

Patricia G. Lange

Videos of Affinity on YouTube

Years ago I watched a documentary about a mutual-support group for terminally ill people. The facilitator told the participants, “One of the greatest gifts you can give another person is your attention.”¹ I was moved by this remark. Even though it was uttered under extreme circumstances, I believe it is widely applicable and relevant. Indeed, it may be beneficial in social contexts to consider human attention as a gift rather than an economic manifestation of capitalist value. Somewhere between highly charged support groups and YouTube videos—some of which contain the voices of ill people, and some which do not—lies a social negotiation that determines who merits our attention, and under what circumstances.

Informing this decision is a moral calculus based on maximizing a limited resource: time. People who post biographical updates are often generically diagnosed as narcissistic.² Critics and some so-called “haters” on YouTube may express moral outrage that a poorly crafted video wasted limited moments of their lives. The outrage is exacerbated by, or emerges from the fact that, the perceived time/life violation was unexpected, and therefore a deception concerning the video’s attentional merit. Evaluations of YouTube videos often consider only whether a video is monetizable and thus “valuable.” Trapped in a binary categorization, professional videos are portrayed as easily monetized, in contrast to uneven amateur content.³ This binary effaces the spectrum of professional video quality, and the relational value that individuals in specific social networks may place on certain amateur or “user-created” videos.⁴ Social networks are defined as connections between people who deem other members important to them in some way.⁵ Across different social networks, people may find a video personally meaningful in ways that merit attention, despite its seeming lack of normatively valued “content.” Negative assessments of certain videos often ignore supportive

viewers’ responses. Yet, what does it mean for a video to have hundreds of views or text comments?

Based on a two-year ethnographic study, this article explores a category of YouTube videos that I propose to call “videos of affiliation.”⁶ Affiliation might be defined in several ways. It can include feelings of membership in a social network, or feelings of attraction to people, things or ideas. On a broad level, people might have affiliations to many types of things such as hobbies, institutions or ideologies that form the overt content of a video’s subject matter. YouTube offers many opportunities to stay attuned to favorite topics. However, this article focuses on the type of affiliation that refers to “feelings of connections between people,”⁷ some of whom may already be a member of or wish to join a videomaker’s social network. Of particular interest is exploring the characteristics of videos of affinity. How do they compare to other home-mode media? How do they establish a “labile field of connection”⁸ between video creators and viewers, and how do such videos create and maintain dispersed social networks?

Videos of affinity try to establish communicative connections to people, often members of a social network. Some people might equate videos of affinity to amateur video blogs⁹ because they are both assumed to focus on home-based forms of videomaking. Although videos of affinity appear in some video blogs, not all video bloggers make home-mode, diary or confessional videos. In addition, numerous people casually share videos of private moments online, but they would not consider themselves video bloggers who have a social or personal obligation to post videos regularly. Videos of affinity can facilitate large, business-oriented social networks, or small personal ones. They vary in levels of sincerity. They can be the main focus of a creator’s body of work; more commonly, they lie in the interstices of other work. Videos of affinity attempt to maintain feelings of connection with potential others who identify or interpellate themselves as intended viewers of the video.¹⁰ The interpellative process is important because attention, at a basic interactional level, is a managed achievement that requires work. Videos of affinity are, in short, useful objects of study because they inform explorations of how social networks are negotiated through video.

Attention as a Managed Achievement

Scholarship on computer-mediated communication has yielded important insights. Yet, one unfortunate legacy of its historically comparative focus is that some studies assume a binary opposition between so-called “face-to-face” and mediated interaction. The widely adopted and rather unquestioned adjective “face-to-face”—which actually applies to only a subset of a much wider field of in-person interaction—connotes warm, concentrated attentiveness. In the popular imagination, mediated encounters are cold and require work. Yet, linguistic studies convincingly demonstrate that securing someone’s attention in person is an ongoing, managed process that easily and frequently breaks down.¹¹ In his highly detailed analysis of in-person conversation, Charles Goodwin showed that some conversational breakdowns and subsequent repairs resulted from a speaker’s attempt to secure a listener’s attention.¹² Remarks were repeated or co-constructed until “precise eye gaze coordination” was achieved.¹³ Such an ongoing effort challenges the assumption that in person, interlocutors’ attention is automatic.

Securing attention requires negotiation, a process exhaustively discussed in the literature on turn taking and interruption.¹⁴ Knowing who will speak next is not pre-determined prior to an interaction; in fact, ongoing negotiations about who *deserves* to speak show that attention is not guaranteed in any interaction. The interruption literature states that participants may display anger when someone speaks out of turn, thus not meriting attention *at that moment*.¹⁵ Some researchers argue that interactive processes break down the moment attention is lost. In experimental studies, researchers have compared storytellers’ abilities when responses were attentive versus distracted, where “speakers with distracted and unresponsive listeners could not seem to finish their stories effectively.”¹⁶ This occurred even when the speaker had a dramatic finish. Everyday interactions are filled with constant micro-negotiations for attention.

Some scholars claim that attention takes on a much greater salience in intensely mediated environments. According to this view “everyone has always lived with some degree of an attention economy, but through most of human history it hasn’t been primary.”¹⁷ Yet, linguists have shown that securing attention is basic to interaction and requires ongoing work, even in person. In economic models scholars suggest

that originality is the best way to secure attention amid a competitive, mediated field.¹⁸ Yet, videos of affinity are not particularly original from the perspective of people who are not part of a creator’s social network. Even creators may feel that a video of affinity is not necessarily original or interesting; instead, such videos are often communicative attempts to negotiate attention from other people to maintain ongoing connections or relationships. From the perspective of a viewer to whom the video is not “addressed,” the video’s seeming lack of content appears to draw undeserved attention.¹⁹ Yet viewers to whom the video is addressed may respond and help maintain a field of connection between creator and viewer.

Videos of Affinity

Anthropologist Bonnie Nardi defines affinity as “feelings of connection between people.” A feeling of connection is often “an openness to interacting with another person.”²⁰ Affinity is achieved through activities of social bonding in which people come to feel connected with one another, readying them for further communication.²¹ In her study of instant messaging in the workplace, Nardi notes that even highly paid telecommunications executives often exchanged short messages such as saying “hi” or nothing in particular. Participants reported that these messages did not necessarily have a purpose. Yet, they were part of what Nardi calls the “work of connection,” and were crucial for keeping a “labile” field of communication open in ways that later facilitated exchange of substantive business information.²² The affinity framework illustrates the instability of continued interaction, social networks and attention.

Videos of affinity are not targeted nor read as necessarily containing material for general audiences. They typically interest delineated groups of people who wish to participate and remain connected socially in some way to the videomaker. The content of such a video is often not original or interesting, although it certainly can be. Often the content is stereotypical, spontaneous and contains numerous in-jokes and references that many general viewers would not understand in the way creators intended. Videos of personal celebrations such as birthdays and weddings—and other types of what Richard Chalfen has called “home-

mode” mediated communication—are potential examples of videos of affinity in that they interest specific individuals or social networks of individuals.²³

According to previous scholarship, home-mode films, or analogue “home movies” in the United States, were often recorded by fathers and focused on specific kinds of rituals such as Christmases, birthdays and weddings.²⁴ The proliferation of less expensive video has facilitated an ability to capture more personal ephemera, such as spontaneous and small moments in life that are not necessarily part of large-scale or highly momentous life celebrations and rites of passage.²⁵ The availability of less expensive and lightweight video equipment, it is argued, also enables a broader range of family members with varying amounts of expertise to more freely capture a wider array of spontaneous moments that they may enjoy sharing with friends and family.²⁶ The rise of the Internet and YouTube have changed distribution options from that of small-scale home-mode viewing to global sharing and exchange.

A primary characteristic of “home-mode communication” is its “selection of audience.” People sharing home-mode media “know each other in personal ways.”²⁷ Photographers and subjects know each other; subjects can identify other subjects. Today as in Chalfen’s day, however, it is important to remember that many people wield cameras at large, public social events. Applying the term “home-mode” to events like weddings and anniversaries risks ignoring the large number of people that may record and appear in various kinds of personal footage. People may not know well or even be able to identify all persons at their wedding. Then as now, images of a number of people outside the social network of the immediate celebrants could be collected. The difference today is that the Internet and YouTube facilitate distribution of personal media to wide, dispersed groups of people.

Chalfen argues that previously, people who engaged in “home-mode” media-making described photographs and videos primarily as memory aids. They were useful to help them “remember how [they] were then.” In contrast, videos of affinity have a present focus and communicative orientation. Although they are technically records of past events (when compared to live video chats, for instance), many videos of affinity nevertheless aim to transmit a feeling of sharing a particular moment, large or small, or a certain state of affairs in the creator’s life.

One video of affinity that I give the pseudonym “Ninjas and Knights” is a five-minute video in which two college students wrestle each other in a dormitory. Between its initial posting on September 30, 2006, and July 28, 2007, it received 2,779 views. One student is dressed in military gear; the other is wearing a suit of medieval armor. The video is a spontaneous recording that captures their humorously awkward moves. They are laughing as they charge at each other, often using kicks, broad lunges and knees. The amusing sight of the youth in their gear prompted several people to emerge from their dorm rooms and watch. Surmising that this would be appropriate for YouTube, some people recorded the hallway tussle. Later they edited this footage and added music. The lyrics of the first song, which plays as they are wrestling and laughing, are apropos. Metaphorically, the lyrics emphasize that the content is not novel, but is part of collective personal histories that the youth wish to share. As the boys wrestle in front of camera-wielding onlookers, a voice (which sounds like Shirley Bassey’s) belts out the following lyrics: “The word is about, there’s something evolving/Whatever may come, the world keeps revolving/They say the next big thing is here,/That the revolution’s near/But to me it seems quite clear/That it’s all just a little bit of history repeating.”

The song is well chosen, considering that one of the participants was a history major who had a ready-to-wear suit of armor. The song is appropriate, given that the video’s content—two youths wrestling in a college dorm room—is not novel or well choreographed; it has happened before and will happen again. For some 30-odd seconds, as the song plays, they spar. Just after the “history repeating” reference, the video uses a transition. The music continues and we are still in the hallway. This time, the video is speeded up. This use of fast-motion is interesting to contemplate. By this time, the viewer has watched 30 seconds of tussling, and the next sequence offers similar fare. Fast motion often provides a comic effect or marks the passage of time. It can also suggest that what is happening is not worth watching in real time. Speeding up the video enables the viewer to see a general sequence of events, without requiring too much viewing time. In the video culture of YouTube, such a technique resembles a “fast forward” button. The creators could have edited this footage out. Yet, its faster pace is cool, matches the tempo of the lyrics, and its comedic connotations amplify the effect of youth having fun.

The video records a moment in time that acquired increased interest when recorded by onlookers in order to share it on YouTube. The participants expressed gratitude to the people who took the time to record their spontaneous fun. The youth said they thought of YouTube partly because of its reputation as a site with amusing videos with similar subject matter. They also posted the video on YouTube because they knew that it would be a convenient distribution method for sharing their experience with friends. As Brian1 put it, "We know a lot of other people watch [YouTube] like our friends, and it's—if we wanted to tell our friends, 'Hey, come and watch this,' it'd be a lot easier if we just put it on YouTube instead of sticking it in an e-mail and waiting for the e-mail to get there and waiting for them to open it which would take forever 'cause the file was so big. So we just put it on YouTube and got the link, sent the link to everyone, and they watched it."

Many critiques of contemporary, personal forms of online video fail to consider the material constraints that people face with regard to sharing media to wide social networks. Many study participants said their friends watch YouTube, and it was far more convenient to share high-bandwidth media on an easy-to-use site. Current alternatives for sharing videos such as copying them onto multiple disks (assuming the disks accommodated the videos) and mailing them to numerous, dispersed, transitory college students is not practical. Nor is sending high-bandwidth videos via e-mail. Instead, they sent the link to the video to specific individuals within their network whom they believed would be interested in seeing them have fun. Brian1 uses the term "everyone" in a way that does not indicate the world population, or even all YouTube viewers. Rather, it connotes all members of a group of individuals to whom the youth were close enough to have an e-mail address and who might enjoy seeing the video.

Of course, not every individual who receives the link will watch or enjoy the video. People not in their network may also find it and watch. The boys listed their university in the video tag (or keyword) list, so that current students and alumni searching for videos about their university would see it. Alumni of the university might be interested in the video, as an example of what is "currently" happening on campus. In this sense, the video may provide feelings of affinity to a large social network of people from the same university (as well as to the university itself). Posting a video targeted for a social network does not imply that

non-members will automatically eschew it. The experience of watching a video of affinity, although often targeted and read as meant for specific social networks of people, does not preclude others' enjoyment of it. But the people who receive links or who interpret the inside jokes and references in a way similar to the videomakers comprise a much smaller population of people than the general public, or even regular YouTube viewers. For those who receive the link in a personal e-mail from a known friend, or who appreciate seeing the experiences of their friends or relatives, the video may encourage feelings of connectedness, closeness or friendship.

A video of affinity attempts to keep the lines of communication open to certain social networks, large or small, by sharing informal experiences. These videos may or may not contain much "content" or artistic aesthetics defined in traditional ways. These videos, often made by and distributed to one's peers, tend to disrupt past ideologies of father-driven home-media creation, yet researchers and members of the general public may not value them. Past scholarship on home media argues that camera manufacturer's exhortations for non-professionals to be attentive to standardized modes of content and style enforced rather than eased divisions between professional and amateur filmmakers. Patricia Zimmerman argues that the "emphasis on Hollywood-continuity style dominated and restricted amateur-film aesthetic discourse; it naturalized its own codes and reined in the flexibility and spontaneity inherent in lightweight equipment."²⁸ She argues that in the decades after World War II, home movies in the United States were often made by fathers and reproduced a certain kind of domestic ideology rooted in the ideals of a patriarchal, middle-class, nuclear family.²⁹ She notes that the technical affordances of video might promote more democratic uptake of mediated self-expression, so that future amateur filmmaking "may liberate it as a more accessible and meaningful form of personal expression and social and political intervention."³⁰ What a sad betrayal it is that next-generation youth who are using video in ways not dominated by standardized ideological, political, educational and aesthetic discourses in filmmaking are criticized for sharing seemingly private ephemera.

Habeas Corpus

Feelings of affinity are normally promoted by communal eating and drinking, sharing an experience in a common space, conducting an informal conversation.³¹ Nardi uses the term “habeas corpus” to stress the importance of the body in promoting affinity. Two videos, “I’m Not Dead” and “Just an update guys,” provide important material with which to understand how creators involve the body to establish affinity. Even the videos’ titles frame them as not oriented around content but rather around human connections. “I’m Not Dead,” a roughly five-minute video which was posted on March 2, 2008, had 824 views and 86 text comments as of March 25, 2009. In the video, a young woman who refers to herself as “panda” assures her viewers that she is alive and will be posting more videos. She states: “Um, just want to let you guys all know that I’m alive. Yes, I wasn’t kidnapped in San Fran, unfortunately. But um, I’ve got a couple of videos coming up. And yes I know I still have to put up my gathering videos. I’m going to do an LA to San Fran video, kill two birds with one stone.”



2 Panda drinking tea in “I’m Not Dead”

This video arguably lies in between her other work, as panda states an intention to post future videos, having not posted videos in a while. Intimacy of a close encounter is facilitated by the setting and camera work. She is seated and appears to be holding the camera in her left hand while she directly addresses it. The image is jittery as if the camera is not stationary, which is a common index of more spontaneous, personal, human interaction. The video breaks down into several parts that can be characterized as: telling a story about making sweet tea; promising to post future videos; taking issue with rumors circulating about her, and previewing an upcoming gathering. These parts are not

well delineated, and interweave throughout the video. In the first minute and a half, panda talks about how she was thirsty in the middle of the night. Eschewing water, she went to the kitchen to make sweet tea. As she says the words “sweet tea,” she brings the cup she’s been holding closer to the camera. She looks into the cup several times as she tells her story. Making the tea did not go as she anticipated; she had to chop a block of frozen ice with a butcher knife. She puts down the cup and simulates the motion of wielding the knife. She drinks from the cup, says, “mm” and slightly tips the cup in the viewer’s direction. She says that the tea “actually turned out really good,” at which point she once again points the cup at the camera, almost long enough for the viewer to see inside.

The vignette contains characteristics that one would expect in an encounter that tries to provide social affinity. Not only does it engage in informal conversation (by relating an ephemeral story about making sweet tea for the first time), it does so in a way that enables her to “have a cup of tea” with the viewer. The lack of stationary camera, the motions of the cup toward the camera, and her consuming of the tea all provide a means to establish a personal, communicative effect. The title “I’m Not Dead” indexes her live body and reassures her viewers that she is still alive and making videos even if she has not posted in several weeks. Evaluating content is culturally and aesthetically relative; people may enjoy her story about making sweet tea. Yet panda mentions her intent to make other videos several times, which gives the video a feeling of existing in the interstices of her other work with more defined content. Videos of affinity often provide a preview of something that is about to happen such as a promise to release a new video. Such previews index a present-focused perspective. “I’ve got a couple of videos coming up,” she states in the middle of the video. “And yes I know I still have to put up my gathering videos. I’m going to do an LA to San Fran video, kill two birds with one stone.” She acknowledges that she “knows” she has to put up gathering videos, which implies that a common practice in her social network of YouTube creators and viewers is sharing YouTube gathering videos. She also mentions that she is “bored,” which young people often cite as a motivator for making videos. Panda’s explanation of being “stuck” and “lazy” index her current state at the moment, and socially account for her lack of recent videos.

Panda acknowledges that certain themes in her forthcoming videos might not be widely appreciated. For example, in mentioning plans to post “meet-up” footage from a YouTube gathering (a popular genre on YouTube and one that merits additional study), she speculates that only some viewers will find this subject interesting. “I’m stupid I didn’t take any footage so it’s just going to be um photos, so [I] guess it’s only for the people who were actually there they’d probably enjoy it. But probably for you other guys it’d probably be boring.” She also refers to people circulating “rumors” about her: “It’s not a gathering without rumors about panda. Panda did this and panda did that. And I’m actually kind of surprised because half of the rumors are coming from people who weren’t even at the gathering. So if you’ve got something to say just ask. I’m not going to get offended. I just find it hilarious.” She exhorts the gossipers to ask her questions instead of spreading rumors. She furthermore addresses “little birdies talking” who used private messages to gossip about her—“I know who you are; I know what’s going on it’s okay I still love you guys.”

Even within a video of affinity that appeals to certain members of social networks, elements within the video may target even smaller sub-portions of a creator’s social network. Viewers may interpellate their identities as the subjects of different themes within panda’s video. In the interpellation metaphor, a policeman calls, “Hey you there!” down a crowded street. A successful completion of this hail is one in which a person turns around and answers, thus recognizing him- or herself as the actual subject of the hail.³² Those viewers who know they have been circulating rumors are able to interpellate themselves as the subjects of her admonition and her request that they pose their questions directly. One viewer joked, “I don’t know enough YouTubers to talk about you. lol:P.” This substantive comment resists interpellation as the subject of panda’s admonishing hail. Other remarks, such as “Woot!” are “comments of affinity” that indicate affective support for panda.³³ Thus, in panda’s video of affinity different groups of people are hailed as potentially interested parties, such as regular viewers, participants at meet-ups, and people who spread rumors about her. The video’s messages are interpellative communications of social interest targeted toward different groups of people. She also uses other techniques such as drinking, sharing an experience, and engaging in informal conversation to indicate affinity to those who are able and willing to interpellate themselves as

subjects of her social hails. She keeps her communication channel open, by showing her live (recorded) body, by encouraging gossipers to ask her questions directly, and by promising forthcoming videos.³⁴

Phatic Signals

The video “Just an update guys” similarly codes it as something that lies between other postings. This roughly two-minute video was posted on April 4, 2008. As of March 25, 2009, it had accumulated 366 views and 27 text comments. The title word “just” frames it as relatively modest in importance. The text description posted to the video says, “This is my new room all pink and purple this is just an update” which the creator Ryan made partly because he “just wanted to see what it looked like.” He says he wanted to make a “quick” update to let people know what was happening with him. The word “quick” indexes it as something not well crafted or labored over. The scene is intimate; he sits in a bedroom. He admits that the image is “terrible” due to the light duplicating in the mirror in the background. Although he has made many other informational and entertainment videos, in this video Ryan talks a lot about his communication problems. He mentions being “officially” moved in to his “new room” but he does not have “Internet access.” He does not use his “normal mic” because he left the stand at home and plans to retrieve it later. He holds a mic up to the camera, looks at it, and shakes it while speaking.



3 Ryan discussing his connection problems and showing his new hairstyle

The frequent references to his technical communication problems resemble what Roman Jakobson called the “contact” function, or what Bronislaw Malinowski called the “phatic” function of language.³⁵ In the

case of a primarily phatic message, its focus is on “serving to establish, to prolong, or to discontinue communication, to check whether the channel works [...] to attract the attention of the interlocutor, or to confirm his continued attention.”³⁶ Jakobson argues that some phatic exchanges focus entirely on prolonging communication. Messages can purport to continue communication although they do not necessarily communicate crucial information.

The image cuts away and seconds later he reappears and sings, “I have run to the mountains. I have run through the sea. Only to be with you. Only to be with you. And I’m still hanging on to what I’m looking for.” The small fragment of song, appearing between segments of dialogue about his access issues, evokes affective images of “being” with “you.” On one level, it is just a nice song to sing. But it appears between shots in which he speaks about the difficulty he is having making Internet connections. One metaphorical reading is that it reaffirms his wish to “be” with viewers and members of his social network who watch him on YouTube. Later, he reports that he has Internet access. He turns the camera to show another computer that has Internet connectivity. The second computer is his “little laptop” on which he can get the Internet. But he cannot put the Internet on his Macintosh computer. He shrugs and says that if “anyone could help me with that that would be great. So for now I’m just going to use my laptop I don’t want to but I will.” Ryan ends the video by mentioning an upcoming YouTube gathering, and asks attendees to contact him. “Also if you’re [going] to the YouTube gathering, tell me I’ll compile a list and then I will put it online.” Just as messages have different functions, videos of affinity may contain multiple functions. By inviting forthcoming meet-up participants to contact him, he uses the video as a bulletin board in ways that enable interested parties to interpellate themselves as members of a social network interested in attending a forthcoming meet up.

Ryan’s video also produces the body, shares an experience, and informally discusses his quotidian network problems. He indexes his body by running his hands through his hair and talking about his haircut. He talks about ephemera such as the color of his room, his haircut and his Internet difficulties. The video’s multiple functions include asking for help, requesting meet-up attendees to contact him, and dealing with his patchy Internet connection. Notably, he takes the time to record these

thoughts in a way that demonstrates a social willingness to communicate even when a physical connection is uncertain.

Conclusion

Analyses of YouTube videos often orient around a broad-scale division between amateur or so-called “user-created” versus professional content. While useful for many types of scholarship, these labels also tend to generate a cascading binary of assumptions about a video’s attentional merit. But such categories efface potentially interesting interactional dynamics that are appearing within and across these categories in contemporary online video. One such dynamic is the use of videos of affinity to establish communicative connections with other people.

Videos of affinity can appear in both user-created and professional contexts—an analytical division which is increasingly understood to be less strictly delineated. Videos of affinity are not necessarily always warm, personal, amateur videos that contrast to cynical professional content. Many so-called amateur video creators can use characteristics found in videos of affinity to gain support and viewership for work that they would happily commercialize. In addition, videomakers who are professional media makers have used videos of affinity to make more personalized contacts with like-minded individuals. They enable an interaction that gives viewers a feeling of being connected not to a video, but to a person who shares mutual beliefs or interests. Videos of affinity can exhibit varying degrees of sincerity, personalization and realistic expectations for interactivity, depending on who they are targeting and how the videos are received. Whatever their origin, videos of affinity have observable characteristics such as a presentist focus that aims to transit feelings of connection and maintain an open, active communication channel. They often contain ephemeral content that the videomakers themselves label as existing in the interstices of their other work.

Seen not as a cinematic end point, but rather as a mediated moment in an ongoing social relationship, the videos help maintain connections between individuals and groups of people in a social network, large or small. These types of videos resemble communicative exchanges in other media such as particular instant messages that are used for “checking in” rather than “exchanging data.” In videos of

affinity, people often produce evidence of their live body and provide a spontaneous, present-status update. People often engage in these types of exchanges to prepare a social channel for the eventual arrival of new, important content.

Further research might investigate the differences between the content and structure of videos of affinity in comparison to affinity messages in other media. For instance, how does the contextual structure of a video of affinity differ from instant messages or text updates on sites such as Facebook or Twitter? In addition, the effects of time should receive scholarly attention when analyzing these interactions. Videos are sometimes viewed long after they have been posted. How do future viewings affect the perception of the message? Do videos of affinity retain their presentist impact across time? How do they function in cultural, social and communicative terms when viewed just after they have been posted compared to when viewed many weeks or months later? Scholarly descriptions and categorizations often take a synchronic view of a video's creation, content and reception although videos may be perceived differently at various points in time.

Critics of videomakers who broadcast ephemera often ignore social, cultural and material circumstances that influence how individuals use video to communicate. Sending video messages to wide, dispersed social networks is far easier to accomplish on a free, public and oft-watched site such as YouTube. Moral judgments about who deserves our attention based on idiosyncratic ideals about normative content ignore the value of connections that videos of affinity attempt to achieve. Videos of affinity defy the logic of economically driven models of attention that would predict a glut of spectacular and novel content in an era of more intense attentional competition. Videos of affinity are made by various types of creators, including popular YouTubers who, judging by their view counts on YouTube, have demonstrated an ability to make well-crafted or at least interesting videos. Economic models do not take into account the fact that basic forms of interaction—whether offline or online—require work and may include multiple methods, such as making videos of affinity, to secure attention.

Videos of affinity can broaden one's social network by inviting self-interpellated viewers to participate in a video-mediated exchange. Amid labile, dispersed social networks, videos of affinity facilitate the possibility of further communication. Elements within the videos may target

different individuals who may or may not ultimately attend to or socially connect with the video's creator. Issuing an invitation does not guarantee its acceptance. Returning to the vignette that began this essay, it is a painfully poignant reminder that even terminally ill people with severely limited time were being encouraged to give someone *else* their attention, in the hopes that they too would reciprocally benefit from one of humankind's most important gifts.

Endnotes

- 1 David Grubin's documentary *Healing and the Mind: Wounded Healers* was made in 1993.
- 2 The objection here is to generic diagnoses of popular interpretations of narcissism. Generic diagnoses are based on broad characteristics such as age or type of media use, such as making videos. People who make videos are assumed to be more narcissistic than people who make other forms of media.
- 3 Yi-Wyn Yen, "YouTube Looks for the Money Clip," *Fortune*, 15 October 2008 – <http://techland.blogs.fortune.cnn.com/2008/03/25/youtube-looks-for-the-money-clip/> [last checked 15 February 2008].
- 4 Patricia G. Lange, "Publicly Private and Privately Public: Social Networking on YouTube," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* no. 1, 2007 – <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol13/issue1/lange.html> [last checked 15 February 2008].
- 5 Barry Wellman, "Are Personal Communities Local? A Dumptarian Reconsideration," *Social Networks* no. 18, 1996, pp. 347–354.
- 6 The study focused on YouTube and video blogging by children and youth in the United States. It included two years worth of observations on YouTube, analyses of videos, over 150 interviews with media makers and attendance at meet-ups across the United States. The researcher also directly participated on YouTube through the video blog called "AnthroVlog." The study was part of the larger Digital Youth and Informal Learning project, which was funded by the MacArthur Foundation. The goal of the project was to understand informal learning practices of children and youth in digital environments, such as online media cultures. For more information see <http://digitallyouth.ischool.berkeley.edu/report> [last checked 15 February 2008].

- 7 Bonnie A. Nardi, "Beyond Bandwidth: Dimensions of Connection in Interpersonal Communication," *Computer-Supported Cooperative Work* no. 14, 2005, pp. 347–354.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 A video blog or vlog is similar to a blog, in that videos are posted in reverse chronological order so that the viewer encounters the most recent video first. Although video blogs may contain text graphics and photographs, video bloggers often prefer to privilege video as the central mode of communication.
- 10 Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), pp. 173–177.
- 11 Charles Goodwin, *Conversational Organization: Interaction Between Speakers and Hearers* (New York: Academic Press, 1981).
- 12 Alessandro Duranti, *Linguistic Anthropology* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- 13 Ibid., p. 273.
- 14 Starkey Duncan & Donald W. Fiske, *Face-to-Face Interaction: Research, Methods, and Theory* (New York/Toronto: John Wiley & Sons, 1977); Lynn Cherny, *Conversation and Community: Chat in a Virtual World* (Stanford: CSLI Publications, 1999); Deborah James & Sandra Clarke, "Women, Men, and Interruptions: A Critical Review," in *Gender and Conversational Interaction*, ed. Deborah Tannen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 231–280.
- 15 James & Clarke 1993, pp. 231–280.
- 16 Janet Beavin Bavelas, Linda Coates & Trudy Johnson, "Listener Responses as a Collaborative Process: The Role of Gaze," *Journal of Communication*, September 2002, pp. 566–580.
- 17 Michael H. Goldhaber, "The Attention Economy and the Net," *First Monday* no. 2, 1997 – www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue2_4/goldhaber/ [last checked 15 February 2008].
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Video creators often express puzzlement that people select or continue to watch a video that they did not initially enjoy.
- 20 Nardi 2005.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid.

- 23 Richard Chalfen, *Snapshots Versions of Life* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1987). Chalfen studied white, middle-class Americans in the northeastern United States, and examined photographs taken between 1940 and 1980.
- 24 Chalfen 1987 and Patricia Zimmerman, *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995). Zimmerman studied the history of nonprofessional film from the late 19th century to the early 1990s.
- 25 However, much more historical, empirical research is needed to understand the precise content of past decades of home movies in comparison to contemporary video. Today's digital video contains many instances of celebratory ritual as well as more spontaneous ephemera. In addition, it is unclear from past scholarship to what extent amateur filmmaking was devoted to recording a variety of events, large and small. For instance, in her analysis, Zimmerman relies heavily on written rhetoric and home-movie discourses in documents such as camera manufacturing brochures and popular magazines, as opposed to close empirical readings of a sample of home-movies over time.
- 26 See for instance, James Moran, *There's No Place Like Home Video* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002). However, as Moran also implies, deterministic arguments about cultural use based on medium specificity cannot be taken too far. Studies have also shown that a number of factors other than medium specificity play a role in who operates a camera and when. See for instance, Patricia G. Lange and Mizuko Ito, "Creative Production," in Ito et al., *Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out: Living and Learning with New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, forthcoming in 2009).
- 27 Chalfen 1987, p. 8.
- 28 Zimmerman 1995, p. 126.
- 29 Zimmerman 1995.
- 30 Ibid., p. 157.
- 31 Nardi 2005.
- 32 Althusser 1971, pp. 173–177.
- 33 Viewers may interpellate themselves as intended targets of different remarks within the same video. For example, I attended several YouTube gatherings. When she mentions posting meet-up videos, I am interested in this theme, and thus arguably a viewer being "hailed" to view them. However, when she speaks of "little birdies" who circulate rumors, I do

- not know who these individuals are, nor am I familiar with the rumors. This portion of the video is targeted toward those who have circulated rumors (or are interested in this topic).
- 34 Although coded by her as existing between other videos, it received similar orders of magnitude in terms of views. “I’m Not Dead” received 824 views and 86 text comments between its posting on March 2, 2008, and March 25, 2009. Views here are not actual viewings that are retrospectively unknowable (as when several people stand around a computer to watch, for instance), but are rather view counts as recorded when a video is accessed on YouTube. Her prior video involving answering a call to see how many grapes she could put in her mouth received 1,055 views between February 13, 2008, and March 25, 2009. Her subsequent video about a YouTube cruise received 1,032 views between its posting on March 14, 2008, and March 25, 2009.
- 35 Roman Jakobson, “The Speech Event and the Functions of Language,” in *On Language*, eds. Linda R. Waugh & Monique Monville-Burston (London: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 69-79.
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 75.

Jean Burgess and Joshua Green

The Entrepreneurial Vlogger: Participatory Culture Beyond the Professional- Amateur Divide

YouTube’s status as the dominant website for online video is a regular topic for discussion in technology, popular and academic presses. The site is often characterized as a significant challenger to the dominance of traditional broadcasting and television services—celebrated in hyperbolic fashion when *Time* magazine declared “You” the 2006 Person of the Year. Unsurprisingly, YouTube was included in the range of sites where, from “rumpled bedrooms and toy-strewn basement rec rooms,” “ordinary” citizens were “seizing the reins of the global media [...] founding and framing the new digital democracy [...] working for nothing and beating the pros at their own game.”¹ Infamously branded as a place to “Broadcast Yourself,” YouTube is a key site where the discourses of participatory culture and the emergence of the creative, empowered consumer have been played out.

Certainly, YouTube appears to be exemplary of the disruptive effect that new networks of content production and distribution are having on existing media business models. The website has been directly in the firing line of the most powerful traditional media companies. Some have developed official streaming sites in direct response, such as NBC Universal and News Corp.’s Hulu. Others have pursued legal action, claiming the site (more than tacitly) supports copyright infringement.² Alternatively, some media companies have approached the service as a site offering substantial reach and potential viral distribution—providing exposure through word-of-mouth networks that might cut through the clutter of the advertising space. Some commentators (including many