has created on her videoblog, a space where "the boundaries are crossed between what is real and what is not… I am able to jump into playful ways of looking at my own reality and that is what seems to be a given in terms of the vernacular for the audience" (Charlene).

As this example shows, the home has a dual significance to the videoblogger. It is both the space from which she videoblogs, and is often represented in the videos. Another example is Erin's video *Mornings* (Nealy 2006), which is a fast-paced video montage of her morning ritual – making coffee and breakfast for her kids – in which short sharp edits are cut together to create a vibrant montage of the un-thought rituals of the everyday. In *Mornings*, "the intimate space of the home is at once the site for mundane transactions and a constituent part of this other vaster space which might have both psychical and mythical dimensions" (Bassett 2007b: 45).

I will discuss the aesthetic of the videoblogs in more detail in the next chapter, but to highlight the way videoblogging was a social practice, I would like to describe Ryanne's video, *V-blog conversations* (Hodson 2004b) in a little more detail here.
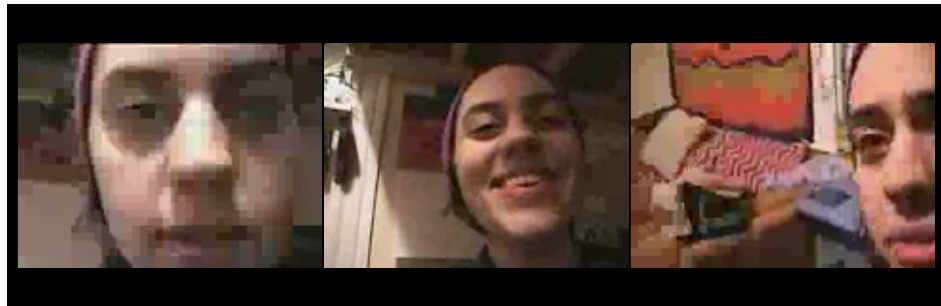
Figure 12: V-blog Conversation (Hodson 2004b)

In this video, Ryanne's face fills the screen in a close-up and only towards the end, when she is showing the viewer her room, does the camera pan away from her face (figure 12). The framing of her face is similar to what we now think of as the "classic videobloggin shot" (Hodson and Verdi 2006, Dedman and Paul 2006) – but also echoes the way our faces are framed in Skype chats or other kinds of instant video-communication (like FaceTime). In other words, the look of the videoblog is reflected in the content of the videoblog, and Ryanne is chatting, literally, to whoever wants to listen,

> Hello… hello videobloggers. Um, I… just watched Jay's video of him sitting with like a purple curtain behind him, talking, um, and saying, wait, why shouldn't I just type this, it's a blog, so [laughs] I was inspired to just sit in front of my camera and talk about videoblogging, because, um, I am so excited about it (Hodson 2004b).

She goes on to describe some of the things she loves about videoblogging, which are linked to exactly the kinds of intimate relationship the medium is allowing her to develop with new people,

> On the Internet, you just make it. And you post it. And people laugh. In California. [smiles] And they write you and they say 'oh my god, I laughed so hard when I saw that' [laughs with entire face] It's so great! It's just the best thing…. you know, the internet, it's a five minute thing I want to do, ok I'm gonna do it and people can watch it and I feel great, oh my god, that's the best thing in the world. So, it's 3 am, right now, and I just played poker all night, and I couldn't get to sleep, cos I just saw Jay's video and I was like I'm totally going to get my camera and talk to people (Hodson 2004b).

In her interview, Ryanne reflected on this in more detail, telling me her videoblog was "a document of my life. Me, observing the world and translating it. It's like complete freedom, I post whatever I feel like. It's my outlet and like an open diary to the world" (Ryanne). This sense of freedom is reflected in a number of her videos, "this is like the

reason I vlog. I've showed myself crying, laughing, ranting, thinking, anything. I just want to relate to other people, not feel like I'm alone and crazy" (Ryanne). Rupert also reflected on this aspect of videoblogging,

> the videos were people sharing [depicted] intimate and mundane parts of their lives. Stuff you still didn't see anywhere then... Back then it was extraordinary to see someone making a video about taking their child to the park and talking to you about it… For me, the more mundane it was, the more excited I was by the newness of it (Rupert).

Jay said, "if done well, something is really shared in these moments. The visual artform is just so rich. The fact that videoblogs are archived also allows me to go and watch a person's past creations and life". The idea of sharing the spaces of their lives, of creating archives and repositories of memory, of narrativising their lives and being able to draw on the videos at a later time, was clearly important to the videobloggers. "I think most of my videos are simply sharing moments rather than telling a story," Erin told me. Jen G told me videoblogging "is my way of sharing of myself personally and processing my experiences". "I would describe my videos as moments," Mary told me, "intimate, personal experiences of my life, my work, my relationships, my spirit, all captured in moments" (Mary). Paris, who made videos about Iran and being an Iranian in America, told me that "sharing" was one of her main goals through videoblogging,

> Initially, it was about cultural expression and sharing – however through this experience of videoblogging… I have been learning about how it can facilitate my own personal self-expression. Sharing my cultural identity with others, so that others can identify with it, I began to experiment with emotion and feeling (Paris).

The videobloggers saw videoblogging as a way of sharing stories and personal experiences, as well as their, perhaps naïve, idea that the content they produced in 2004 would remain as an archive for future generations. As Jay told me, "imagine what it'll be like in 50 years when people's lives are all in video in different ways! It'll be gold to our ancestors." Ironically, writing in 2014, due to technical changes, shut down web sites and general link breaking, only a handful of Jay's videos are still available on the internet, and only to those who know where to look.

The unstable nature of the technologies that made the up the techno-social foundation of the practice, and showed how with time, the changes in technologies, as well as a changes more akin to a political economic analysis (such as hosting companies changing owners/ changing terms of service etc.), caused the practice to slowly grind to a halt. When videoblogging fell out of favour with hosting sites such as Blip in

November 2013, a company started by videobloggers and which used to be intimately linked with the community (see chapter 4), the practice had already been largely abandoned by the videoblogging community, and the community of users – albeit still tenuously connected through sites such as Facebook and Twitter – was largely dispersed.

Time, temporality and Videoblogging

I now want to turn more specifically to how time and temporality are manifested in the practices of the videobloggers that I have interviewed, but also consider how this is manifested in rituals, habits and repetitions. I also want to explore how these are mediated through the videoblogs, both consciously and unconsciously.

As was explored in chapter 4, videoblogging was a practice that required technical expertise and was very time consuming. Thus, I wanted to explore the amount of time, in general, the videoblogger spent videoblogging; was it a daily occurrence, weekly, monthly? Did they videoblog all day, for a couple of hours or five minutes? How long would it take to produce an entry on a videoblog, how often would the videoblogger produce content, what time of day (or night) would she work? Many videobloggers talked about sharing stories and developing visual archives for the future, thus I was interested in the idea of videoblogs as repositories of memory, working archives of lived experiences and how the videobloggers articulated this both discursively and in their work.

To Silverstone, the "veritable dailiness" of everyday life (Silverstone, 1994: 3), the routinized practices that make up the fabric of the everyday, exists through a sense of order and ritual. Couldry also describes media practices, understood as "routine activities" as opposed to "consciously chosen actions" (Swindler, in Couldry 2004: 121). How we make sense of these quotidian practices, Silverstone argues, is through "an order manifested in our various traditions, rituals, routines and taken for granted activities—in which we, paradoxically, invest so much energy, effort and so many cognitive and emotional resources" (Silverstone 1994: 1).

Mary told me that, "vlogging is routine… though does fall behind if other work gets busy, but I video blog every day – be it shooting, editing, writing. I look forward to it. I am always thinking about it". Mica's answer was a ambiguous "whenever," but when asked to elaborate, she told me that,

artmaking is a daily process for me. I have always made myself do something every day. I started working with digital video and vlogging simultaneously so it was about making a process that was simple and something that could be incorporated into daily life. When it feels like a chore I take a break. I have taken periodic breaks to work on specific projects (Mica).

Mica's answer represented a more general attitude to videoblogging – that it shouldn't be a chore. For Jen P, the incorporation of videoblogging into her everyday life was part of her routine, but for others, like Susan, a mother of two, videoblogging could be a guilty pleasure as well; "sometimes (guilty) I have to make myself wait until after the kids go to bed, so I can spend some time with them instead of editing videos when we could be playing together' (Susan). Erin, 33 year old mother, expressed a similar mix of guilt and pleasure when she described her perfect night in,

I absolutely LOVE to edit video that I have captured. There have been times where I've let that overtake my day, but since I have two children I am trying to be careful about that […] there is nothing better than the feeling of the kids sleeping peacefully in their beds, me at my desk with a coffee in hand and working on my latest project (Erin).

Having to *make* time for videoblogging was highlighted by a number of respondents, including Roxanne, Mica, Jen G, Erik, Enric, David, Cheryl, Erin, and Gena. To illustrate, one respondent told me he it would on average take him "1 day or more" to record a video, "a day to edit and up to half a day to upload" (Nicholas). Another told me he spent 1-2 hours recording, up to 20 hours editing and 30 minutes to an hour uploading a videoblog (Erik). A third respondent told me her videos took her, on average, 1-2 hours to record, 6-8 hours to edit and 2 hours to upload (Zadi). There were, of course, those who spent "3 minutes" recording, and only "15 minutes" editing (Steve) or "a few minutes" shooting (Markus) but "anything up to an hour" to edit (Richard BF), but the majority of respondents reported spending at least an hour recording, editing and uploading videos to their videoblogs (Zadi, Adam, Juan, Richard H, Loiez, Ryanne).

"The process takes too long" (Dedman 2004) had been identified as one of the main obstacles to videoblogging (see chapter 4), and this was something that was highlighted by many of the respondents. In general, the editing was by far the most laborious part of the creation of videoblogs, with recording mostly completed in around an hour and uploading generally completed within 15 minutes. With upload times being fairly slow, creating shorter videos (no more than 5 minutes in length and compressed to a small a file as possible made a lot of sense technically).

Jen P told me she makes videos, "really randomly. I have no schedule. I usually take 1-6 months recording moments, and then actually sit down and put them together. I really see it like making a photography book." Similarly, when I pressed on whether taking more time over videos allows for greater reflection, she answered

> oh yeah.... I got to let things sit. Usually I'll record a moment and know its good. You just know. But I have no idea how to use it. I have to collect these good moments over time...and then let them fall into place. Allowing time to pass between recording moments and publishing moments allows me to understand why I happen to record it at the time. To be clear, there are no answers here. Time just helps me see how 'cool' life can be. That's all recording a moment is. Trying to make the mundane...special (Jen P).

Amongst those self-identifying as "artistic" videobloggers, there was a clear trend towards working at night. "I reserve the hours 9:00PM-3:00AM for video work, after the kids are put down for the night," Erik told me. Adam told me his "best work happens between the hours of 9pm and 4am." Equally, Loiez, who defines videoblogging as a form of poetry, said he works "during the night generally." For some, like Richard BF, working at night wasn't a necessity, i.e. to work around children, work or other commitments, but merely out of choice. "[I work] all over the place," he told me. "Sometimes I'll edit straight after shooting, which could be any time of the day or night. I guess generally it's at night, but that's just because I like to work at night, not because I'm busy during the day".

Interestingly, these were also the participants who were most likely to tell me they worked from a "studio" (Adam and Jen P, see above) – most notably from a converted attic space (David and Erik, again, see above). This recalls images of "the romantic artist" and, interestingly, these were the participants whose explanations of their videoblogging practices were quite ambiguous. By this, I mean that they were more likely to talk about their videos in "artistic" terms. To illustrate, this comparison between the answers of Erin, who mainly videoblogged about her family and children, and David, who self-identified as an artist, is interesting. Erin told me it usually took her "10-30 minutes" to record her videos, whereas David told me they took "as long as is required". Further, whereas Erin told me she used "anywhere from 6-12 hours" to edit a video, David would work "until it is finished". Lastly, when explaining the length of an individual video, Erin articulated a clear and rational reasoning for the length of her videos (her videos range from 3 to 5 minutes), telling me;

> I just feel like people don't have the attention span to watch anything much longer than that sitting at their computers. Every now and then, I'll throw a longer video in there that maybe I didn't create specifically for the videoblog. But generally if I'm creating something that is especially for my site, I will try and keep it under 5 mins (Erin).

By comparison, although his videos were almost identical in length (they ranged from 1 to 5 minutes) David couldn't (or wouldn't) give me a reason, "no rhyme or reason to the length. I am currently trying to make them shorter than 1 minute and tell a longer more complex story. It doesn't always work out that way though. My videos generally dictate to me *how long they wish to be*" (David, emphasis added). He did add, however, that the pleasure he experienced in relation to videoblogging was linked to spending hours alone creating something, a bit like a craftsman at work; "I fit it in when I have time to sit locked away for an extended time. I very much look forward to making them and wish I could do it all the time" (David). This echoes Kember and Zylinska (2012), who argue that in the age of the digital, with the distributed networks of users and potential collaboration across time and space, the creative subject is now collaborative rather than individualistic, yet she is still "driven by the very same desires, motivations, and fantasies that had shaped the Romantic creative: those of artistic freedom, self-worth, and individual fulfilment" (Kember and Zylinska 2012: 175). It is also interesting to think about this difference in terms of gender and the time and space affordances that are granted to an individual in society as result of their gender. Nowhere in David's discourse does he mention external pressures such as kids, family or domestic labour, whereas for Erin, consideration for kids, family and the everyday pressures of being a mother has to come first. Erin's notions of videoblogging are shaped by these external (or rather, domestic) demands on her time. She knows exactly how long she has to videoblog, and exactly when she can take the time to do so.

A few of the "everyday life videobloggers" have had periods of reduced videoblogging and even complete withdrawal from the "vlogosphere". Raymond, who whilst the interview was taking place was on a self-imposed hiatus from videoblogging, showed signs of burn-out when he talked to me; "in the beginning of 'my videoblogging career' I structured my days around producing videos, watching videos, interacting with other videobloggers. I would wake up, and watch videos before eating breakfast. I might make a movie after breakfast. I might spend an evening after work talking with other videobloggers on AIM or Skype. Especially between October 05 and June 06 I spent a LOT of time… videoblogging" (Raymond)

Others showed a pragmatic approach to videoblogging. Jen P maintains her own personal site where she posts "short experimental non-fiction videos". She works full time as a professor at a University in the US and tries to "fit my videos in when I can." Her attitude, similar to Mica's, is that videoblogging is an organic process and that she usually does it:

> when the video calls for it, rather than forcing myself to do a video… But I do put some pressure on myself to keep producing. If it's been a while since I've posted anything, then I more actively seek stuff to shoot, or find stuff to edit, or try to come up with something interesting to post. It's something that's always on my mind, in the back of my head, but I really just fit the process in where I can, like another piece of my weekly life puzzle (Jen P).

To the question of whether she had to *make* time for videoblogging, she stated categorically "I would say no – it's simply ongoing, like another part of life. It's just another thing I do during the week, like going for a walk or making a nice dinner" (Jen P).

Jen P was drawn to the contingency of videoblogging, and described how it allowed her to react to events in her life in a more spontaneous way. As a professor of film studies, videoblogging presented an alternative approach to creating moving images, one which she found "liberating" (Jen P),

> I think part of the great power in videoblogging is related to its spontaneity, to its now-ness, and to its capturing of those beautiful, fleeting life moments that we all experience but rarely have an opportunity to document. So for me, those random events are often the more uncanny or moving or interesting, the being-there-at-the-right-time kind of moments, that don't as often occur when you capture life in more of a planned or scripted way (Jen P).

The videobloggers motivations for videoblogging, then, can be seen to vary from "there's something exciting about the immediacy and global audience that makes it fairly unique as a hobby" (Richard BF), to the self-fulfilment of being a content producer with an audience; "it's great to be with the camera shooting stuff. I feel like a movie director doing short films" (Juan). Raymond told me,

> I felt as if my head was about to explode every few hours, when I realized just how much [videoblogging] could change everything... To me, videoblogging… was the missing link. It was what would allow people from regions like sub-saharan Africa to communicate with the world (I have a good friend in Nigeria). Videoblogging, if done with a low-key approach to it, could really change how we communicate (Raymond).

Richard H, a university professor of information science and technology and "early adopter" of videoblogging, told me he prefers videoblogging to his "real" work. With

some irony (he is an academic) he told me that "... also, many more people have watched my most popular videos, than have read my most prestigious journal publication" (Richard H). Richard H described videoblogging "like meditation – I'm in a different world […] several hours goes by and it feels like I just started and my concentration is such that little sounds and stuff really bug me if they get my attention ... very much a feeling of 'flow'" (Richard H). It also became clear that the practice of videoblogging was conceptualised and experienced by the videoblogger as inherently *social*. For some, it also became a way of meeting people,

> When I found videoblogging I realized that I could have conversations with these other people online and experience some kind of socializing without having to resort to going to bars and meeting strangers face to face (Adam).

This chapter has explored videoblogging as everyday practice, critically engaging with how, where and when the videoblogger was able to produce her work. It explored the social dimension to videoblogging and how it created a way for the videoblogger to mediate her life, whilst creating a personal archive of lived experiences. It was argued that for the majority of the videoblogger interviewed for this project, videoblogging engendered an intense personal relation with mediated time and space, one in which social relations were explored and engaged with, where ideas were exchanged and life experiences were shared.

By bringing together the socio-technical practices explored in chapter 4, alongside the practices that contributed to the beginnings of an everyday practice of videoblogging, the videoblogging practice, mediated through the channels of communication available to and utilized by the videobloggers, formed the contours of a community of users forming what I call an *invested network*.[156] I now turn to analyse of the videos themselves, with the aim of mapping out the particular aesthetic that distinguished videoblogging from other kinds of online video at the time, and which remains iconic of early online video. This is particularly relevant in relation to ways in which the videoblogger identity, practices, time and space were mediated and given an aesthetic form.

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[156] By *invested network* I point toward the notion of a self-referential community of interest around a shared object of focus, in this case the videoblog and related technologies, email lists and video artifacts.

Chapter 6 – Videoblogging as visual cultural form

> The first successful movies – i.e. the first moving pictures accepted as motion pictures – were not applications of a medium that was defined by their giving significance to specific possibilities. Only the art itself can discover its possibilities, and the discovery of a new possibility is the discovery of a new medium (Cavell 1979: 32).

This chapter summarises the findings of a close formal analysis of six videos from three different videoblogs (approximately 30 minutes of video work), tracing what the videobloggers actually did and how they did it. This will follow the pattern of a "traditional" film analysis approach, highlighting the use of techniques such as close-ups, point of view and establishing shots, use of sound (diegetic, ambient etc.) edits and credits, combined with a medium-specific analysis drawing particular attention to the way in which these formal elements of film production, theory and analysis are re-framed within the particular practice of videoblogs. For instance, a long-take in a movie screened at a cinema is different to a one-take in a video screened in a web browser. The formal analysis will thus highlight distinctive elements found within the videos, in other words, it will look for ways in which the videobloggers could be said to have experimented with the medium, or pushed the boundaries of digital online video. I will also be drawing on the interview data and discussions in the videoblogging community at the time. The aim here is to see whether the discourses of early adoption, experimentation and creative practice is consistent with the findings in the videos themselves.

Finally, this chapter will draw these two strands (what they do and what they say they do) together to create a rich map of the visual aesthetic of videoblogging, particularised within this community. It will be argued that videoblogging is a context dependent, self-referential cultural form, in which the videoblogger is at once aware of herself as an early adopter of a new public media, and at the same time speaking directly to a particular, identified group of people, perceived to be part of an invested network.

Visual Analysis of Videoblogs

Here, I want to explore how the videoblog aesthetic grew out of the practices developed in the community of videobloggers, who through their work experimented and playfully explored a Do-It-Yourself (DIY), or "good enough" aesthetic (Bassett 2014, see also Cubitt 2008 and Capps 2009). For example, the videobloggers all used a very similar

title card at the end of their videos (figure 13). This would more often than not display their URL on the last few frames of their videos; most often this was done using white type on a black screen. The type might vary from videoblogger to videoblogger, but as can be seen from a few screen grabs represented below, the result are remarkably similar in form and presentation.
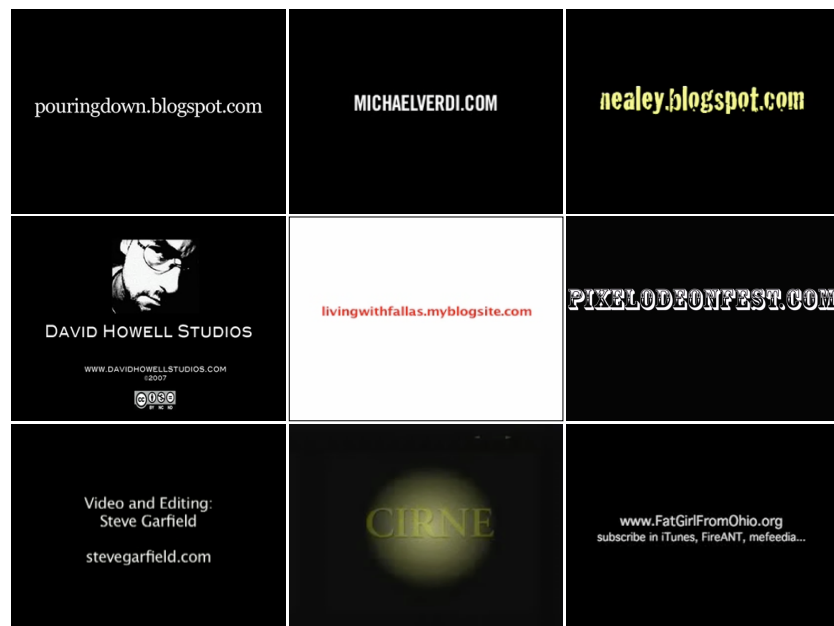

Figure 13: Typical credits showing use of URL as branding, note similarity of form

DIY aesthetic is here defined as a set of stylistic and formal tropes, including narrative decisions and technical equipment, all contributing to the creation of a particular seemingly amateur visual result. As Newman argues,

> DIY can mean different things. It can describe a visual or sound style, the modest-means quality summed up by the punk myth that all it takes to start a band is three guitar chords… But DIY can also mean media made using the new tools, themselves the products of professional creators, that allow anyone to set up a blog or a Web photo album (Newman 2008).

Here, the DIY aesthetic not only refers to how a video *looks*, but also to the wider practices associated with amateur and semi-professional production, which includes a "shift in taste from an assumption of professionalism as the norm and standard of quality to a position that amateurism has equal or even greater value" (Newman 2008). Making do with whatever equipment was available has a long tradition in amateur and semi-professional film and video production (see Zimmermann 1995), and it is not "new" as such. For example, in the 1970s, the term DIY aesthetic was used to describe

the video works of the Guerrilla television makers. However, the particular constellation of technologies available to the videobloggers was unique. For instance, the guerrilla television makers might have had access to portable equipment and editing tools, but access to distribution remained one of their main obstacles. As Miles (2006) argues, networked distribution is where videoblogging is truly unique in the history of film and video.

Before presenting the result of my analysis of the videos, a methodological note on selection. The videos selected for the formal analysis were collated from videos recommended by the videobloggers themselves as examples of their work. Due to the time that has elapsed since the interviews took place, however, some of these videos, for a variety of reasons, are no longer accessible. Blip.tv – where most of the videos were hosted – decided in October 2013 to delete all old videoblogs that no longer met "the web series focus that has been in place for some time" (Compumavengal 2013). Others were hosted on a videoblogger's personal server, many of whom are no longer making these files available online. Some have chosen to delete old videos, or have migrated to new web domains and neglected to move the videos to the new site. One videoblogger, Raymond, told me his website (he migrated to a Wordpress blog in 2007) got infested with malware, and he can no longer access any of his own videos. At the time I conducted my interviews, I downloaded all the videos that were recommended to me that were available to download.[157] Amongst the ones I downloaded and archived, some are encoded in old obsolete codec formats, and will no longer play, a frustrating aspect of technical media and, perhaps, of their "planned obsolescence" (Hertz and Parikka 2012a). Those videos uploaded to the Internet Archive have survived technical upgrades and changes best. It is interesting that so few of the videos survive, not only because of recent debates about how nothing is ever forgotten or lost on the internet (Essers 2014, Ribeiro 2014), but because of the discourses within the community, and emphasised in the interviews, surrounding the desire to use videoblogging as a way of archiving and aiding memory for the future. As Susan put it, "I am documenting this for my kids to watch when they're older" (Susan). With so many of the original videoblogs missing, then, the pool from which to chose videos was considerably reduced. However, I still had at least 20 videos to choose from, so a decision was made to choose six

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[157] Some videos, especially those in a flash format, couldn't be downloaded at the time, thus, some videoblogs were never archived.

videos, that is, two videos from three different videobloggers, each creating videoblogs that fitted into the main categories identified in chapter 5 (see also figure 10).[158]

Towards a visual aesthetic of videoblogging: documenting the face

The videobloggers were quite adept at using established cinematic styles and tropes in videoblogs. There is thus a diverse mix of styles to be found in their work, only some of which I want to explore here. As the practice developed, some videobloggers invested in external microphones, but the majority recorded diegetic, ambient sound through the internal microphone of the cameras they used, so generally, the sound in videoblogging was extremely low quality. Some voice-overs, like Daniel's, may have been recorded in post-production, resulting in "better" sound quality than what for instance Ryanne could achieve talking into her camera, yet neither Daniel or Ryanne had the kind of resources available to them that were increasingly used by for instance Rocketboom. Lighting was usually limited to whatever light was available where and when the videoblogger was shooting, which meant faces were often "badly" lit –all of which affected the aesthetic of the end product. What is interesting is that this aesthetic was often a deliberately made choice, as "according to its own rhetoric, the new participatory online culture needs none of the fancy apparatus of the mainstream media to create something honest and worthwhile, something that communicates citizen to citizen in an authentic and personal mode of expression. It is better off as amateur media than it would be with the means available to professionals" (Newman 2008, see also Campanelli 2011: 55-56).

The editing in videoblogs tends to be either very limited (for instance, one long-take bracketed each end by a title card and credits, as seen in *Excited* and *V-Blog Conversations*, below) or feature a number of short edits, with cuts as short as 1-2 seconds long (see for instance *Theory:Practice* and *Greetings*, below). There was seemingly no premeditated reason why a videoblogger chose to approach one video in one way and one in another. As Juan told me,

> One video can be really simple, not a lot of editing, but then the next one can be heavy-edited and music. So that element of surprise is kinda nice. Plus, in some videos I feel more like being creative, and in others not so much (Juan).

Further, as Juan told me, whether a video had a lot of editing in it wasn't always planned from the beginning;

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[158] Personal videoblogging, everyday life videoblogging, and artistic videoblogging (see chapter 5).

> I spent a weekend in Sundance, alone. I recorded a lot of things, and I knew I wanted to do a video about it. But only until I began editing I knew how the video was going to be. Editing it, I realized that I could tell a story having 10 frame shots only. And it would all be a crescendo for the last shot where I say that life without my wife is boring. So it ended up being a nice creative-crazy video (Juan).

This comment really highlights how videoblogging differs from conventional film-making practices. This open-ended approach of being almost happy-go-lucky with their material (I have never come across a videoblogger story-boarding a video for example), the playfulness of not having to conform to a particular genre, style or tradition, allow great freedom and personal experimentation, which was crucial to the way the practice was articulated at the time.[159] As Ryanne said, "it's like complete freedom, I post whatever I feel like. It's my outlet and like an open diary to the world" (Ryanne). And Jen P; "I use my site to experiment with new techniques or ways of seeing or storytelling… it's a space that isn't open to me anywhere else. It's kind of a judgment-free zone for me, where I can make work that finds an audience (albeit a small one) but is totally experimental and not necessarily polished. It's a space where I can express myself and connect with others, however imperfectly, and I love that. It's very liberating." As Richard BF explained,

> By experimenting I mean trying lots of different styles. So like doing a slow motion piece, one in B&W, I did one upside down, I did one with my camera gaffed to my motorcycle, I did various character voice overdubs, I faked a few 'personal' videoblogs, short ones, long ones, art pieces with effects etc. Basically trying everything that I could think of that was possible with video and an editor (Richard BF).

As explored in chapter 5, most informants told me they spent more time on editing than on shooting, indicating how important this aspect of the practice was to them. This emphasises that to the videoblogger, editing in itself was highly valorised and formed an important part of the "craft" of the practice. They clearly felt a strong sense of ownership over their content, and in this respect, editing, the shaping of the image, the creation of narrative and affect, was central. This "power" to create something unique, to manipulate images and sound to create new stories, clearly holds a certain appeal; "in editing, it's only me and nobody else. I love this. I love how from different shots, I end

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[159] This playful experimentation was not limited to aesthetic choices, as was pointed out by one videoblogger. They also experimented with for example technical settings; "you would play with a number and you go, 'Ok, oh, Q value. What if I put a 60 in here? Let's see what happens. Ok, that didn't work. Let's try 70. Let's see what happens.' Until you got something that worked, you know?" (The Web Ahead 2014).

up with something people never imagined" (Juan). This emphasis on the importance of the editing process is perhaps best summarised by Richard H, who told me that "editing is like meditation – I'm in a different world" (Richard H spent 4-5 hours editing a video, which ended up being 3-4 minutes long). Juan, equally, highlighted the importance of editing to the videoblogger,

> Because I like to edit a lot. So I take my time. The fastest edit I ever did was like 4 hours. But in other more complicated videos I have spent probably 6 hours per day for 5 days. But that's because I love editing (Juan, emaphsis removed).

There is also a notable absence of particular standard cinematic tropes, such as the establishing shot. An establishing shot is intended to give the viewer a full overview of a scene before the action kicks off, establishing boundaries of action and meaning. In some ways, it is one of the main tools used by a director to frame a scene, both symbolically and materially.[160] The lack of this in videoblogging more generally – even for those self- categorising as makers of documentaries – is significant. Movie director Joe Swanberg, who has adopted many "internet video" elements in his work, and makes movies that operate similarly to some videobloggers (shoe-string budgets, digital cameras, heavily influenced by YouTube and web video). He argues the reason he almost never uses the establishing shot is because "I don't want you to know where people are because it's not important. . . . I like working extremely close because it's all about that moment. When I photograph a body part—a hand or foot—this is what I care about. The little things—tiny details separated from their circumstances" (Swanberg, quoted in Christian 2011: 123).

In videoblogging, we see a move away from the establishing shot and instead the focus on "tiny details" such as close-ups of objects; coffee machines (Erin), hands (Daniel, Charlene), and faces (Ryanne, Daniel, Erin). Mary told me that when filming others she focuses on the "face, eyes, hands. The parts of them that are truly them" (Mary). She never elaborated on why these particular parts were "truly them" but it is perhaps reminiscent of the concepts of partial objects and *faciality* from Deleuze and Guattari (2004). As they argue, the face can be read as a language (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 199) and "the close-up in film treats the face primarily as a landscape; that is the

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[160] Bordwell and Thompson tie the framing of an image to the "conscious processes of the film-maker" (Treske 2011: 26) and argue that "whatever its shape, the frame makes the image finite. The film image is bounded, limited. From an implicitly continuous world, the frame selects a sleeve to show us, leaving the rest of the space offscreen. If the camera leaves an object or person and moves elsewhere, we assume that the object or person is still there, outside the frame" (Bordwell and Thompson 2007: 187). Treske (2011) also discusses the use of framing in Mike Figgis' 2000 film *Timecode*, in which four narratives unfold simultaneously on a screen divided into four frames to highlight ways in which framing can be used for narrative purposes.

definition of film, black hole and white wall, screen and camera" ((Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 191). As such, the face gains an elevated position within film theory and acts as a "veritable megaphone" (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 199). Raymond told me,

> I film myself, mostly… the face, the talking. the conversation… face, head… I don't really see my body as the key of this either. The only reason why I show my body is that it is the carrier of my face, and even though I show my face a LOT less than I used to, I still see the face as being important for the kind of communication I want in my videos (Raymond).

The emphasis on the face can be seen in statement from a number videobloggers. It can also be found across YouTube,[161] where numerous videoblogs exist with hours and hours of footage of people talking, singing, arguing and laughing into the camera. There is even an art project critiquing this, the Tumblr site Webcam Tears,[162] which features YouTube videos of people crying, and labels itself "a project depicting contemporary sadness in an voyeuristic internet era through the medium of the webcam… in an time where your best friend is your screen" (Moutot 2012).

This idea that the face plays a vital part in communication is developed in film theory. Christian argues that "pushing the camera against the face forces the viewer to contemplate the character's interiority and story expressed through the screen; it defines the film as a mediated, intimate space first, and eventually as a space where something "real" is possibly but improbably achievable" (Christian 2011: 123). This mediation of some kind of "real" is central to the videoblogging aesthetic, and also to their discourse.

There are also technical reasons why the face might have dominated the videoblogging aesthetic. In his interview, Juan moved between technical and symbolic reasons for focusing on the face in videoblogs, thus performing a kind of medium analysis of his own work. He starts by giving a symbolic reasoning for his "directorial choices" telling me that he focuses mainly

> on the face. That's how people watching the video 'connect' with it. Because as a viewer we feel compelled and we can understand and accept (or deny) a person's reaction. And the best way is either by an action of the person, like in a movie; or by the person's face (Juan).

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[161] For an interesting critique of this, see Adam's *video is fun of this computer website!* (Quirk 2006) which is edited to show various images of his face, from a medium-shot of him walking in the park, to close up of his drooling mouth. The video carries the caption "I am big fan of Youtbue and Love to make vidoe of me walking in park and my face. The Youtube is for all fun and people to me" (Quirk 2006, spelling mistakes in original, added as a deliberate critique of content on YouTube).
[162] http://webcamtears.tumblr.com

He then moves on to discussing how the medium of videoblogging (though he is really discussing QuickTime here) lends itself to a facial close-up "in order to connect" with other people.

> Plus, we have to understand that videoblogs are 320 x 240, or in our case 480x 280, and *that* is a small screen, so the closer we are to someone's face, the better we can understand and connect with her/him (Juan).

Here we can see how the materiality of videoblogging has a structuring influence on the visual it produces. Juan also points to other the material restrictions of videoblogging,

> I primarily show the face… because I only have the microphone of the camera, so the closer I am to the person talking, the better sound I get. Another thing is that I love the typical videoblog shot. The one where you shoot yourself holding the camera with your own hand. I think part of the magic of videoblogs is this particular shot. I mean, we have medium shots in CNN or BBC News, right? We also have all this incredible shots in the movies were the camera even flies around in an spectacular shot. In videoblogs, we have the camera in 'a person's face', and this is way more personal. I like this. No, I love this (Juan, emphasis removed).

Here, he concludes by highlighting the "typical videoblog shot" ("The one where you shoot yourself holding the camera with your own hand") and how this is "way more personal". Somehow, then, the face in videoblogs have come to indicate some kind of realism, or truth, and certainly some kind of personal connection. However, as Bassett (2014) argues, it is not necessarily the face itself as captured by the videoblogger that suggest an unmediated or "unspun record of the event" but the fact that the recording exists at "the arm's length" (imagine a person holding up their mobile phone in front of them to take a "selfie" or a snapshot of a place or an object). Of course, this claim to the real, or to realism, is itself problematic, and even those videobloggers who "love it" (like Juan, above), are still reflexive about that fact that what you see is mediated, or somehow manipulated.

Some videobloggers, like Daniel, never show their faces in their videoblogs, or who used to but stopped, for a variety of reasons. Mica told me that in her work, "faces are often secondary because they almost distract too much or allow people to make too quick judgements" (Mica). Brittany, on the other hand, told me she "partially don't want to talk to my camera anymore, and I also am not really convinced that's effective. In the sense of putting myself into the video in heart, yes, they are personal. But do I show my face as much, talk about my life, how I feel? No. I let people draw assumptions from whatever I make' (Brittany). Brittany talked at length about how she "used to show emotion when I talked to the camera, but it backfired

when I got too angry on film", and how this affected her relationship with the videoblogging community. Daniel, whose work I explore below, fits Lange's (2008b: 372) notion of a "privately public" videoblogger; despite having a large group of followers/subscribers/fans/friends, he is very protective of is identity, and that of his family. Daniel's daughter, for instance, is only ever referred to as "Mookie" and although she features quite heavily in his videos, the viewer learns very little about her. Daniel himself never reveals anything about his own identity in his videos, beyond the fact he is male and lives in New York.

Personal Videoblogging – Ryanne: *Excited* and *V-Blog conversation*

Ryanne started videoblogging in November 2004, and was one of the most active videobloggers in the "core community". She self-defined as a "personal videoblogger" documenting her everyday life, and has a number of "talking head" videos in which she mostly speaks to the camera from her room in her apartment in New York. She was heavily involved in promoting videoblogging, including writing a book (Hodson and Verdi 2006), speaking at conferences, organising workshops and running freevlog.org.

Excited (00:50 min, 240x180) was one of Ryanne's first videoblogs and the first video in which she turned the camera on herself. In this video, she started developing her particular style of videoblogging, which she develops further in *V-Blog Conversation* (03:32 min, 160x120).
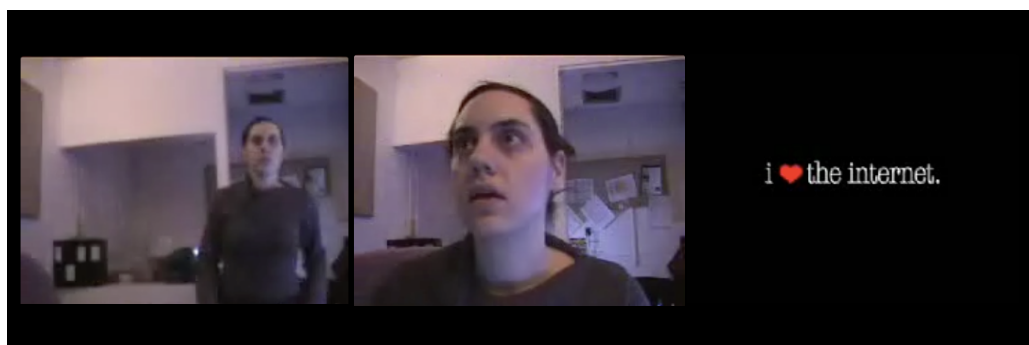

Figure 14: Excited (Hodson 2004a)

Both *Excited* and *V-blog conversation* use the classic videoblogging head shot, the talking head, which Ryanne also highlighted in her interview as one of her most used devices: "[I film] the face mostly, talking head, talking at ya!" (Ryanne). Her face fills almost the entire screen (figure 14), which is framed slightly off centre and slightly

blurred. She isn't lit in a professional way, in fact, it looks as if her face is being lit by the light emanating from her computer (laptop), which means she either filmed this particular video using the recording video function in iMovie, on a webcam or on a digital camera with video function. Cross-referencing with her interview, Ryanne told me she mainly uses her Xacti camera to shoot film (something that would explain how her later videos have a higher quality image), however, the camera was only launched in January 2006[163] and Ryanne's first mention of it is in 2006 (on the videoblogging list, where she posted a review). Like many other early videobloggers, using the video function on a digital camera was their preferred method of capturing film, and it looks this is what Ryanne is doing here.

In *V-Blog Conversations*, it is clear that she is holding the camera in her hand. The shot isn't nearly as steady as in *Excited*, and it moves around as she does. In their book, Hodson and Verdi call this the "classic 'talking to the camera' videoblogger shot" (Hodson and Verdi 2006: 70). Dedman and Paul also call it a "classic videoblogger shot" (2006: 46) and Luers describes it as "the most pervasive vlogging camera position… the arm-extended, camera-turned-on-oneself method of address" (Luers 2007). At one point, Ryanne also pans it around the room to show her room to whoever is watching where she lives. Again, the lighting is poor, this time her face is half-lit by what looks like a light source off-screen to the left, which means half of her face is hidden in shadows for most of the video.

Both *Excited* and *V-Blog Conversations* use long-takes, and have no cuts in the main body of the video, which is a common trait in this particular type of videoblog; the personal, confessional, diary style videoblog. This is for two reasons. Firstly, from a purely technical perspective, having long single-take video makes the production process much quicker and easier; the videoblogger simply adds a title card at the beginning and credits at the end, before compressing and uploading. Secondly, it creates a sense of intimacy. By showing herself in one clean take, Ryanne is giving the viewer the impression that she is able to "able to put yourself out there and be so vulnerable with people" (Ryanne) – rather than present an edited version of herself. This echoes André Bazin's notion that "cinema is objectivity in time" (Bazin 1967). Bazin argued for the "use of long, continuous shots in order to preserve spatial and temporal

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[163] See review of the first model at http://www.webcitation.org/5wpwJU6ow

continuity" (Brody 2008: 14) and believed that "editing serves to falsify reality by breaking up space and time" (Brody 2008: 14).[164]

Interestingly, when Ryanne and Jay started working on the project *Ryan is Hungry*, a funded web series about sustainable living and ecological farming, their videos were much "snappier" – featuring sharp edits, professional-looking logos and following much more traditional documentary-style tropes (interviews, commentary, narrative). The personal videoblog, then, was, for Ryanne at least, a personal space in which she could narrate stories from her own life and share experiences with her other vlogger friends, "this has been the greatest gift of videoblogging. Having people say 'me too!' Isn't that what we're all looking for? I think so" (Ryanne).[165] She is also filming inside her own bedroom, inviting the viewer into her private realm, even giving the viewer a tour of her personal space.

In both videos, Ryanne is playfully exploring the idea of videoblogging as a new platform for expression and free speech, a medium in which the videoblogger can say whatever they want – "I am so excited about videoblogging. Because I can say whatever I want and the FCC can't do BLEEP" (Hodson 2004a). In her interview, this freedom of expression, both artistic and political, was something she stated as being very important to her; "it's like complete freedom, I post whatever I feel like. It's my outlet and like an open diary to the world" (Ryanne). At the time, Ryanne was working in television, and was frustrated with how making content was laborious, expensive and censored. In her interview she said her videoblog is "something really different than TV" (Ryanne). However, it is very clear from her video that Ryanne is also censoring herself, choosing to bleep out not only her swear words, but even the surname of George W. Bush, whom she clearly dislikes,

> Ryanne: Hmm. *Looks away from camera as if she is thinking what to say next. Faces camera* Ryanne: BLEEP you, George W BLEEP BLEEP BLEEP BLEEP [mouths "Bush, you fucking asshole"]. You BLEEP [mouths "suck"] (Hodson 2004a).

In other words, there is a tension in Ryanne's video between the perceived potential for artistic and political freedom, and the self-censorship of bleeping out "bad words" as if

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[164] Bazin also argued that the screen is "putting us 'in the presence of' the actor. It does so," he claimed, "in the same way as a mirror—one must agree that the mirror relays the presence of the person reflected in it—but it is a mirror with a delayed reflection, the tin foil of which retains the image" (Bazin 1967: 409).

[165] Vanderbeeken points out that "what is special about web video documents is that their credibility depends on the viewer's willingness to accept their authenticity, as there is no guarantee that they are not staged or manipulated" (Vanderbeeken 2011: 40)

she is on a public network channel. This could be seen in contrast to her video *V-Blog Conversation*, in which she speaks much more frankly to a much more specific audience, even mentioning other videobloggers by name.[166] In other words, although *V-Blog Conversation* was posted less than a month after *Excited*, and although it has roughly the same amount of comments (10 comments on *V-Blog Conversation* versus 9 comments for *Excited*), the early community had already started to form, and you get a sense that Ryanne is talking to a specific network of people. As she starts to learn not just that people *are* watching, but *who* are watching, Ryanne's tone changes, and her style becomes more conversational and less of a performance.

Stylistically, *Excited* feels entirely self-contained; it has a clear narrative arc, and, although it shares a theme with many of Ryanne's other videos (the theme being videoblogging itself), it can be seen as a stand-alone video that can be viewed in isolation and still make sense. *V-Blog Conversation*, on the other hand, lacks the visual clues of a narrative arc, there's no title card, no credits, and, although she starts with "hello" and ends on "goodnight", there is no real narrative progression. *Excited* is clearly scripted, whereas *V-Blog Conversation* feels like a complete improvisation, she saw a video online she really liked, she was inspired to join the conversation and she just started talking. The transcript reveals a kind of stream of consciousness in which she is seemingly just talking to herself or the audience, about whatever pops into her mind at any given moment. In this sense, despite looking quite similar, the two videos are in fact stylistically quite different. They also show that for a lot of videobloggers, at this time, videoblogging was very much about experimenting, not just technically, but in terms of genre, style, technique and "finding a voice".

Artistic Videoblogging – Daniel: *World Maps* and *Theory: Practice*

Daniel self-defined his practice as "experimental personal film(?)making" (Daniel, original punctuation). Daniel's interview is somewhat "sparse", he was circumspect in my interviews and seemed to avoid most of my questions, yet his answers, despite being short, were useful and to the point. For instance, when asked if his videos had a linear narrative, he was quite clear that he does not create "any linear stories. But visual stories. Textural stories. Tone poems" (Daniel). What seemed like quite a frustrating

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[166] She mentions other videobloggers in other videos around this time too, yet another example of how the videoboggers were, at least discursively, creating a sense of community; referencing each other's work, commenting and engaging one another in conversations across videos and across videoblogs.

interview, actually revealed a certain assuredness of purpose, which is also reflected in his films.[167] *Theory: Practice* (Liss 2006b*)* explores the much-debated question of what videblogging *is*, and *World Maps* (Liss 2006b), a video playing with the idea of videoblogging as a medium for exploring. The videos can be seen as a reflection of Daniel's own practice, as well as on videoblogging more generally.

    Theory: Practice is a visual polemic, just short of 4 minutes long, in which Daniel presents his contribution to the community debate around what a videoblog is. Or rather, it is perhaps a manifesto against manifestos (Bassett 1999), a attempt by Daniel to distance himself from those in the community who were trying to do exactly that, demarcate and control a specific definition of videoblogging that everyone should adhere to. As he told me, looking back;

> I remember being (disproportionately?) incensed by a segment of the dialogue happening [on the email list]. Specifically this: I felt that we were a like a bloodthirsty horde marauding happily across the plains (what were we bloodthirsty for? maybe every perceived revolution is bloodthirsty?) and then suddenly some in our group :: maybe some stragglers, or self-appointed generals even, were saying Guys Guys, you're not marauding right! That's not proper marauding! THIS is proper marauding. There were suddenly rules about which chunk of online video was eligible, and which wasn't. And I was riled up. And that specific video, *theory : practice*, was certainly a response to that (Daniel, original formatting).

Theory: Practice (3:54 min, 400x300) features footage from New York; an apartment block filmed through the window of a car and, later, the botanical gardens, interspersed with close-ups of objects that drive the story; scraps of paper, a mechanical pen, a baby's hand, and views of objects through windows (figure 15). Daniel's voice over is used in conjunction with the images, to present his argument. *World Maps* (03:38 min, 400x300) is structured much in the same way, hand-held footage of a baby exploring maps, books and other travel memorabilia set to Daniel's self-composed music and voice. Here, however, the narrative is more linear than in *Theory: Practice* – as the video progresses, the objects get more and more scattered, and the baby is getting more and more intimate with them (putting them in her mouth, touching, feeling). The voice-over in *World Maps* follows a clear narrative path, whereas the footage and narrative in *Theory: Practice* is cut in a non-linear way.

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[167] Daniel also elaborated more fully on his practice in a later email conversations we had (in 2013) and remains one of the videobloggers I stay in touch with across social media platforms such as Vine and Twitter.

In contrast to Ryanne's videos, Daniel never makes talking-head videos,[168] something he discusses in *Theory: Practice*, saying he doesn't "point the camera at myself and explain" (*Theory: Practice)* what is going on in his videos. "It's probably shyness but I think it's something more than that. I don't see the world that way and I don't tend to listen that well when information approaches head on. I just don't" (*Theory: Practice*).

Figure 15: Theory: Practice (Liss 2004b)

Daniel uses the point-of-view shot as his main form of expression. Always looking out at the world from his eye level and always hand-held, the camera, which "roams freely" (Daniel), acts like an extension of his eye, seeing the world as he seen it. This is somewhat reminiscent of Dziga Vertov's *kino-eye* (Dawson 2003), though perhaps in Daniel's case, it reminds one more of Alexandre Astruc's idea of the *camera stylo* (Astruc [1948] 1999) – Daniel writes his story through images, matching words and images, cuts and words, visual movement with rhetorical movement. In *World Maps* this is evident, as the camera pans around on floor level, panning around the baby, as she is experiencing the map, zooming in and out to focus on her hands, then feet, and finally a full shot of her as she is sitting on the map (figure 16).

The effect is twofold. Firstly, as the camera is situated literally in the action, the viewer feels quite close to it. Secondly, a hand-held camera held close to the floor is not going to capture a perfect image at all times, and so the quality of the image is variable, going in and out of focus. This acts as a reflection on the opacity of memory – as the baby is discovering memorabilia from his past travels, Daniel is also remembering them, but poorly, as a faint (blurred) memory.

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[168] Not once in his entire archive could I find a video of him pointing the camera at himself. Additionally, when footage emerged from the videoblogging film festival Pixelodeon, he either shied away from being filmed, or requested that his face be blurred out. Amusingly, a cut out photo of the American Actor Yul Brynner was often pasted over Daniel's face in photos.

Figure 16: World Maps (Liss 2004c)

In *Theory: Practice,* similar blurred images and "half-captured" scenes – objects blurred through car windows further and further obscured by rain drops – also contributed to Daniel's theory of videoblogging, an art form which isn't *supposed* to be perfect (cf. Bassett 2014 on "good-enough" aesthetic and Campanelli on what he calls "disturbed aesthetic experiences" (2011: 52).[169] As Newman argues,

> rare is the videoblog that has anything resembling the look or sound of a local news program or network sitcom. Just as punk is opposed to the polish of pop, Web video is opposed to the gloss and sheen of Hollywood entertainment. That sense of opposition is the spirit and ethos of DIY production whether in music, publishing, or audiovisual media. As Frank describes it in the episode of 23 October 2006, videoblogging is "a cheap and fast alternative to making media — that looks cheap and fast" (Newman 2008).[170]

This can be seen as a deliberate stylistic choice, as much as a result of the constraints on the videoblogger due to equipment and bandwidth, especially in the case of *Theory: Practice*. As well as bringing the viewer closer to the action, creating a sense of intimacy, Daniel is making the point that this is videoblogging as he sees it, because this is how he sees the world; "I am showing you a part of my world and telling you a little something about it…. This is my world. This is how I see it, how I think it. I vlog it for you" (*Theory: Practice)*.

Throughout the video, Daniel is playing with form and narrative. He skips back and forth in time (e.g. a piece of paper is shown with writing, then shown completely

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[169] Campanelli presents the hypothesis that "the use of digital tools in relation to cinema, and the consequent lowering of product quality, are not necessarily a consequence of the small budgets of young independent directors. Rather… we are in the midst of a new aesthetic positioning – one which, as usual, is picked up by the antennae of artists before becoming obvious to all… these are all conscious aesthetic choices, which have nothing to do with finances available to the production" (Campanelli 2011: 55-56)

[170] "Frank" here refers to American comedian and "videoblogging pioneer" Ze Frank, who ran a videoblog *The Show with Ze Frank* every day for a year, between March 2006 and March 2007. Frank is a professional comedian who was not a member of the videoblogging community. Consequently, he does not feature heavily as part of this thesis.

blank), repeats the same image again and again (first he repeats the image of the New York building, then he shows it a third time with an inverted image of a hand layered over it). He manipulates the image (e.g. by using double exposure on the images of the hand and the building) to highlight the mediated nature of videoblogs, pointing out that even when someone simply shoots-and-posts their videos are still mediated. "To pretend that's something unmediated in itself is I think a little naïve", he sighs (*Theory: Practice*). He also manipulates the sound (bringing in music at dramatic moments in the narrative) to create emotional effects, often in conjunction with sharp cuts or swift camera movement.

Like Ryanne, Daniel speaks directly to the viewer, although his style is very different. Whereas Ryanne is talking to the viewer, sitting down in front of and facing the camera and speaking into it in a conversational tone, Daniel's interactions are more subtle, yet equally direct. Here, I am not thinking of the way he communicates though sound and image, rather by the way in which he occasionally drops in sentences like "I vlog it for you" and "I wanted to bring you something" (*Theory: Practice*) and, quite subtly, at the end of *World Maps*; "I never thought of the possibility of someone else going through it, not the baby leafing backwards through her dads adventures. And not you." I asked Daniel about his particular use of "you' in his videos, as it felt like a particular part of his style. He replied, "if I had to speculate — and really why do you make the choices you make artistically??? — I'd say that there is/was a somewhat heartening immediacy to it all, an inexorable feeling of conversation, a presumed someone looking back at you. And maybe at the best of times an intimacy to the proceedings. And so you address it directly" (Daniel).

Looking through his archives, I noted that initially, Daniel's videos were cut with sound, image and text only, no narration, but that at some point he started talking directly to the viewer. I asked him why this was. "I remember being somewhat dismayed by this at points," he told me "people responded much more... if I spoke in my videos. Like, they weren't my favorites but they were relative crowd pleasers. (Where crowd equals something mindblowingly huge like 30 visitors)" (Daniel). In other words, Daniel started adding more voice-over narrations because his audience seemed to like it better. This shows how important the feedback from the community – the recognition from the invested network perhaps – was to the videobloggers, even to someone willing to go against the grain of the current thought and create his own aesthetic.

Pettman (2011) argues that in the age of digital sound, "the subject is increasingly vulnerable to being lost in an aural version of Fredric Jameson's Bonaventure Hotel. The cues for recognizing individuality via the ear become something other than the timbre of the voice: the melody, the beat, or a catch phrase, for instance" (Pettman 2011: 152). Daniel's voice certainly contains some of these qualities. Contrary to the visuality of his videos ("images are *out there*, on the screen, and framed by it" (Chow and Steintrager 2011: 2)), the sound - and particularly his voice – "does not appear to stand before us but rather to come to us or at us" (Chow and Steintrager 2011: 2).[171] His narration is melodic and rhythmic, clearly scripted, and yet, because it is repeated over the narrative arc of his entire body of work, becomes synonymous with the videoblog itself. I would never recognise Daniel if I walked past him on the street, but I would have no trouble picking his voice out in a crowd. His voice is part of what makes his videoblogs unique, which emphasises that videoblogs are not just visual objects, but aural. In his paper on web video, Newman (2008) argues that videoblogging

> might usefully be considered as self-taught art, a term art historians use to refer to artworks by individuals 'who have no academic artistic training and little connection to the mainstream traditions of Western art history.' Self-taught describes the work of artists who lack skills standard within an art world, and connotes an absence of rules for the artist to follow, a lack of familiarity with 'proper' ways of solving certain aesthetic problems (Newman 2008).

Daniel was clearly familiar with both cinematic rules and how to apply them to further his narrative and increase the affect for the audience. As an example, at the end of *Theory: Practice*, Daniel uses denouement to conclude his polemical defence of his right to videoblog however he wants. As the music gradually gets louder, he cuts back to the park scene, and zooms in on the cardboard, now shown to be filled with tiny scribbles. "While the baby was out," he narrates, as if to summarize, "I filled first the cardboard and now this wrapper with these scribbles, it's all in here." Then,

> [*Cut to park bench, with (white) wrapper and cardboard, both filled with writing*] Voice-over: But let me show you one last thing, and I feel a lot better already doing this. [*Camera pans to baby, who is smiling, Cut to image of spring flowers peeking up through the grass*] Voice-over: Here in the garden, there's the first sign of the spring thaw. [*Cut to black screen*] (Liss 2006b).

A denouement is defined as either the final scenes after the dramatic climax of a story, where the author/film maker ties up all the lose ends or "the brief period of calm at the

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[171] As Deleuze and Guattari say, "the voice is far ahead of the face" (1999: 333).

end of a film where a state of equilibrium returns" (Pruter 2004). Daniel does this quite eloquently, by returning to the park scene (where his theorizing about videoblogging began), capturing a glimpse of the (now) awake baby, who is smiling (reminding us that "naptime" is when Daniel gets most of his videoblogging done) and finally, showing us the "first sign of spring" – the everyday yet beautiful, symbolic both of the quotidian aspect of his (and others) practice (of videoblogging) and a reminder that videoblogging doesn't have to be about elaborately structured and produced videos, but works just as well as the crystallisation of the beautiful moments of the everyday.

Everyday Life Videoblogging – Juan: *Greetings* and *Sococho*

Juan made videoblogs with his wife Ximena, because they wanted to stay in touch with friends and family,

> It's basically a reality show of our life in Los Angeles. We are from Colombia (my wife and I), and we wanted to show are families (who are in Colombia), how our life is here… So we began shooting our selves doing normal things like, going to the grocery store, going to the beach, in our apartment cooking, if we made a trip we would shoot it, etc (Juan).

Juan's videos are on average between 4 and 5 minutes long, and a close reading reveals, in videoblogging terms, quite high production values, at least when seen in comparison to some of the earlier videoblogging videos (like Ryanne's). Juan told me he "want[ed] each video to fill 'real'. Just as 'real life' is" (Juan). This meant he made a deliberate choice to, for instance, not use any effects on the image (filters etc.) and keep transitions to a minimum; "from the moment we decided to make our videoblog, we decided that we wanted each video to be entertaining, to have a beginning, middle and end. So we edit and add music to each video. This way, it's exciting, and not boring" (Juan). This emphasis on "exciting, not boring" was an important part of Juan's practice,

> we edit and add music to make it more 'enjoyable'. Nobody wants to see 'boring moments', not even our own family (not even me!), so I edit out those boring moments and only leave the good stuff. That way, instead of having a half hour video, we have a 3 or 5 minute 'really nice video' (Juan).

Here, it would seem that Juan's decision to make videoblogs of a certain length, which other videobloggers, and others writings on videoblogs, like Newman (2008) argue was made for technical reasons, such as restrictions on bandwidth, was rather more of an aesthetic, or stylistic, reason. Later, he elaborated on this,

between you and me, I prefer the short video, instead of a long one. Our
attention span is getting shorter every year, we want things to happen fast. So
having short videos, things begin and end in a blink of an eye (Juan).

Greetings (Falla 2005) is Juan and Ximena's first video, and acts as an introduction to
their videoblog. The video only has a very short fade-in from black, and is shot with
Juan and Ximena both facing the camera directly. Throughout the video, Juan and
Ximena are sitting next to each other on a sofa with the camera resting either on a table
or on a tripod about a meter in front of them. They speak either directly to the camera or
to each other. As the image fades in from black, Juan is seen moving away from the
camera to the sofa behind him, in other words, showing the viewer that he has just
turned the camera on (figure 17). This is a technique often used in documentaries and
films to show that the protagonist is filming herself on a small, usually hand held
device, and is often followed by a monologue directed at the camera, the moving
image's version of the "selfie perhaps". It is also a visual representation of the way "the
camera [does] not just observe events, [but become] an actively recognized participant
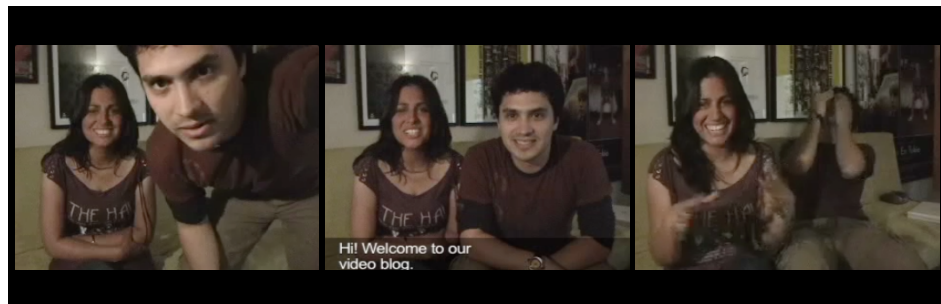in the film" (O'Shaughnessy 2009).

Figure 17: Greetings (Falla 2005)

Greetings features a quick succession of short cuts, all edited together. Usually, cuts and
edits are made in a video to remove content, but what is interesting here, is what has
been left in. Apart from the sequence between 02:47 and 03:58 in which Juan and
Ximena introduce their videoblog (in both English and Spanish), the video is basically a
collection of out-takes, showing Ximena and Juan joking and laughing as they
repeatedly forget what they are supposed to say ("where is the SCRIPT!" (Ximena)),
speak over each other (e.g. at 00:26), feel silly on camera ("that sounded so bad!!!"
(Ximena) "why is it that people get nervous when they're in front of a camera" (Juan)),
or one of them starts talking about something unrelated ("We don't have any fights… or

sex" (Ximena)). These out-but-in-takes are reminiscent of gag-reels from TV programs, where actors are shown breaking character, or corpsing, through fits of giggles. Gag-reels are used to create a human connection between the performer and the audience, showing that even the successful actor is "only human" and makes errors just like the rest of us (Evans 2010). However, this material is always assigned to the gag-reel. In videoblogs, this material is often brought to the forefront and instead of hiding it, they "leave in bits of interviews that more professional operations would edit out, seemingly to reassure the audience that they are getting total access to the material being covered" (Newman 2008).[172]

Sancocho (5:52 min, 480x270) features Juan and Ximena in their kitchen, making Sancocho, a Colombian dish. It was first uploaded on 15th September 2006, so we can see that in the year after uploading *Greetings* (4:07min, 320x240), Juan and Ximena were already improving their production values and experimenting with size and quality of their work.

Figure 18: *Sancocho* (Falla 2006)

In *Sancocho*, Juan films using a combination of the PoV shot ("everything we show is based on our point of view") and the talking head shot. Here, he holds the camera stretched out and slightly up above himself, in order to capture not just his face but his wife in the background (again, the "classic videoblogging shot" as Dedman and Paul (2006) calls it). At some point he also places the camera on the kitchen counter, which allows him to help with the preparation, whilst carrying on recording. The result is a slightly odd image, sometimes cutting off the top of his head, whilst at other times, they lean down towards the camera to chat (figure18).

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[172] This style was adapted by Amanga Congdon, anchor of the internet news videoblog Rocketboom (2004 – 2006), but it was also used by Ze Frank and others (like Juan and Ximena) for comic effect.

In the same way Daniel and Ryanne both discussed videoblogging within the videoblog itself, Juan and Ximena at one point digress into the same topic,

> Ximena: This is so stupid. Stop the camera! [*laughing*.] *Cut* Juan: That's what a videoblog is [*points to himself*] We don't have to act. We don't have to be another person Ximena**:** ok ok [*She starts counting down (in Spanish) to another take.*] Cinco, Quatro, tres, dos, uno, action. *Cut* Ximena: I need a script. This doesn't work without one. [*Both laugh*] *Cut* (Falla 2005).

Here, then, we have yet another example of how videoblogging becomes the subject of the videoblog itself. However, where Ryanne projects excitement at the "new" medium she is about to start exploring, and Daniel is vehemently opposed to being put in a pre-defined box, Juan – who came to videoblogging slightly later – seems to have accepted some kind of idea of what a videoblog is. Interestingly, in his interview, Juan described his videoblog as a "reality show" and looking at the various stylistic and editing decisions he repeatedly made, as well as the structure and narrative of the videos produced, this description is quite apt. His content (videos of himself and his wife at various travels, events and domestic settings) might fall into the "everyday life videoblogging" category, yet as both *Greetings* and *Sancocho* show, Juan's editing skills mirror those of reality TV shows (Miles 2006).

And here, perhaps, is the key to understanding Juan and Ximena's practice – they were influenced greatly by what they loved, television ("We watch a lot of TV. I'd say minimum 3 hours a day" (Juan, emphasis removed)).

> What I like about videoblogs is that they are done by 'normal people'. Let me explain: if I want to see a good mystery story, I might go to the movies or watch a TV show; but both these mediums don't deliver the raw footage that a videoblog does. When you have a housewife, or an architect, or a truck driver (people who don;t work in the TV or Movie business) telling you how they see life, the things they do, etc; there's something there that commercial TV and the Movies can't give us… 'commercial' is the key. Both TV and the Movies are a business which needs to give profits; instead videoblogs are done by people who just want to express themselves. They're doing it because they like to, becasue they want to. They are not doing it for the money. So this makes all the difference (Juan, emphasis removed).

Videoblogs are sometimes criticised for their poor quality (see Juhasz 2008), and if you download any of the videos today, what will stand out is not just the poor compressions, but the bad lighting, terrible sound, amateurish editing and mundane subject matters. However, as Lange argues in relation to her work on YouTube, "critics fail to understand that video quality is not necessarily the determining factor in terms of

how videos affect social networks" (Lange 2008b: 368). For Lange, the videos have value because "creating and circulating video affectively enacts social relationships between those who make and those who view videos" (Lange 2008b: 368) and "frequent interacting between video makers and viewers is a core component of participation" (Lange 2008b: 377). Effectively, the social network on YouTube is created, not merely through profile pages, linkages and friending, but through the videos produced and the interaction between users watching, commenting on and sharing videos. The same can be said for the videoblogging community.

This chapter has explored the visual content of the videos produced by a selection of videobloggers, in order to create a sense of what kind of aesthetic emerges from the socio-technical practices under examination. It has done this through a close formal analysis of six videos, an analysis which has then been discussed in relation to the videobloggers' own articulation of their practices. The aim was to get a sense of how the videobloggers, despite their multiple self-definitons in term of genre and style, all shared common sets of stylistic tropes and elements that could be grouped together to form the "videoblog aesthetic".

The findings are twofold. On the one hand, the videobloggers show a great understanding of cinematic tropes, utilizing them effectively to create their stories. Through their work, the videobloggers show both awareness and an understanding of how to employ cinematic elements to drive narrative, draw the viewer in and keep their attention right through to the end credits. On the other hand, videoblogging is a medium-specific practice, which utilizes and experiments with its own technical restrictions, in order to push the boundaries of what (at the time) was possible to achieve within the online production of moving images.

In October 2006, Will Luers, videoblogger, artist and frequent poster on the videoblogging email list made the following observation about the videoblog aesthetic as a reticular aesthetic,

> The other day I screened, that is projected on a screen, a little bit of pouringdown and 29fragiledays. I expected that, as art students, they would see creative possibilities. Not so. There was more of an appreciative shrug. What's the point? One student asked. Then it hit me. These were shown completely out of context. There is the context of the vlogger's serialized posts, the ongoing layering of ideas, the sense of a living person picking up the camera or finding images elsewhere. The excitement, the suspense, of what they will come up with next. There is also, of course, the text introducing the post and the comments

etc. But here is the other part that is so intangible. The context of seeing the work along with other vloggers. To see duncan's work next to daniel's and jay's and verdi's etc. This is the context of the network and it is very different from a screening of shorts at a festival, where each work is made and presented without awareness of the other work. The social part is central to the activity (Luers 2006).

What Luers here describes is what I have defined as the cultural-technical community of videoblogging – the people (videobloggers) and the technologies (the videos, the blogs, the emerging platforms) networked together through links that are both material (http, blip, archive.org) and symbolic (friendships, work relationships, shared aesthetics). This is in contrast to Miles' argument, that videoblogs differ from (text-based) blogs in that its content (the videos) are not tied to the blog itself, but can exist divorced from it, independently. He argues that "currently you can place the video content of your videoblog onto DVD and project it in a gallery or cinema, and it is for all intents and purposes the same content as appears in the videoblog" (Miles 2006). I disagree. Miles argues further that "once you have published your audio or video blog entry (regardless of the efforts to produce it) it becomes a closed and whole object that is deaf to the network that it ostensibly participates within" (Miles 2006). Again, I disagree. The videoblog object can only truly be understood when seen contextually, within the videoblog, and within the community from whence it came. This is what I mean by it being part of an invested network and as such a self-referential community of interest.

This is different to the articulation of videoblogs that Newman (2008) points to in a paper on the videoblogger ZeFrank, where he argues that the videoblog, which he calls Web video, is an "interstitial form" of media, due to the fact that is "fills gaps between other activities" (Newman 2008). In other words, by its very design, the way it lives in the browser, the fact it is rarely more than 3 minutes long, because it is a stand-alone video with no necessary links to other videos, users or narratives, the videoblog is only meant to be viewed in gaps in the viewers' daily schedule.

Where Newman (2008) sees Web video as situated as an in-between, this thesis argues that the videoblogging community was always very much an invested network where the participants actively sought out videoblog to watch, creating meaning for its members through the very context in which it existed, the shared experiences of the members and the shared understanding of what a practice of "videoblogging" was. I now want to draw these strands together in the final chapter of the thesis to revisit the main findings of the research and re-presents its argument in terms of the technical

conditions, the practices and networked nature of videoblogs relational structure and the specific aesthetic that emerges out of the cultural-technical hybrid of the videoblog.

Chapter 7 - Conclusion

> That's what's cool about video on a blog. Francis Ford Coppola, his quote that one day the next Hollywood masterpiece would be made by a 10 year old girl with her dad's video camera, right? I think we all know [laughs] that she's a videoblogger (Verdi, *Vlog Anarchy* 2005b).

The central work of this thesis has been to undertake a cultural history and ethnographic analysis of the early developments of "online" video, to trace the history of videoblogging before YouTube and the rise of social media. As such, the thesis examined the interaction between the technical conditions of possibility and the everyday practices undertaken by videobloggers. Scholarly work drawn from media and cultural studies, medium theory and digital media have informed the theoretical framework for this study and its empirical work. I explored the emerging videoblogging platform through both Langlois et al's (2009) platform-based research and through Couldry's (2004, 2012) theory of media as practice. This framework was then used to inform my analysis of the videobloggers practice, together with the aim of exploring what can be called a videoblogging aesthetic – the *short-form digital film.* This is a cultural form that, as I have shown throughout the thesis, is "sharable" in Silverstone's (1994) terms, but also is "shared", or has the potential to be so, towards a public culture that increasingly uses video as part of its aesthetic repertoire, whilst also - and increasingly –integrating it, so that it becomes part of the vernacular of everyday life. We might think about this change in the status of video (and film), as it moves away from its complex, difficult and technical beginnings to a more "democratic" everyday medium, as the video-ification of culture –particularly in relation to the way in which personal memory is increasingly held in video form, especially short-form versions between 6 seconds and 3 minutes. We are living in an increasingly videoed and video age.[173]

The emergence of the short-form digital film is strongly tied to the technical constraints under which it was developed. It is also linked with a set of perceived socio-technical assumptions – about how much data could successfully be uploaded to the internet, how fast the video would download from the internet, how much content a perceived possible audience would want to watch and so on. It also develops, in its early stages, a strong sense of the need to adhere to a kind of videoblogging standard; a set of

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[173] See for instance Manovich's *Selfie City* (2014), for a similar analysis of the use of Instagram and the everyday activity of taking "selfies".

practices that were perceived to be defined as *videoblogging*. As such, the videos I explored tended to follow certain stylistic and technical norms, developed within a core community of users, and subsequently adopted by the wider community. The media-form aesthetic sustained itself, with the community acting as both guide and regulator of its standards, informing users if they were "doing it wrong" but also acting as a technical and social support system, through which expertise was shared, experiences publically debated, and feedback given. The community also sustained its radical edge through constant debate and contestation (Verdi 2005b, Liss 2006a), which meant that, despite its concern with a "videoblogging aesthetic", it never quite settled for a fixed definition of what videoblogging was, and thus remained open to ideas and new possibilities. This openness (what I also refer to as its contingency) would ultimately lead to the gradual decline in the community activities, as the members moved on to newer networks, new technologies and platforms.

Understanding the close entanglement of culture and technology in this area of digital media production in the early 2000s – most notably in the self-definition and development of a community based around video objects and technologies – has been crucial to the findings of this thesis. Through an ethnographically-informed approach to cultural history, which maintains an interest in materials as well as discourses, the thesis has explored the practices and technologies of videoblogging, new forms of cultural-technical hybrids that have emerged in an increasingly digital age. The thesis traced the discourses and technological infrastructures that were developed simultaneously within and around the community of videobloggers that created the important pre-conditions for the video artefacts they produced and their associated practices.

My thesis has addressed the following research questions: (1) how did early communities of practice and related cultural forms crystallise around digital video on the internet between 2004-2009; (2) why did the technical-cultural assemblage of the videoblog emerge as a specific instance of short-form digital film, and how was the community around this media-form sustained?; (3) how did videobloggers understand and conceptualise their own practice and the co-construction necessary in creating the conditions of possibility for videoblog work, sharing and community building?

To explore these research questions in detail, I undertook a literature review of writings from cross-disciplinary studies of the internet, with particular focus on online film and video practices, and questions surrounding community and identity online (chapter two). I then moved to explore a pre-history of videoblogging, together with

some aspects of its historical development through a genealogical survey of film, video and internet technologies and culture, informed by media histories and media archaeology (chapter three). Using this foundation, I was then able to develop my ethnographic work in chapters four, five and six, with an examination of the constellation of technical objects that made up the videoblogging platform (chapter four); a detailed examination of the practices of videoblogging (chapter five); and finally, a visual culture analysis of a curated selection of videoblogs (chapter six). It has been an invaluable part of the study that I was able to work with my informants as co-researchers in terms of discussing my research questions with them but also to observe at first hand their willingness to debate in public on various public fora, but most consistently on the videoblog mailing list.

In the three case studies (chapter 4, 5 and 6), the videobloggers' early digital works were presented as original case studies of material digital culture on the internet. I have explored how traces of the practices, technologies and aesthetics of videoblogging has been drawn on and amplified in network culture, mainstream media, and contemporary media and cultural production. Chapter 4 traced the discourses and technological infrastructures that were developed both within and around the community of videobloggers and that created the important pre-conditions for the video artefacts they produced. I elucidated how early online video did not start with the launch of YouTube, but rather how the practices and technologies were already being debated, experimented with and utilised since the early 2000s (Kontras 2000, Miles 2000). As the thesis has shown, however, it was in 2004 that videoblogging as it is conceptualised here, started taking shape. The constellation of technologies that were made available around this time, I already discussed the stability of QuickTime in this period, but a number of other events are worth mentioning. For example, the rise of open-source software, the web platform, Blogger which was bought by Google in 2003, Blip.tv and OurMedia, which was founded in 2005, and the Sony Xacti digital camera, which was launched in 2005. Parikka links the openness of media to its reusability, particularly in terms of a lack of proprietary platform control (Parikka 2012: 149), which is interesting in terms of the comment made by Jay in relation to Fireant, namely that if he could do it all again he would have open-sourced it (see chapter 4).

Chapter 5 explored the everyday life practices of videoblogging in more detail, and showed how the videoblogging community constructed itself discursively, drawing on both their practice and the technologies around them. Videoblogging formed part of

the everyday habits and routines of the videoblogger, and I explored where and when the practice of videoblogging took place. This contributes to developing a theory of *videoblogging as practice*, allowing the videoblogger to narrate her own story through the technologies and cultural codes available to her through videoblogging.

In chapter 6, I drew on the previous chapters discussing the technical conditions and the everyday practices of the videobloggers, to show how the aesthetic properties of the videoblog is closely tied with its socio-technical constraints and technical conditions of possibility. I explored the cultural aesthetics associated with videoblogging through a close reading of both the structure, narrative and formal properties of six videoblogs, alongside a more distant reading of the other videos produced.

I now want to bring these strands together to look at the broader implications and findings of my research, as well as its limitations, and possible opportunities for future research. By definition a thesis is a limited scoped study of research and I have been unable to explore all aspects of the extremely rich culture of videoblogging. Instead, I have sought to cover the broad terrain of their practices, technologies and collectivity through thematic analysis (chapters four, five and six) to drill down into particular aspects that demonstrate what I have shown to be the key issues, questions and debates within the videoblogging community.

Throughout the thesis, I have argued for the importance of an historically informed approach to studying digital culture. Following the nascent writings on media archaeology, the thesis subscribes to the view that "dead-ends" and "failed" media forms are useful and revealing about the shape of our contemporary media landscape, rather than more "neat" historical narratives often assigned to events retrospectively. The materialist influence on this thesis is informed by the field of media archaeology, which itself draws on the writings of the German Media School (see Siegert 2013, Kittler 1999, Parikka 2012), and provides a key part of the theoretical foundation to the original ethnographic research undertaken, and has allowed me to frame the critical engagement I have made with the material technologies and practices of videoblogging.

I have shown that, despite being involved in what became a "failed" project (Huhtamo and Parikka 2011), the videoblogging community developed and in some cases remediated some of the key aesthetic and technical practices that were taken up by subsequent online video users. For example, the visual effect created by using the tip of your finger in the video application Vine, for instance, is aesthetically similar to the editing styles used by many early videobloggers. What also emerged was from this

research that although some videoblogs may appear to confirm claims that videoblogging mostly copied televisual aesthetics (Miles 2006),[174] in contrast, by combining an historical contextualisation with an analysis of the videobloggers' self-definitions of their practice with a close visual analysis of their videos, I argue that videoblogging draws on a much wider range of influences, which has generated a variety of genres; from news shows, documentaries and comedies, to personal diaries, art projects and polemical confessionals. In relation to this, it was been interesting to observe how the informants in this study demonstrated their reflexivity in relation to their videoblogging practices and the multiple forms in which it was deployed.

My literature review identified gaps in previous studies of online video that generally didn't take into consideration the videoblogs and their materiality and tended to focus on either statistical analyses of adoption, usage and effectiveness of tools or content-based analyses in relation to videoblog practice (see chapter 2). I therefore distanced myself somewhat from previous, "screenic" studies of videoblogging, which also tended to set aside issues of materiality. Thus my concern has been to add a material approach to videoblogging, analysing it through not only through the screen image but also through the embodied practices of the videobloggers, and as a medium-specific cultural-technical hybrid. Treating the videoblogs as material digital objects meant that I analysed them not only in terms of their content, but also through their technical a priori. In this respect it is interesting to note that the videoblogging platform (or the technical requirements enabling videoblogging) – as practice – experienced a period of relative calm in the years between 2004 and 2009, which is when the community was at its most active. The calm came about partly because during this period Apple stopped upgrading QuickTime while concentrating on moving between microprocessor platforms. Keeping the QuickTime codec consistent for these years, may in fact have been a key condition of possibility in the emergence of the community, allowing it to to focus on developing practices and processes, and enabled it to negotiate around technical complexity, rather than expending its energy constantly learning about and updating video codecs. In asking how technical effects of the media, such as the one outlined above, intervenes in the way that a cultural formation develops. I return to the formulation given by Silverstone in his notion of the "double articulation" of media, which argues that media

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[174] For a good example consider the material discussed by my informant Juan (chapter 5)

> draws the members of the household into a world of public and shared meanings as well as providing some of the raw material for the forging of their own private, domestic culture. In this sense, through its double articulation, the medium does become the message, though that message is not pre-given by the technology. It is worked and reworked within the social circumstances under which it is both produced and received (Silverstone 1994: 83).

Indeed, throughout this thesis I have attempted to remain reflexive of Silverstone's argument in relation to the videoblog as an historically located cultural.[175] In relation to questions of materiality, here I would like to make a brief comment on the importance of archives and the lack of institutional repositories in relation to some aspects of popular culture in digital contexts. Indeed, it is impossible to quantify just how much digital culture has already been lost. For example, Geocities was very nearly destroyed as an archive (Hall 2014), and the British Library only started archiving the UK portion of the internet in 2013. As a comparison, the Norwegian *Nasjonalbiblioteket* started archiving the Norwegian web in 2006.

The fragility of digital artefacts, and the status of the videoblog as historically located object, has had a number of implications on this thesis, both methodological and epistemological. It became apparent (particularly as the thesis evolved from a contemporary critique to an historical project) that as digital material objects, videoblogs are subject to the same conditions of temporality as other non-digital objects – over time, if not archived, catalogued and cared for, they can become difficult to locate, and if not sometimes impossible to play back and watch. As explored above, the identity of the videoblogger was closely tied to a desire to capture the personal and create visual archives of their everyday life. However, as there is currently no central functioning archive of early videoblogs, the videoblogger memory is in some sense under threat, especially its memories and archives as a community. Methodologically, this meant that creating a representative corpus was difficult, and in many instances I have had to rely on the kindness of the videobloggers to share their personal copies with me. Changing technical standards have also meant that even where video files could be located, they would not necessarily play. As Parikka argues, "the archive [is] a central concept for digital culture" (Parikka 2012: 160) and in terms of this research it seems critical that greater efforts are made to store the videobloggers' "archiving of the self"

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[175] This relates back to the various debates concerning the "newness" of "new media" (see Galloway 2011, Galloway et al 2013, Manovich 2001, Chun 2011, Gitelman and Pingree 2003, Silverstone 1999b) and the importance of historicizing and contextualizing research more generally (see for instance Jameson 1981: 9)

through an institutional repository for online video culture. As Bassett argues, in relation to personal archiving,

> all digital media systems are archiving systems or memory banks of one kind or another. For greater or lesser periods of time they *store* information, and in that process they organize and control access to various kinds of data, including data that concern individual and social information: the kind of data that helps to constitute the self, over time and across space (Bassett 2007a: 108).

We might add to that that the *collectivity* of the videoblogging comments is also constituted by these kinds of archiving and without storage they will be lost to history.[176]

This thesis also argues that the videoblogs are part of an invested network, and that their cultural value is best appreciated within the context of the videoblog. Therefore I strongly advocate firstly for the establishment of a videoblogging archive aimed at cataloguing and preserving these disorganised and dispersed objects - and it is crucial that they are archived, with appropriate means for preservation and possible future playback. Secondly, I argue that it is important to build and maintain this archive with consultation with the former members of the videoblogging community, in order to acknowledge what has been established here; that the the videos are far more than simply video files. They are crystallisations of the embodied practices, technical and aesthetic experimentations and personal narratives of a closely-knit community of interest.

It is ironic to note that, despite their investment in community, and the fact it was sustained in party by demands of investing in/sharing technological expertise, the videoblogging community was constantly looking for ways to make the practice of videoblogging both more widespread, accessible and "easier" in terms of technical expertise required. For example, it is interesting to note the excitement and passion within the community at the emergence of web 2.0. Web 2.0 promised many answers to technical issues that the videoblogging community struggled with in its early days. The "ease of use" that Langlois et al (2009) describe, the seamless integration of video publishing and consumption, as well as the potentials for hosting and distribution, really resonated with the members of the community – despite their antagonistic attitude towards YouTube, for example, and, particularly YouTube's initially poor video quality and terms of service.

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[176] That is not to say that archiving of digital video does not itself present particular challenges, not only in terms of technical storage but also copyright issues, distribution and access.

In the end, the very technologies that were meant to assist and improve the practice of videoblogging (and I would argue in many ways fulfilled that), also signalled the end of the early adopter community – and the beginning of a "new generation" of online video. By removing the technical obstacles that had fostered such intense communication and discussions on the list, the community saw itself grow larger in numbers, but smaller in terms of personal communication and sharing. Many users who had been very active in the beginning, faded away, or moved to new social networks and video services. A sense remained, however, that these new services lacked something that the videoblogging community had provided, "I have tried Vine a little bit," Jay told me in 2013 "its cool. I love how simple videoblogging has gotten." Hence we can see that, with the ease of at first YouTube, and later, video applications such as Vine, which allows professional looking video-editing at the tip of your fingers (see for instance the Vine *Starting the Summer off Right with Vine Magic* by Christian Leonard (2014)), the need for a specialised community space in which to discuss the technical, social and aesthetic intricacies of laboured and time-consuming video-production, was made less compelling for videobloggers and other interested parties.

The videoblogging community was formed not just with a concern for making these short-form digital films, although these remained important, but also the technical *a priori* (chapter 4) and the complexities and contestations that crystallised around it, where they were able to develop and strengthen the community and its self-identity. The cultural-technical hybrid that I am gesturing towards here, is unique in that it demanded its members be both culturally *and* technically proficient and keen to control and manage both its cultural production *and* the means of production themselves. However, this control remained a fragile network based around a generally non-commercial sharing orientation drawn from open-source software and principles from open culture, and thus remained susceptible to corporate capital and better resources and profit-driven (and funded) alternatives like YouTube.

Videoblogging is dead, long live videoblogging

Through this cartography of the cultural/technical structures, created and maintained by the videoblogging community, I like to think we can see the outlines of the trajectories of future media and cultural production. Indeed, this is demonstrated by the kinds of networked cultural-technical hybrids explored in this thesis. Equally, in this work I have

been keen to draw attention to the tendency within digital and new media cultures to *forget*. The desire to embrace new technologies, as seen with the increasing focus on YouTube developing in conjunction with tools and technologies that allow for the adoption of videoblog-like practices, sometimes means that earlier iterations are sidelined or dismissed as irrelevant or out-dated. This thesis, however, argues that in order to maintain critical understandings of the media practices and theories we observe around us today, it is essential to remember the media practices of the past, especially those that – even only 10 years after – may on the surface seem out-dated, or even naïve. Indeed, I agree with Parikka who argues that researchers need to "look at media… in terms of their long-term relations that radically steps out of the short-term use value that is promoted in capitalist media industries" (Parikka 2012: 147).

The media landscape of 2014 is arguably not so utopian as in the 2000s (although Morozov (2013) shows that this utopianism is still operative in some sense in the technical industries of Silicon Valley). YouTube is big business now, with a class of YouTube "stars" making a living off either highly polished brands or the reviews/commentary of games and gameplay such as Twitch.tv (Jacobs 2014).[177] Today, it is rare to watch a video on YouTube without first having to sit through (or skip) an ad, and the majority of content consumed online is corporate content, television programmes, music videos or news. The millennials may be watching more digital video than TV (Wagner 2014), but the question should be not just what are they watching, but also how are they creating and exploring this new video age?

One of the interesting aspects of writing about early internet culture at the end of 2014, is to look back on the discourses of optimism and excitement that prevailed in the early days of the videoblogging community, with a more nuanced and critical take on how events transpired. The early videoblogging community was excited about video, about community and about the possibility of making media, sharing it with the world and being part of the new "new media" landscape. This excitement was reflected in the debates on the list, which could be heated and antagonistic, but also caring and supportive. Jen Simmons, an early videoblogger, summarised videoblogging in an interesting way;

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[177] Though, as has also been pointed out, YouTube takes a large cut, with content creators not making as much as the media has reported, "we were huge fans of YouTube ... but we are not creating content anymore because it's simply not sustainable. YouTube is an awesome place to build a brand, but it is a horrible place to build a business" (Edwards 2014)

> One of the things that… felt so fresh and weird and new 10 years ago is that, you know, I would watch that video, it's, whatever, 5 minutes. I spent 5 minutes of my life watching something that didn't matter… That was not a hit NBC television show in a primetime slot on Thursday night. It was not designed to get 40 million people to watch it. It was, like, you were going to show it to your 4 friends. Today, in 2014, it's like, 'So what? Duh.' But back then, that felt so radical and weird… It did mean something. It was a kind of conversation on a small level that was intimate, that mattered. (The Web Ahead 2014)

Hodson and Verdi (2006) argue that "instead of being a one-way communication from creator to consumer, like traditional media (not just movies and TV, but newspapers and magazines as well), vlogging is about creating conversations among members of a global community" (Verdi and Hodson 2006: 189). This perhaps echoes Jenkins (2006) more celebratory work on convergence culture that has garnered criticism for its lack of critical engagement with the wider issues of control, surveillance and corporatisation, and for being too enthusiastic about the potential for the new media world he describes.

Indeed, it is now known that companies like Google and Facebook are hoovering up content, scraping data and storing infinite amount of information about individuals on their servers. The events surrounding Edward Snowden have made painfully clear, even our own governments are monitoring and collecting data on an *unprecedented* scale. This, it goes without saying, includes video and audio – which has created a new terrain for thinking about the growth of vernacular video and its growing penetration of everyday life, facilitated by the distribution through social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. I leave the implications of this new and dangerous potential for monitoring and surveillance to others as it lies outside the scope of my thesis. Nonetheless, I think that this thesis has demonstrated the importance of new forms of digital video practices in both private and public contexts, and as consumption and production. This points toward new ways of reading and writing culture but also wider possibilities for public life and community, for the dissemination of ideas and arguments in *public* through new forms of digital media.[178]

The complexity of studying new cultural practices entangled with new media technologies requires a new constellation of methods and approaches. In my research, I have attempted to do this by undertaking a virtual ethnography, a discursive analysis of the way the videobloggers articulate their work and practices, and a formal analysis of a

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[178] The issue of public culture and the way in which videoblogging and practices of video reading and writing can contribute to it lie beyond the scope of this thesis, but remain suggestive of new means for politics to reconnect with younger citizens who increasingly connect to public life through *video* in the first instance through platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Vine and Vimeo.

curated set of videoblogs. This thesis has redoubled my feeling that it is crucial that at important junctures in digital culture we take the time to both study even the most ephemeral of cultural practices, and also to seek to archive them in a responsible way that enables future historians and cultural theorists to explore them. There is little doubt that as media merge in new forms through the pressure of digitalisation and the growth in the power and versatility of digital technology, rethinking method will be an on-going process. As such, it is helpful to situate the practice in a much wider historical context than simply dismiss it. Indeed, Burgess and Green argue,

> Rather than amateur video being explained via the notion of the 'video about nothing' or by notoriety without talent, it could also be situated in the much longer history of vernacular creativity – the wide range of everyday practices (from scrapbooking to family photography to the storytelling that forms part of a casual chat) practiced outside the cultural value system of either high culture or commercial creative practice (Burgess and Green 2009: 25)

The practices associated with videoblogging, serve as an important example of how amateur and semi-professional video artists were working, creating and distributing video across the internet in the mid-2000s. The videoblogging archives are currently residing "offline" on individual hard drives and in a variety of unstable video hosting sites. They hold narratives and memories of friends, family, lived experiences, and of a community that helped introduce a large number of people to posting video on the internet. As such, it is strange that videoblogging has remained little explored in relation to internet history. As a cultural form, videoblogging lives on, in some sense remediated through a constellation of new technologies and adapted practices, from YouTube to Vine, Instagram and Facebook, perhaps as a form of reconstituted dead or zombie media (Hertz and Parikka 2012a, 2012b).

Indeed, videoblogging is a cultural practice that, although somewhat changed in relation to the form that was nascent in 2004-2007, is now expanding, as mobile phones and other technical devices incorporate new video cameras, software and technologies that enable the sharing and storing of moving image materials. Many of the commonplace practices we see on YouTube, Vine, Snapchat and other video sites were developed for a digital environment by the early community of videobloggers. As such, this thesis has explored the rich cultural history of videoblogging in a way that has tried to do justice to the contradictions and complexities of a living, evolving and above all creative community of technologists, artists, video-makers and designers.

In this research, I have tried to highlight how the videoblogging community raised important questions about the trajectories and failures of what was once called "new media". The videoblog has contributed toward the growing penetration of digital video as a vernacular medium, but also a medium that increasingly documents the present in a form that captures a "rough draft of history". This is a partial history to be sure, but one that is mediated by new techniques of storing the moving image, and new and remediated narrative structures and aesthetics. In many ways videoblogs are an answer to the call for a democratised form of vernacular media but crucially they also suture the film of yesterday with the film of tomorrow. This is a reticular medium that can be sharable and shared, private and public, individual and collective. In some senses, then, videoblogging is not so much the film of tomorrow, envisaged by Francois Truffaut in 1957, but rather the film of today.

Appendix

List of informants and their videoblogs.

Videoblogger	Videoblog
Adam	http://bullemhead.com
Andreas	http://solitude.dk
Bekah	http://missbhavens.blogspot.com
Brittany	http://bshoot.blogspot.com
Casey	http://galacticast.com
Charlene	http://scratchvideo.tv
Cheryl	http://hummingcrow.com
Daniel	http://pouringdown.tv
David	http://davidhowellstudios.com
Enrik	http://cirne.com
Erik	http://bottomunion.com
Erin	http://nealy.blogspot.co.uk
Jay	http://momentshowing.net
Gena	http://outonthestoop.blogspot.com
Jan	http://fauxpress.blogspot.com
Jen G	http://ebbandflow.tv
Jen P	http://jenniferproctor.com
Juan	http://viviendoconfalla.blogspot.com
Loiez	http://loiez.org
Markus	http://www.apperceptions.org
Mary	http://videopancakes.blogspot.com
Mica	http://micawave.tv
Nicholas	http://www.filmedworld.com
Paris	http://thisiranianamericanlife.blogspot.com
Richard BF	http://kashum.com
Richard H	http://richardshow.org
Roxanne	http://www.beachwalks.tv
Rupert	http://www.mommaradio.com/fatgirlinohio
Ryanne	http://ryanedit.blogspot.com
Sam	http://patalab02.blogspot.com
Steve	http://stevegarfield.com
Susan	http://kitykity.blogspot.co.uk
Zadi	http://smashface.com/vlog

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