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Immediacy and Aesthetic Remediation in Television and Digital Media: Mass Media's Challenge to the Democratization of Media Production

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of Philosophy

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IMMEDIACY AND AESTHETIC REMEDIATION IN TELEVISION AND DIGITAL MEDIA:
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation, *Immediacy and Aesthetic Remediation in Television and Digital Media: Mass Media's Challenge to the Democratization of Media Production*, analyzes North American television's aesthetic remediation of user-produced media forms. I argue that the use of the aesthetics of user-produced media in television production is more indicative of the television industry's hegemonic influence over cultural creation and discourse than of the democratization of media production. It includes a semiotic analysis of television and user-produced reality-based media such as television news, citizen journalism, video blogs, and reality programming. This is followed by another case study on animation centering on television's recent appropriation of the aesthetics of user-produced Web cartoons. These case studies are on one hand an historical analysis of television's use of reality and animated content and, on the other, a semiotic analysis of the aesthetics of user- and mass-produced media which is used to elaborate upon the television industry's adaption to a post-network, digital media age. Drawing on concepts such as Raymond Williams' dominant and emergent cultures, Pierre Bourdieu's habitus, Walter Benjamin's notion of the *Urvergangenheit* (mythic past), and Nick Couldry's "myth of the mediated centre" as a theoretical framework, the final sections explore the relationship between aesthetic remediation, cultural production, and ideology in order to challenge assumptions about and posit alternative approaches to user-produced media.

Keywords: television, digital media, remediation, Flash, reality TV, citizen journalism, participatory culture, user/producers

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1 THE UTOPIAN PROMISE OF DIGITAL MEDIA

"Television is a tool of tyrants. Its overthrow will be a major force for freedom and individuality, culture and morality. That overthrow is at hand."[1]

"Computers will soon blow away the broadcast television industry."[2]

Writing in the early 1990s, George Gilder—the author of the two quotations above—not only expected the death of television at the hands of digital media, but a complete cultural revolution. "For Gilder," writes Henry Jenkins, "the computer has come not to transform mass culture but to destroy it."[3] This collapse of mass culture was not to be feared but rather celebrated. Gilder is one of earliest and most prominent "digital revolutionaries", convinced that advances in digital technologies such as the personal computer, the Internet, and the World Wide Web would be the source of radical social change. Digital media, he predicted, would allow American culture to "attain new levels in both the visual arts and literature."[4] Socially and politically, their use would "blow apart all the monopolies, hierarchies, pyramids, and power grids of established industrial society. It will undermine all totalitarian regimes. Police states cannot endure under the advance of the computer because it increases the powers of the people far faster than the powers of surveillance."[5] He also believed digital media would ultimately lead to a rebellion against the centralized, manipulative, hegemonic power that mass media institutions such as television represent.

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[1] George F. Gilder, *Life after Television* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994), 49.

[2] Ibid., 139.

[3] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 6.

[4] Gilder, *Life after Television*, 48.

[5] Ibid., 61.

Now, over two decades after the first edition of his book *Life after Television* was published, some of his predictions, such as the spread of wireless communication technologies, seem quite prescient while others seem rather naïve. For example, while he predicted the demise of television and cinema, he believed that "computers pose no such threat to newspapers. Indeed, the computer is a perfect complement to the newspaper."[6] Despite the dubious nature of some of his more utopian visions, the core of Gilder's argument—that digital media would democratize cultural production, shifting power away from mass media institutions and to individuals—has remained influential and even accepted as social fact. The decentralized and accessible structure of the Internet, coupled with the kinds of personalization, interactivity and participation possible there, fuel these utopian views.[7] Hans Magnus Enzensberger calls the new version of media utopianism the "digital gospel" and compares the beliefs of these "digital evangelists" (*digitalen Evangelisten*) to similar hopes Bertolt Brecht had for the democratizing potential of radio.[8]

Jean Burgess and Joshua Green argue that much of this discourse represents what they, echoing Enzensberger, call a "digital utopianism" that "surfaces repeatedly as part of the DIY ideology of participatory culture, the valorization of amateur and community media, and hopeful ideas about the democratization of cultural production."[9] The ability for "average" people to create and distribute their own media content is one of the most

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[6] Ibid., 139.

[7] Jeffrey Wimmer, "Counter-Public Spheres and the Revival of the European Public Sphere," *The Public* 12, no. 2 (2005): 98.

[8] Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "Das Digitale Evangelium," *Der Spiegel*(2000), http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-15376078.html.

[9] Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, *YouTube*, Digital Media and Society Series (Malden, Massachusetts: Polity, 2009), 12.

important pillars of this digital utopianism. Scholars like Jenkins espouse the virtues of a new "participatory culture", which he considers to be a new model for the production of culture significantly different from a now-waning era of mass media.[10] Democratization—that is, the ability for "average" people to have equal and unfettered influence over the production of culture within a society—is intrinsic to participatory culture, as the term references "the apparent link between more accessible digital technologies, user-created content, and some kind of shift in the power relations between media industries and their consumers."[11] Inspired by this idea, *Time* magazine named "You" (i.e., the magazine's readers) as its 2006 "Person of the Year" for "seizing the reins of the global media, for founding and framing the new digital democracy, for working for nothing and beating the pros at their own game."[12] More literal references to the democratizing and radical potential of digital media can be seen in references to civic protests in Iran in 2009 and demonstrations in the Middle East and North Africa in 2010 as a "Twitter Revolution."[13]

This dissertation is an examination of these claims about the democratization of media production through the grassroots creation of digital media and the subsequent dismantling of the hegemonic control of centralized mass media—particularly television—over sociocultural discourse. While it is indeed difficult to argue that the potential for interactivity and participation is not a significant experiential change from the "old" medium of television, the assumption that digital media are inherently

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[10] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, 246.

[11] Burgess and Green, *YouTube*, 10-11.

[12] Lev Grossman, "Time's Person of the Year: You," *Time* 168(2006), http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1569514,00.html.

[13] Reza Afshari, "A Historic Moment in Iran," *Human Rights Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (2009): 854.

revolutionary seems premature and, by trying to separate "new" media from old, overlooks the myriad ways various forms of media interact. Often, the supposition that digital media are essentially democratizing has the effect of masking mass media's capacity—again, particularly television's ability—not only to remain an influential ideological force, but also to respond to and contain the subversive potential of digital media. Television's successful adaption to digital media and participatory culture, it will be argued, can be seen in the medium's appropriation and use of grassroots media—not only the wholesale inclusion of user-produced media texts, but also their forms, structures and aesthetics. Before examining the relationship between television and digital media, however, it is necessary to historically, socially, and culturally contextualize these two forms and outline some of the foundational concepts that will be used to guide this discussion.

1.1 Mass Media, User/Producers and the Public Sphere

Television's development into both a cultural and informational authority reflects what Jürgen Habermas refers to as the "structural transformation of the public sphere."[14] Habermas developed the term "public sphere" to represent "a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed."[15] The original "bourgeois" public sphere represented "private people coming together as a public" and its primary function was to act as a mediator between society and the state.[16] According to Habermas, it first emerged in the 1700s as capitalism and mercantilism expanded at the expense of

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[14] Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel Der Öffentlichkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990), Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1991).

[15] Jürgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article," *New German Critique*, no. 3 (1964): 49.

[16] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 27.

feudalism, which allowed the development of private discursive spaces for rational

debate and production of consensus (i.e., public opinion) outside of state (feudal) control

and influence.[17] The expansion of coffee houses and newspapers in the latter half of the

18th century reflected the development of this new private sphere and were, according to

Habermas, interrelated, as "periodical articles were not only made the object of

discussion by the public of the coffee houses but were viewed as integral parts of this

discussion; this was demonstrated by the flood of letters from which the editor each week

published a selection."[18] This public sphere "stood or fell with the principle of universal

access. A public sphere from which specific groups would be *eo ipso* excluded was less

than merely incomplete; it was not a public sphere at all."[19] Equal opportunity for

"publicity" in the form of public participation and debate was a defining characteristic of

this bourgeois public sphere.[20]

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[17] Ibid., 23-24.

[18] Ibid., 42.

[19] Ibid., 85.

[20] It should be noted that several critiques of Habermas find fault with his limited or narrow conception of the public sphere which, as Geoff Eley argues, is focused on class (i.e., the bourgeoisie) at the expense of other social groups. Nancy Fraser, for example, notes a "gender-blindness" in Habermas' model of the public sphere and argues that "the view that women were excluded from the public sphere turns out to be ideological; it rests on a class- and gender-biased notion of publicity, one which accepts at face value the bourgeois public's claim to be the public." Karen A. Foss and Sonia K. Foss argue that the public sphere has been constructed to privilege white males, which marginalizes communications and contributions from others, while Mary P. Ryan similarly notes the existence of "gender boundaries" on the public sphere that "placed a mark of selective social identity on citizenship in general." Cindy L. Griffin suggests that Habermas' development of the public sphere is "rooted in an essentialist view of women and men" that restricts the contribution of women to private spheres. Craig Calhoon suggests this "exclusion" is rooted in Habermas' analytical framework, as gender is "only problematically grasped by the Marxism that shaped his early analysis." It is outside the scope of this document to examine all of the works that address this topic, but the authors and texts mentioned here provide an ample introduction to debates on this issue. See Craig Calhoon, "Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoon (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1992), Nancy Fraser, "What's Critical About Critical Theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender," *New German Critique*, no. 35 (1985), Geoff Eley, "Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoon (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1992), Karen A. Foss and Sonia K. Foss, *Women Speak: The Eloquence of Women's Lives* (Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland, 1991), Cindy L. Griffin, "The Essentialist Roots of the Public Sphere: A Feminist Critique," *Western*

Habermas attributes the decline of this public sphere to what he calls the

"refeudalization" of society in the 19th century, during which "the powers of 'society'

themselves assumed the functions of public authority"[21] and the "culture-debating" public

of the 18th century was replaced with a "pseudo-public or sham-private world of culture

consumption."[22] Changes in the structure and approach of newspapers, and the

introduction of new centralized mass mediated forms, are representative of this

refeudalization. Lisa Gitelman suggests mass media operate as "'abstract' social spaces

for public discussion and opinion, in which some voices and positions are legitimate, and

others are constrained."[23] In other words, rather than having a participatory role in the

public sphere and actively shaping culture, society was reduced to a more passive role

and looked to the public sphere as a source *of* culture. Publicity was thus transformed

from "a form of participatory debate into a strategy for manipulation[.]"[24] Habermas,

using quotations from W.H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* to illustrate his point,

persuasively argues that not only was the separation of public and private damaged by

this transformation, but:

> The public's rational-critical debate also became a victim of this
> "refeudalization." Discussion as a form of sociability gave way to the fetishism of
> community involvement as such: "Not in solitary and selfish
> contemplation…does one filfill [sic] oneself" in the circles of bourgeois public—
> private reading has always been the precondition for rational-critical debate—"but

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Journal of Communication 60, no. 1 (1996), Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoon (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1992).

[21] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 142.

[22] Ibid., 159-60.

[23] Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2006), 13.

[24] Mark Andrejevic, *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 39.

in doing things with other people…even watching television together…helps make one more of a real person."[25]

The reference to television is appropriate, as it is clearly illustrates the concept of a "culture-consuming public."

1.1.1 Television and the Public Sphere

Jonathan Bignell argues that the idea of a public sphere can be used to recognize why forms such as reality TV (and, it should be argued, all media forms on television) can be understood to represent issues of public concern.[26] The historical development of television in the United States in particular demonstrates this idea clearly. Television historian Lynn Spigel demonstrates that, although the technology had existed for several years, television as an institution only began to establish itself as a mass medium in the years following the Second World War, aided by the development and spread of suburbs in the 1940s and 1950s.[27] She explains that American television networks such as NBC did not attempt to fit programming into the daily routines of citizens, but instead "aggressively sought to change those rhythms by making the activity of television viewing into a new daily habit."[28] These attempts were highly successful. The use of television and other domestic appliances started to replace the use of community facilities and, as a result, attendance at sporting events and theatres dropped, as did attendance at

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[25] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 158. Whyte quotations from William H. Whyte, *The Organization Man* (New York: LaFarge Literary Agency, 1956), 280.

[26] Jonathan Bignell, *Big Brother: Reality TV in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 70-71.

[27] Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 100-02.

[28] Ibid., 85.

movie theatres for the first time since the Great Depression.[29] Television took on an

important role in the home, becoming a source for the establishment of social and cultural

norms and "an ideal vehicle through which to regulate family life."[30] The introduction of

cable and satellite television only cemented television's role in the home and, while these

technologies offered an increase in channel and programming selection, television's

dominant cultural role remained mostly unchanged. Even with the growth of digital

media, argues Daya Kishan Thussu, "television continues to be the world's most powerful

medium[.]"[31]

1.1.2 Digital Media and the Mass-mediated Public Sphere

Adam Joinson notes that "[w]hen a new technology develops, there inevitably

follow forecasts envisaging a variety of positive outcomes."[32] This tendency can be seen

after the removal of access restrictions to the Internet and Tim Berners-Lee's

development of the World Wide Web in the 1990s, the combination of which ostensibly

presented the first challenge to television's position of dominance as the primary source

of information and entertainment. The emergence of digital media has fed expectations of

new, revolutionary forms of interactive entertainment. Indeed, digital media are often

referred to as "new media" not only to indicate that these technologies are recent

inventions, but also to suggest that they are inherently different from "old" media such as

television. Both Peter Lunenfeld and Lev Manovich observe that advances in the

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[29] Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies (Paperback)* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 279, Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*, 106.

[30] Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*, 59.

[31] Daya Kishan Thussu, *News as Entertainment: The Rise of Global Infotainment* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 2007), 10.

[32] Adam Joinson, *Understanding the Psychology of Internet Behaviour: Virtual Worlds, Real Lives.* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, U2002), 116.

technical capabilities of computers, combined with the increasing ubiquity of Internet

access, have allowed the personal computer to become a single site for the production,

dissemination, and reception of media texts, a rather reasonable observation.[33] Lunenfeld

further contends that "new media" allow for the creation of new, alternative forms of

media production.[34] Jonathan Sterne, however, argues: "To refer to digital media as 'new'

technologies is to import the value-system of advertisement into scholarship, where

'newness' itself is an index of sociocultural significance and transformative power."[35]

Digital media are indeed often credited with substantial sociocultural power. Several

authors have noted the potential of the Internet to challenge existing structures of

information and cultural control, although they do not agree always about the positive or

negative impact of this potential.[36]

1.1.3 Liveness and Immediacy

Proponents of digital media suggest, however, that not only are digital media

completely separate from traditional media, but they are also inherently *better* than

traditional media as well. One of the primary reasons for this is the belief that they exude

a superior "liveness" and are therefore more "real" than mass media. According to Nick

Couldry, liveness or "live transmission—the phrase from which the term originates—

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[33] Peter Lunenfeld, *Snap to Grid: A User's Guide to Digital Arts, Media, and Cultures* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000), 71, Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), 4.

[34] Lunenfeld, *Snap to Grid: A User's Guide to Digital Arts, Media, and Cultures*, 31.

[35] Jonathan Sterne, "Bourdieu, Technique, and Technology," *Cultural Studies* 17, no. 3/4 (2003): 368.

[36] See, for example, the differences in opinion conveyed in Nick Dyer-Witheford, *Cybermarx* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), Andrew Keen, *The Cult of the Amateur: How Blogs, Myspace, Youtube, and the Rest of Today's User-Generated Media Are Destroying Our Economy, Our Culture, and Our Values* (New York: Doubleday 2007), David Weinberger, *Everything Is Miscellaneous: The Power of the New Digital Disorder* (New York: Times Books, 2007).

"guarantees a potential connection to shared social realities as they are happening."[37] The "live" in liveness seemingly emphasizes time, since the phrase "live TV" in North America generally indicates simultaneous broadcast and reception. Jérôme Bourdon notes, however, that the word "live" translates to *direct* in French, *diretta* in Italian, and *direkt* in German, all of which suggest the ability of television to abnegate both time *and* space.[38] The word television, after all, as well as its equivalent in other languages such as the German word *Fernsehen*, literally means "distant sight." The term liveness thus overlaps with the concepts of "immediacy" and "hypermediacy."

According to Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, a sense of immediacy is achieved by both "removing the programmer/creator from the image" while also "involving the viewer more intimately in the image.[39] In this definition, the medium becomes transparent, allowing the viewer a sense of presence with the mediated image. A sense of immediacy can be achieved through the simultaneous broadcast and reception of an event—the simplest definition of liveness—but it can also, as Rhona J. Berenstein suggests, "resonate in spatial terms, suggesting a physical proximity between the viewer and the performance rendered."[40] In this manner, even televised events from the past can

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[37] Nick Couldry, "Liveness, 'Reality,' and the Mediated Habitus from Television to the Mobile Phone," *The Communication Review* 7, no. 4 (2004): 355.

[38] Jérôme Bourdon, "Live Television Is Still Alive: On Television as an Unfulfilled Promise," in *The Television Studies Reader*, ed. Robert C. Allen and Annette Hill (New York: Routledge, 2004), 182.

[39] Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2000), 30.

[40] Rhona J. Berenstein, "Acting Live: TV Performance, Intimacy, and Immediacy (1945–1955)," in *Reality Squared: Televisual Discourse on the Real*, ed. James Friedman (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 26.

generate a feeling of immediacy, reintroducing a sense of historicity Mimi White claims discussions of liveness lack.[41]

Bolter and Grusin also note that immediacy can be achieved through the related concept of "hypermediacy" which is "an immediacy that grows out of the frank acknowledgement of the medium and is not based on the perfect visual re-creation of the world."[42] Immediacy and hypermediacy share a complex relationship in which "hypermediacy makes us aware of the medium or media and (in sometimes subtle and sometimes obvious ways) reminds us of our desire for immediacy."[43] Television has been able to achieve a sense of immediacy through hypermediacy since the medium's Golden Age, such as when *See It Now* (1951) host Edward R. Murrow displayed views of both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans simultaneously on screen.[44] Hypermediacy remains important to television today, whether it be through the use of split screen such as in the *See It Now* example, news stories illustrated and expanded through the use of 3-D computer generated models, or the use of graphic overlays during the broadcast of sporting events. Examples of the latter include graphics that display the statistics of players or teams in certain situations in baseball games or the digitally inserted "yellow first down line" that has become a regular element of National Football League (NFL) game broadcasts in the United States and Canadian Football League (CFL) broadcasts in Canada. In all of these cases, hypermediacy is achieved by allowing the audience to see something they could not otherwise see without the aid of mediation. Digital media, it is

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[41] See Mimi White, "The Attractions of Television: Reconsidering Liveness," in *Mediaspace: Place, Scale and Culture in a Media Age*, ed. Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy (New York: Routledge, 2004), 89.

[42] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 81.

[43] Ibid., 34.

[44] White, "The Attractions of Television: Reconsidering Liveness," 84.

often suggested, convey a superior sense of immediacy because the fact that they are not

filtered by mass media institutions makes them "more real." In addition, Bolter and

Grusin suggest that the form of interactivity and participation possible online further

enhance their immediacy (or hypermediacy).[45]

The concepts of immediacy and hypermediacy are used here to examine the

relationship between a user and a media text or, more specifically, the user's involvement

with a text. That involvement might be literal, such as in the case of interactive Internet

sites that allow direct user participation. In this example, a sense of contemporaneousness

is important; the user is interacting in "real time." Immediacy also references a feeling of

"presence" (in time, space, or both) with a mediated event. This form of immediacy,

according to Bolter and Grusin, is as applicable to reality television programming as it is

to cinematic period costume dramas:

> To fulfill our apparently insatiable desire for immediacy, "live" point-of-view
> television programs show viewers what it is like to accompany a police officer on
> a dangerous raid or to be a skydiver or a race car driver hurtling through space.
> Filmmakers routinely spend tens of millions of dollars to film on location or to
> recreate period costumes and places in order to make their viewers feel as if they
> were "really" there.[46]

Hypermediated media texts such as television news or sporting events offer a similar

sense of participation and interaction by presenting multiple informational sources that

suggest an increased, even privileged level of access—in short, the allow people

experience things they would not otherwise be able to experience, or in a way a non-

hypermediated text would not allow.

[45] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 81.

[46] Ibid., 5.

Bolter and Grusin note their use of the terms immediacy and hypermediacy can have both an epistemological and a psychological meaning:

> In the epistemological sense, immediacy is transparency: the absence of mediation or representation. It is the notion that a medium could erase itself and leave the viewer in the presence of the objects represented, so that he could know the objects directly. In its psychological sense, immediacy names the viewer's feeling that the medium has disappeared and the objects are present to him, a feeling that his experience is therefore authentic. Hypermediacy also has two corresponding senses. In its epistemological sense, hypermediacy is opacity—the fact that knowledge of the world comes to us through media. The viewer acknowledges that she is in the presence of a medium and learns through acts of mediation of indeed learns about mediation itself. The psychological sense of hypermediacy is the experience that she has in and of the presence of media; it is the insistence that the experience of the medium is itself an experience of the real. The appeal to authenticity of experience is what brings the logics of immediacy and hypermediacy together.[47]

Their use of the terms "authenticity" and "real" here is—perhaps purposefully— imprecise. On the surface, Bolter and Grusin seem to suggest that immediacy and hypermediacy are two strategies for presenting what appears to be an almost-unfiltered text. Digital grassroots media are indeed often positioned as more "real" or immediate because they do not pass through the filters of mass media and are therefore, it is assumed, less manipulated and manipulative. Although Bolter and Grusin make only a cursory mention of it, there can seemingly be an affective element to immediacy as well: an experience is authentic if the audience finds it "moving."[48] In other words, a sense of immediacy is achieved if a user or viewer has a "genuine" emotional response. This affective component is especially important to science fiction, fantasy, or animated media that, instead of relying upon a representation of "realness", attempt to generate a sense of wonder. As such, immediacy does not simply concern the reception of media texts, but

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[47] Ibid., 70-71.

[48] Ibid., 69.

also their production; in essence, the generation of immediacy becomes a strategy employed to ensure user involvement. Aesthetic elements play a significant role in the generation of immediacy, and the assimilation of aesthetic elements of a particular media form is often guided by the desire for immediacy. As Bolter and Grusin state: "Whenever one medium seems to have convinced viewers of its immediacy, other media try to appropriate that conviction."[49]

1.1.4 Before Remediation: Theories on Television and Digital Media Convergence

Proponents of digital media such as Nicholas Negroponte often point to the superior immediacy of digital media and predict that the grassroots production of digital media will lead to a radical transformation in, if not the total collapse of, centralised mass media such as television.[50] Originally, research on the potential of digital media centred on the notion of technological convergence—a blurring of lines between the computer and television. Convergence as an economic term had been around for quite some time, referring to vertical integration within media markets, such as the merger of America Online (AOL) and TimeWarner.[51] However, Jenkins suggests that the late MIT political science professor Ithiel de Sola Pool should be considered the "prophet of media convergence."[52] Writing in 1983, de Sola Pool outlined a process he called a "convergence of modes" which blurred the lines between media, "even between point-to-point communications, such as the post, telephone, and telegraph, and mass

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[49] Ibid., 9.

[50] Nicholas Negroponte, *Being Digital* (New York: Knopf, 1995).

[51] John Caldwell, "Convergence Television: Aggregating Form and Repurposing Content in the Culture of Conglomeration," in *Television after TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 67.

[52] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, 10.

communications, such as the press, radio, and television."[53] His definition describes how a service previously provided by one particular medium could now be provided by several. The key to this process was the increasing digitization of information, combined with cross-media ownership. As Jenkins states, "Digitization set the conditions for convergence; corporate conglomerates created its imperative."[54] Digitization allows information to be more adaptable and makes it easier for a corporation to distribute content over a variety of media under its purview.

Lisa Cartwright claims that discussions about convergence reached a new level of frenzy in the 1980s and 1990s because of the "exponential growth effect that occurs with the integration of media and products—and corporate holdings—across industries."[55] Excitement about the technological and economic potential of convergence encouraged fewer limits on the vertical integration of media companies and other media ownership deregulation. Cartwright claims, however, that convergence became a "different entity" when digital media could support elements previously limited to film and television.[56] The primary concern in academic areas such as film studies became the "disintegration" and merging of media forms.[57] The merging of television and digital media, and the impending death of broadcast media and cinema, dominated debates about convergence in the 1990s. Jenkins notes these discussions "contained an implicit and often explicit assumption that new media was going to push aside old media, that the Internet was

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[53] Quoted in ibid., 10.

[54] Ibid., 11.

[55] Lisa Cartwright, "Film and the Digital in Visual Studies: Film Studies in the Era of Convergence," in *The Visual Culture Reader: Second Edition*, ed. Nicholas Mirzeoff (New York: Routledge, 2002), 417.

[56] Ibid., 418.

[57] Ibid., 417.

going to displace broadcasting[.]"[58] He details two prevailing theories of how this would

happen. Some, such as the aforementioned "visionary" Gilder, believed new media would

eradicate mass culture; others, such as executives of new media companies, believed old

technologies would "be absorbed fully and completely into the orbit of the emerging

technologies."[59] This latter view was prevalent in convergence literature as late as 2003,

when June Deery discussed her belief that new media and television convergence would

be a complete "enfolding" of one technology into the other, and not a simple borrowing

of conventions and structures that occurred between television and radio.[60] She claimed

that the future standard would be something like Microsoft's WebTV, a service that

provided programming as well as Internet access via television. This Internet/television

combination would alter television content and the viewing experience, making it a

"cooler" (in McLuhan's sense) medium.[61]

While theories related to technological convergence remained popular for over a

decade, scholars since Deery have criticized them as being too limited. Jenkins claims the

"black box theory" of convergence—the idea that people will receive all of their media

through a single media device—reduces all media change to technological change and

ignores or "strips away" cultural considerations.[62] William Boddy notes that devices that

combine Internet and television products such as WebTV have not been successful,

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[58] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, 6.

[59] Ibid., 5-6.

[60] June Deery, "TV.Com: Participatory Viewing on the Web," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 37, no. 2 (2003): 161.

[61] Ibid., 161-2.

[62] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, 15.

failing to even turn a profit, let alone become a new standard as Deery had predicted.[63]

Jostein Gripsrud, writing about television in a digital age, notes the same. He believes

this failure is due to a societal norm that establishes television as a passive, relaxing

technology and the computer—including Internet access—as a work or research tool.[64]

Thus, he believes there will always be an experiential and social difference between using

the Internet and watching television.[65] More recent theories include a consideration of

cultural rather than just technological issues, and look at the emerging and expanding role

of audiences and users.

1.1.5 The User/Producer and Democratization of the Public Sphere

As a focus on technological convergence gave way to new theories on "cultural

convergence"—the flow of media content across various media—a new strain of thought

emerged. For Jenkins, this means that convergence is not just about technological change,

but is instead "changing the ways in which media industries operate and the ways average

people think about their relation to media."[66] One of the primary tropes of this view of

digital culture is the often assumed ability for a formerly "passive" audience to become

active "user/producers" capable of creating independent media content and sharing it

with a worldwide audience, which represents a break from television's hegemonic control

over cultural production and content.[67] The kinds of interactivity and participation made

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[63] William Boddy, "Interactive Television and Advertising Form in Contemporary U.S. Television," in *Television after TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 114-7.

[64] Jostein Gripsrud, "Broadcast Television: The Chances of Its Survival in a Digital Age," in *Television after TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 217.

[65] Ibid., 218.

[66] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, 243.

[67] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 73-75, Lisa Parks, "Flexible Microcasting: Gender, Generation, and Television-Internet Convergence," in *Television after TV: Essays on a Medium in*

possible by digital media have indeed had a significant impact on media production. Jeffery Wimmer notes, however, that many scholars do not just see digital media as offering new media experiences, but rather believe there is enormous democratic potential in this nullification of the separation between producers and audiences or senders and receivers.[68] Jenkins strongly believes that digital media allow "the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer [to] interact in unpredictable ways."[69] Mark Andrejevic approaches this new dynamic somewhat sceptically, arguing that "one of the recurring marketing strategies of the new economy is the suggestion that with the addition of the interactivity prefix—the telltale lower case *i*—forms of media that were once passive and mind numbing are transformed into means of creative self-expression and empowerment."[70] Others are more optimistic. Jenkins, for example, argues that increased television and digital media convergence can lead to questions concerning the discursive control of television programming.[71] Peter Lunt sees this questioning in the interactive nature of reality programming, arguing that people "who have traditionally been in the position of the audience are now involved in the production of such programs, blurring the boundary between production and reception."[72] June

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Transition, ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 148, Negroponte, *Being Digital*.

[68] Jeffrey Wimmer, *(Gegen-)Öffentlichleit in Der Mediengesellschaft: Analyse Eines Medialen Spannungsverhältnisses* (Meppel, The Netherlands: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2007), 140.

[69] Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 2.

[70] Mark Andrejevic, "Watching Television without Pity: The Productivity of Online Fans," *Television and New Media* 9, no. 1 (2008): 35.

[71] Deery, "TV.Com: Participatory Viewing on the Web.", William Uricchio, "Television's Next Generation: Technology/Interface Culture/Flow," in *Television after TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 179.

[72] Peter Lunt, "Liveness in Reality Television and Factual Broadcasting," *The Communication Review* 7, no. 4 (2004): 329.

Deery makes a similar argument, noting that users frequently create their own websites devoted to their favourite shows which decentralize the flow of information and deconstruct the traditional, one-way flow of "old" television.[73] This interaction between audiences and television producers results in a "Kristevian notion of productivity when, instead of being finished products, both TV text and audience remain in a state of production."[74] In fact, she states, most websites devoted to television programs are now fan-produced and are often more interactive that the "official" websites.[75] The result is a new form of interaction with television, one that is user-generated and outside of the control of the industry. Furthermore, Deery claims, television producers have begun altering their texts, sometimes in direct response to audience suggestions or complaints on such sites.[76]

Lisa Parks, evoking a concept posited by Marshall McLuhan, sees even greater possibilities for the "cross-pollenization" of television and new media, suggesting this trend generates possibilities for social transformation.[77] Andrejevic has similarly observed that the "resolution of the struggle in favor of a system of top-down, centralized control has become the implicit target of the critique mobilized by the publicists of the digital revolution[.]"[78] Indeed, discourse on the power of digital media to democratize media production is far more prevalent than more dystopian views. Amanda Lotz, for example, claims digital media give users the ability to dismantle mass media's

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[73] Deery, "TV.Com: Participatory Viewing on the Web," 164-5.

[74] Ibid., 179.

[75] Ibid., 164-65.

[76] Ibid., 162.

[77] Parks, "Flexible Microcasting: Gender, Generation, and Television-Internet Convergence," 142.

[78] Andrejevic, *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*, 31.

"bottleneck of distribution"[79] and Deery demonstrates how digital technologies allow users to "recirculate media in new ways" which challenges the control producers have over even their own cultural creations.[80]

Others suggest a greater sociocultural and ideological revolution is taking place, claiming that the capacity to produce and distribute media content outside of existing mass media structures allows for greater control and independence, which in turn might generate possibilities for social transformation. Indeed, the phrase "new media" perpetuates the idea that any new technology is capable of bringing about fundamental cultural and societal change and represents a break from the dominance of mass media such as television.[81] In a 1996 interview with *Wired* magazine, Canadian humanities scholar Derrick de Kerckhove stated: "In a networked society, the real power shift is from the producer to the consumer, and there is a redistribution of controls and power. On the Web, Karl Marx's dream has been realized: the tools and the means of production are in the hands of workers."[82] More recent ruminations on the power of digital media are no less optimistic. Wimmer elaborates upon a widely held belief that digital media modify the structures of the public sphere and the monopoly of the mass media.[83] Manovich makes a direct link between the capabilities of digital media and radical potential, stating that "after almost two decades of menu-based media manipulation

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[79] Amanda D. Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 148-49.

[80] Deery, "TV.Com: Participatory Viewing on the Web," 180.

[81] Anna Everett and John T. Caldwell, "Issues in the Theory and Practice of Media Convergence," in *New Media: Theories and Practices of Digitextuality*, ed. Anna Everett and John T. Caldwell (New York: Routledge, 2003), xx.

[82] Kevin Kelly, "What Would Mcluhan Say?," *Wired* 4, no. 10 (1996), http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/4.10/dekerckhove.html.

[83] Wimmer, *(Gegen-)Öffentlichleit in Der Mediengesellschaft: Analyse Eines Medialen Spannungsverhältnisses*, 42.

programs and the use of computers as media distribution machines (greatly accelerated

by the World Wide Web), a little programming could prove quite revolutionary!"[84] Anna

Everett claims that the "advent of the digital revolution in late-twentieth and early-

twenty-first-century media culture apparently confirms…media critics' claims that we

have entered a post-television age."[85] She later links this to a sociocultural effect, stating:

"Subtending all this is my contention that we are witnessing the rise of a new cultural

dominant[.]"[86]

These claims clearly demonstrate that discussions of new media are not simply

about technology or even production, but rather involve a larger discussion about how

these technologies can fundamentally alter a society and its culture. It is this belief that

leads to utopian claims that "ordinary citizens" are able to participate culturally and

politically through media production, "thus helping to realize Gramsci's dictum that

anyone could be a public intellectual."[87] These arguments seemingly construct a dialectic

in which a centralised mass media structure was necessary for the development of

technologies needed for a "revolution" in media production and distribution. The

expectation that "ordinary citizens" are able to participate culturally and politically

through media production suggest the contemporary realization of what Walter Benjamin

calls the *Urvergangenheit*—a mythic past with a classless and egalitarian society.[88] The

utopian promises of new media espoused by Jenkins and other proponents of digital

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[84] Lev Manovich, "Generation Flash," in *Total Interaction: Theory and Practice of a New Paradigm for the Design Disciplines*, ed. Gerhard M. Buurman (Boston: Birkhäuser, 2005), 75.

[85] Everett, "Digitextuality and Click Theory," 3.

[86] Ibid., 7.

[87] Douglas Kellner, "Globalization from Below? Toward a Radical Democratic Technopolitics.," *Angelaki* 4, no. 2 (1999): 109.

[88] Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften in Sieben Bänden*, ed. Rolf Tiedmann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, vol. II•3 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991), 1064.

media evoke the *Urvergangenheit*, and suggest a future in which cultural divisions and hierarchies will be eliminated. For these writers, the interactive capabilities of digital media offer the opportunity for the return of the "culture-debating" public of the coffeehouses of the late 18th century Europe, albeit in a digital form. The supposedly superior immediacy the Internet and other digital media provide is integral to this democratized public sphere.

<div align="center">1.1.6 Television's Adaptation to User-Produced Media</div>

However, John T. Caldwell notes that, despite the challenges presented by new media, "television as an institution has proven resilient in adapting to a series of fundamental economic, technological, and cultural changes."[89] He insists that television has overcome the threat originally posed by digital technologies by incorporating them, and has done this better than other media such as film.[90] In fact, the "migration" of content and forms between media, a process Simone Murray refers to as "content streaming", is actually made easier because of digitization.[91] Aesthetic forms and codes, in addition to complete texts, can now be easily exchanged. This sharing and appropriation of aesthetics is a part of a process which Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin term "remediation." Remediation is essentially the representation of one medium in another.[92] The basic premise is not new. Writing in the 1970s, Canadian media scholar Marshall McLuhan noted that newly developed media always refashion and reform the

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[89] Caldwell, "Convergence Television: Aggregating Form and Repurposing Content in the Culture of Conglomeration," 43.

[90] Ibid., 42, 50.

[91] Simone Murray, "Media Convergence's Third Wave," *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 9, no. 1 (2003): 19.

[92] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 45.

structures and content of older media.[93] As Lynne Cooke states, "the visual display of 'new media'…must be understood in relation to their media predecessors because they draw on the design conventions of these media as they evolve."[94] She details how news organizations in particular borrowed from other media in order to develop a web presence: "While the internet gained popularity with the public, television news programs, newspapers, and independent news organizations developed an internet presence, in part, by borrowing from visual trends in existing media."[95] John Hartley also argues that most media, including cinema, television, and digital media, rely heavily on trends in print design.[96] Television in particular, Caldwell notes, was important to defining the aesthetics of new media.[97] Television and related devices provided conventions such as the rectangular screen and video controls such as the play/pause, fast forward, and skip chapter functions, which were made popular with the introduction of the VCR and the DVD player. David Weinberger sees this similarity as an advantage for new media, suggesting users new to the Internet are able to interact with its dense imagery and text "because of our familiarity with other media like magazines, newspapers, books, and even reports/spreadsheets."[98]

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[93] See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994).

[94] Lynne Cooke, "A Visual Convergence of Print, Television and the Internet: Charting 40 Years of Design Change in News Presentation," *New Media & Society* 7, no. 1 (2005): 25.

[95] Ibid., 37.

[96] John Hartley, "From Republic of Letters to Television Republic," in *Television after TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 391.

[97] John T. Caldwell, "Second-Shift Media Aesthetics," in *New Media: Theories and Practices of Digitextuality*, ed. Anna Everett and John T. Caldwell (New York: Routledge, 2003), 132.

[98] David Weinberger, *Small Pieces Loosely Joined: A Unified Theory of the Web* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus, 2002), 36.

Bolter and Grusin, however, are careful to say that remediation is not linear, but rather reciprocal.[99] In other words, while new media can and certainly do remediate the aesthetics of older media, so-called old media can also remediate the aesthetics of newer media. The authors suggest that "we are in an unusual position to appreciate remediation, because of the rapid development of new digital media and the nearly as rapid response by traditional media."[100] Indeed, Caldwell also notes how this new generation of user/producers have "substantively transformed what television looks like and sounds like" in an age of digital media.[101] Television has been appropriating many of the visual elements of user-produced objects meant for distribution on the World Wide Web despite having neither the same interactive capabilities, nor the technical limitations that guide and influence the aesthetics of early Web media projects. Digital icons such as the ubiquitous arrow mouse pointer make regular appearances in television advertising to exude a sense of interactivity and encourage later action, and Parks outlines how the US cable network Oxygen integrated "edgy elements of a digital aesthetic in order to lend greater social and cultural legitimacy to the medium."[102] Cooke adds that these "visual similarities are not random happenstance; instead, they emerge from a dynamic media environment that is shaped by technological, social, and cultural forces."[103] As that statement suggests, while economic considerations might motivate these developments, there are certain social, cultural, and even political motivations for this aesthetic

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[99] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 105.

[100] Ibid., 5.

[101] Caldwell, "Convergence Television: Aggregating Form and Repurposing Content in the Culture of Conglomeration," 46.

[102] Parks, "Flexible Microcasting: Gender, Generation, and Television-Internet Convergence," 145.

[103] Cooke, "A Visual Convergence of Print, Television and the Internet: Charting 40 Years of Design Change in News Presentation," 23.

remediation of digital media as well. Television's "colonization" of the Web through the establishment of official and interactive sites for reality TV shows, news programming, dramas, and game shows are additional examples of the institution of television extending its ideological reach in a digital era. Indeed, this trend seems to indicate a savvy recognition of the fact that, in a digital media environment, "content must do more than appear 'on television' to distinguish itself as having cultural relevance[.]"[104]

It is tempting to see television's appropriation of the aesthetics of user-produced digital media, or the wholesale inclusion of user-produced texts, as reactionary, an attempt to maintain economic viability as the industry fights what is assumed to be a losing battle with digital technologies such as the Internet. This temptation stems from the fact that, Jeffrey Sconce argues, media scholars tend to treat television as an "annoying distraction" that separates the age of cinema from the age of digital media and therefore treat television as "a technological and cultural 'problem' to be solved rather than a textual body to be engaged."[105] This dissertation is an attempt to address that problem and challenge several assumptions about the relationship between television, digital media, user/producers, and the democratizing potential of digital media. It focuses on what grassroots user/producers are doing with media *and* what mass media do with user-produced media in order to problematize the utopianism of digital media that Jenkins and others champion. In addition, it argues that television's appropriation of user-produced media in particular works to subvert the revolutionary potential of digital media while simultaneously making television appear more democratic.

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[104] Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, 37.

[105] Jeffrey Sconce, "What If?: Charting Television's New Textual Boundaries," in *Television after TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 93-94.

1.1.7 The Importance of Aesthetics

In a critique of media studies approaches, Caldwell argues that "scholars need to pay as much attention to the communities and cultures of production as they do to... political economy."[106] An examination of the aesthetics of a text can provide a great amount of insight into these cultures of production. The term "aesthetics" is used here not to refer to a specific approach, but rather a set of characteristics that can be used to distinguish a particular text or set of texts. Aesthetics not only include visual elements (e.g., shape, colour, movement, framing, and, lighting), the medium and format (e.g., video, film, computer animation, cel animation), and audio elements (e.g., speech, music, effects), but also the applied structures and conventions that guided the production of a text (e.g., the length of the text, the presence of a host or narrator, whether address is directed towards the viewer/user or not).

Referring to various forms of art in 1912, Wassily Kandinsky wrote, "The form is the outer expression of the inner content… Necessity creates the form."[107] The same is true of media texts, including those that are user-produced. As such, aesthetics convey particular information about the artist, his or her work, and the content thereof. The aesthetics of a particular media text, however, reflect a number of different influences,

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[106] Caldwell, "Convergence Television: Aggregating Form and Repurposing Content in the Culture of Conglomeration," 45.

[107] Wassily Kandinsky, "On the Problem of Form," in *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics*, ed. H. B. Chipp (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1984), 157. This Kandinsky quotation is interesting for a number of reasons. A number of scholars have addressed the relationship between aesthetics and politics in thought-provoking ways including Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno and Jacques Rancière among others. See, for example, Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2002), Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk Im Zeitalter Seiner Technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006), Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (New York: Continuum, 2006). Kandinsky, however, not only addresses the relationship between form and content, but does so without specific political or technological considerations. Indeed, Kandinsky is approaching the relationship from the perspective of an artist rather than a scholar, and it is important to include this perspective along with academic considerations, especially when discussing the forces that shape production.

not just the practical and artistic considerations of the producer(s), but also the historical

development of the form or genre, the sociocultural transformations that guided that

development, and even the tools used to create a specific media project which themselves

reflect a particular approach influenced by history and sociocultural expectations and

developments. Understanding the factors that influence the aesthetics of a media project

can indeed tell us much about the "communities and cultures of production" behind a

particular media text, including why the producer employed a particular aesthetic style

and whether the choice was intentional or the result of other (i.e., technological, financial

or training-related) constraints. In other words, the aesthetics of a project can reveal a

great deal about the producer's intentions as well as contextualize the production

environment.

Aesthetics also have significant meaning within a society and culture and can

inform the reception of a media text. Maureen Furniss notes that American media have

set "aesthetic norms" for viewers, certainly in the United States but also internationally.[108]

This American aesthetic has become a signifier "good" mass-produced media, and

attempts to replicate this aesthetic suggest a desire to capitalize on that association, while

simultaneously reinforcing the status quo. Thus, deviations from a standard mass media

aesthetic can be quite momentous and take on their own cultural significance. This is

certainly the case for user-produced media, the aesthetics of which, as will be explored in

detail in the following chapters, have come to symbolize the democratization of media

production and the rebellion against centralized mass media. Indeed, the lack of

"professional techniques" is often expected to the point that, as Peter Humm argues, the

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[108] Maureen Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2007), 15.

veracity and intent of user/producers can be questioned if advanced production methods are used.[109] In other words, when user-produced media are too aesthetically similar to mass produced media, there is a significant cultural effect, which suggests the same might be true for the appropriation of user-produced aesthetics by television producers—i.e., when television aesthetics closely resemble those of user-produced media. The effects of the aesthetic remediation by television of user-produced texts are central to the research in this dissertation. Indeed, Bolter and Grusin's concept of remediation is a key to understanding how approaches to design, aesthetics, and production can illuminate the often overlooked relationship between television and digital media.

1.2 Theoretical and Analytical Framework

In his examination of Pierre Bourdieu's social theory and its applicability to studies of technology, Sterne argues that "there are extraordinary institutional pressures on technology scholars to think about technology in certain ways, to ask certain kinds of research questions about technology to the exclusion of others." One of the arguments here is that assumptions of digital media's "newness" and democratizing ability prevent many media scholars from actually asking *if* they are new and revolutionary. Sterne suggests that scholars might avoid these problems by making what Bourdieu refers to as an "'epistemological break' with the 'common sense' of technology."[110] This break occurs when researchers are able to ignore preconceived ideas or assumptions about their

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[109] Peter Humm, "Real TV: Camcorders, Access and Authenticity," in *The Television Studies Book*, ed. Christine Geraghty and David Lusted (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 231.

[110] Sterne, "Bourdieu, Technique, and Technology," 369.

object of study and instead view it with "'a new gaze', *a sociological eye*."[111] As Sterne

later elaborates:

> To be intellectually effective, technology scholars must willfully construct their
> objects of study, and not accept 'pregiven' objects or 'prenotions'. This requires
> us to try and make an epistemological break from the objects we study, so that we
> do not simply describe them in their own terms. This is especially crucial for
> technology scholars who are approached from all sides with pregiven objects,
> approaches and programmes of study.[112]

This need for an epistemological break guides the research contained here.

One useful theory in this regard is the concept of "mediatisation." As Andreas

Hepp explains, mediatisation "adopts the central idea of medium theory, namely that

'media change' and 'cultural change' are interrelated, but tries to capture this not merely

from the perspective of the relation *from* media *to* cultural change."[113] In other words,

mediatisation theory recognizes that media play a cultural role without making the

assumption that the introduction of a new medium or technology causes or is indicative

of sociocultural change. The concept is strongly related to others: David Morley's "media

ensembles" and Couldry's "myth of the mediated centre." Morley insists that scholars

need to "understand the variety of ways in which new and old media accommodate to

each other and coexist in symbiotic forms."[114] In other words, media should not be

considered in isolation—from a society and its culture *or* from each other. Hepp also

recognizes the value of Morley's contribution, stating:

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[111] Bourdieu, qtd. in ibid., 369. Emphasis in original.

[112] Ibid., 384.

[113] Andreas Hepp, "Researching 'Mediatised Worlds': Non-Mediacentric Media and Communication
Research as a Challenge," in *Media and Communication Studies Interventions and Intersections*, ed. Nico
Carpentier, et al., *The Researching and Teaching Communication Series* (Tartu, Estonia: Tartu University
Press, 2009), 39. Emphasis in original.

[114] David Morley, *Media, Modernity and Technology. The Geography of the New.* (New York: Routledge,
2007), 200.

> The idea that this discipline can focus exclusively on a single medium becomes more and more problematic when the internet makes it possible to distribute very different forms of 'media' along one technical infrastructure that transgresses into more and more aspects of everyday life….In other words, they have to develop a transmedial point of view.[115]

At the same time, Morley cautions that we must "'decentre' the media, in our analytical framework, so as to better understand the ways in which media processes and everyday life are interwoven with each other."[116] Here Morley is providing the foundation for Hepp's call to not conflate media change with social change. Indeed, Hepp references Morley's call for a non-mediacentric approach, stating:

> '[D]ecentrism' means two things. On the one hand, it is the analysis of processes through which the possession and use of certain media are constructed as central (that is, as important) in everyday life. On the other hand, it calls for more research of the processes through which media in their various forms are constructed as the main interfaces to the 'core resources' of a society.[117]

Couldry's concept of the "myth of the mediated centre", as the name suggests, represents the "belief, or assumption, that there is a centre to the social world, and that, in some sense, the media speaks 'for' that centre."[118] Like Morley and Hepp, Couldry believes scholars need to avoid inadvertently incorporating this myth in their analysis and framework, and instead examine how media operate within a society to fabricate a "centre" in order to build and maintain hegemonic structures. The parallels to media decentrism are apparent.

These concepts lead to a better understanding of why proponents of digital media believe that the abilities for user/producers to create and distribute their own content is

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[115] Hepp, "Researching 'Mediatised Worlds': Non-Mediacentric Media and Communication Research as a Challenge," 42.

[116] Morley, *Media, Modernity and Technology. The Geography of the New.*, 200.

[117] Hepp, "Researching 'Mediatised Worlds': Non-Mediacentric Media and Communication Research as a Challenge," 43-44.

[118] Nick Couldry, *Media Rituals: A Critical Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 2.

indicative of significant social change and representative of, as Everett contests, the emergence of a new cultural dominant. Everett's language choice is reminiscent of Williams' concepts of dominant, emergent, and residual cultures. According to Williams, the dominant culture is the hegemonic, primary understanding of a culture, while emergent new cultural formations can challenge the dominant.[119] In some cases, emergent cultures are incorporated by the dominant culture in order to control them. Williams further explains that this domination is often welcomed by the emergent cultures as this incorporation is interpreted as a form of acceptance.[120] This concept is useful for understanding how the aesthetic remediation of user-produced texts and aesthetics is not simply a question of visual appropriation, but has far greater ideological considerations and can work to naturalize relationships between media forms, their producers, and their users.

Bourdieu's concept of habitus provides a similarly useful framework for understanding how these relationships are constructed and maintained. According to Bourdieu, habitus is "embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history."[121] At the same time, habitus also produces history by producing "individual and collective practices."[122] In other words, habitus is a structuring structure that is dynamic and open-ended—an unconscious representation of history that constantly reinforces itself by shaping or informing social actions until certain actions and relationships become commonly accepted as a "natural" part of a society and its culture.

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[119] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 121-27.

[120] Ibid., 121-24

[121] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Polity, 1990), 56.

[122] Ibid., 82.

The concept of habitus provides context for understanding the use, status, and commonly held beliefs of media, as all are informed by and in turn inform the habitus. It furthermore provides insight into how the historical, technological, and sociocultural development of television allows it to be constructed as an ideological dominant.

This theoretical and analytical framework informs the research questions and research methodology outlined below, as well as the analysis of aesthetic remediation between television and digital, user-produced media in the following chapters. It provides the background for an understanding of aesthetic remediation as a process of exchange within a media ensemble that not only affects media production, but also helps shape the understanding of these media in society.

1.3 Research Questions and Goals

The following research questions are designed to understand the cultural significance of the aesthetics of user-produced media, detail television's aesthetic remediation thereof, and explore the ramifications of this appropriation in relation to the democratization of media production. As previously discussed, the working hypothesis for these research questions will be that the aesthetic remediation of user-produced texts provides the institution of television with distinct ideological benefits, providing it with the guise of democratization while simultaneously reasserting its position as a hegemonic cultural dominant. Television's successful adaption to digital media's challenge to its dominance and subversion of its democratic and revolutionary potential, it will be argued, can be seen in television's appropriation and use of grassroots media. Case studies of two media forms—reality-based media such as news and "diversionary" reality entertainment as well as animated media—will establish the historic development of television as a cultural dominant, the development of user-produced forms, the communicative value of

the aesthetics of these forms and, finally, the remediation between television and user-produced iterations of these textual forms. The information gathered through these case studies will then be used as a starting point for a larger discussion that examines the relationship between mass media and user/producers and how that relationship impacts the supposed democratization of media production made possible by digital media such as the Internet.

1.3.1 Television as an Ideological Dominant

How has the historical development of television and televisual forms constructed or reified television as a cultural and ideological dominant?

To assume that television has achieved a position as "both forum and ideological enforcer"[123] would be as problematic as assuming that digital media democratize media production. Thus, an historical examination of the technological and cultural development of television before the introduction of digital media such as the Internet is a necessary first step in examining not only television's role in Western society, but also the later relationship between television and user-produced media. One of the most important elements in this discussion will be the establishment of television as a centralized, hierarchical, "one-to-many" mass medium as opposed to a more democratic, decentralized, participatory, "two-way" medium even though the technology could be used in such a manner. The case studies in chapters 2 and 3 will review the technological and industrial development of the medium and the development of reality media and animation, in order to demonstrate how the ideology of television manifests itself in the production process. These examinations will contextualize television's development to

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[123] Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, 32.

establish how it fulfils a particular, hegemonic role that enables it to act as a central source for and determinant of information, social issues, and cultural forms. Furthermore, if aesthetics have significant social value and meaning, as discussed above, then the aesthetics of televisual media should not only convey television's social power, but also work to reinforce it. The case studies will identify the aesthetic features particular to television reality media and animation, as well as examining how these visual characteristics work to reinforce television's ideological position as a dominant medium. The use of aesthetics to convey immediacy will be a primary focus.

1.3.2 The Aesthetics of User-Produced Media

What are the aesthetics of user-produced media? What factors affect their development and how are they similar to—and different from—televisual aesthetics?

Of course, coming up with a definitive set of characteristics that describe the entirety of user-produced media is a difficult, if not impossible, task. However, by examining a range of these digital media, it is possible to identify trends that characterize a number of these texts. As already suggested, user-produced media often display a "degraded" visual quality, but how this manifests is multivariate and often dependent upon the type of text (e.g., reality, citizen journalism, animation) being produced. The case studies of reality and animated media texts will identify specific aesthetic markers of user-produced media, and discuss the relationship between these aesthetics and the notion of immediacy. They will also be considered in relation to televisual aesthetics. As Manovich asserts, "We may compare new media and old media such as print, photography, or television… We may also ask about similarities and differences in the

material properties of each medium and how these affect their aesthetic possibilities."[124]

Indeed, just as some of the structures and characteristics of television media are the result

of "material" conditions, so too are the aesthetics of user-produced media the result of

specific technological considerations such as bandwidth, available software, and the tools

and menu options software packages make available. However, user-produced aesthetics

also have sociocultural value. Comparing the aesthetic generation of immediacy in

television and user-produced media can provide insight into the relationship between

them.

1.3.3 The Role of the User/Producer and User-Produced Media

What is the role of the user/producer in the subversion (or reinforcement) of

television's hegemonic role?

As noted previously, more powerful home computers in conjunction with

broadband Internet connections have allowed those outside traditional media industries to

produce and distribute their own media products, hence the term "user/producer." The

availability of user-friendly software packages such as Adobe Flash, the increasing

availability of cell phones with image and video capture capabilities, and Internet sites

such as YouTube, Current.com, or CNN iReport allow these amateur producers to create

their own multimedia projects and, so it is theorized, compete with established media and

thus democratize media production. However, there are several issues to be examined

which have direct impact on the previous questions raised. Gitelman, for example,

argues:

> When media are new, when their protocols are still emerging and the social,
> economic, and material relationships they will eventually express are still in

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[124] Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 47.

formation, consumption and production can be notably indistinct…. In short, the definition of new media depends intricately on the whole social context within which production and consumption get defined—and defined as distinct—rather than merely on producers and consumers themselves. This is not to diminish the role of human agents but only to describe more thoroughly where more of them stand in order to resist, as much as possible, the disavowal of underlying economic structures or cultural politics.[125]

In other words, it is not simply enough to examine the objectives of user/producers and the content of their projects; it is also necessary to understand the cultural, social, and economic environment in which user/producers operate, and how their texts are disseminated and used in a multivariate media environment. This suggests some tangential questions are necessary, such as: what is the nature of the participation and production of user/producers, what discourse is associated with their production of media, and how do mass media cater to and/or marginalize user/producers? This last question is particularly important, since digital media are positioned as a separate from "old" media such as television. Sterne, however, correctly argues that, "[b]ecause technologies do not have an existence independent of social practice, they cannot be studied in isolation from society or from one another."[126] It is thus necessary not only to examine the online actions of user/producers, but also to consider how they interact with mass media.

1.3.4 Aesthetic Remediation and the Supposed Democratization of Media Production

How has television remediated the aesthetics of user-produced media, and what are the sociocultural ramifications of this appropriation? Do user-produced media represent a cultural form independent from and subversive to mass media institutions?

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[125] Gitelman, *Always Already New*, 15.

[126] Sterne, "Bourdieu, Technique, and Technology," 385.

While undertaking her own historical examination into the introduction of new media technologies in history, Gitelman asks, "Should we be looking for a sequence of separate 'ages' with ruptures, revolutions, or paradigm shifts in between, or should we be seeing more of an evolution? A progress?"[127] So-called digital evangelists assume that a rupture from the previous, mass mediated age has taken or will soon take place, but the cultural exchange between television and digital media problematizes this assumption. Caldwell, for example, notes that television's interaction with the Internet is altering the definition of a television text.[128] This question directly addresses the evolution of the televisual text in the digital era. Previous research has already examined the changing aesthetics of television news and suggests that many of the graphic changes to news programming are an attempt to mimic the appearance and information-dense aesthetic of web pages. Similarly, one of the goals of this dissertation is to analyze specific examples of ways in which television production has adapted to the introduction of digital media, specifically in the form of the aesthetic remediation, and suggest the possible ideological benefits of this appropriation. While it is difficult to establish a direct causal relationship, developing and investigating possible theories for the changes in television aesthetics through the examination of specific examples in the case studies is necessary for a greater understanding of the ever-developing relationship between television and digital media.

This last question is the core of this dissertation. The research conducted in the case studies to address the previous three questions will provide the background information necessary to evaluate the claims by digital media advocates such as Jenkins,

[127] Gitelman, *Always Already New*, 1.

[128] Caldwell, "Convergence Television: Aggregating Form and Repurposing Content in the Culture of Conglomeration," 51.

Negroponte, Gilder and others that digital media are inherently democratizing, revolutionary, and represent a direct challenge to centralized mass media. Put simply, is there a democratization of media production through user/producers' use of digital media and the Internet that threatens the power and even existence of television, or does television's aesthetic remediation demonstrate a savvy capability to react, assimilate, and contain the subversive potential of user-produced media?

1.4 Research Methodology

Answering the research questions outlined above requires an examination of a broad array of topics including the technological development of television and digital media, the aesthetic characteristics of mass and user-produced texts, and their sociocultural meanings. One method capable of incorporating these diverse elements into a coherent examination is a "media archaeology" approach. Geert Lovink describes media archaeology as "a methodology, a hermeneutic reading of the 'new' against the grain of the past, rather than a telling of the history of technologies from past to present."[129] Gitelman, whose own method "resembles and appreciates" media archaeology, argues that this approach reads media into history and thus has the advantage of "a built-in refusal of teleology, of narrative explanations that smack structurally of the impositions of metahistory."[130] Indeed, the theoretical and analytical framework outlined above emphasizes enforcing a separation from established teleology and narratives about the media forms in question while simultaneously recognizing how these media have operated *in* history.

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[129] Geert Lovink, *My First Recession* (Rotterdam: V_2/NAi Publishers, 2003), 11.

[130] Gitelman, *Always Already New*, 11.

These case studies are, on one hand, an historical analysis of television's use of reality and animated content and, on the other, a semiotic analysis of the aesthetics of user- and mass-produced media. The combination of these approaches avoids a strictly chronological narrative about media technologies and users and instead allows the kind of sociocultural study that can illuminate the relationship between media, culture, and society, and investigate the democratizing potential of new media. The media forms chosen for the case studies were selected because of their availability and popularity, and for their similarities and differences from each other. The selection of specific texts for aesthetic analysis is a difficult issue. Writing about the development of early animation, Donald Crafton asks, "How are we to assimilate those thousands of cartoons produced by dozens of animators?"[131] That question becomes exponentially more difficult when one considers the millions of producers and texts on television and on the Internet. Gitelman notes a similar problem, suggesting that choosing "singular examples from the World Wide Web in order to support claims about the Web or digital culture as a whole is a lot like manufacturing one's own evidence, minting one's own coin" and suggests instead that it is necessary to "take a longer view, to focus on tools, methods, and protocols rather than the dubious exemplarity of Web pages themselves."[132] That is the approach taken here; rather than selecting a handful of user-produced texts and television programming for comparison, a large number of shows, clips, and animated projects, both on television and on popular sites that offer multiple user-produced texts from multiple user/producers such as iReport.com, YouTube, and Newgrounds.com were viewed. Crafton, in

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[131] Donald Crafton, *Before Mickey: The Animated Film 1898-1928* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 259.

[132] Gitelman, *Always Already New*, 130.

answering his own question about how to "assimilate" thousands of texts suggests that "[p]erhaps the very uniformity of the product can aid us."[133] This approach seems reasonable here as well. It allows for the identification, outlining, and description of various aesthetic trends and characteristics common to a number of these media without falling into the trap of trying to compose a comprehensive list of all of their aesthetic features. In some cases, specific texts and elements are mentioned in the case studies, but are included as examples to illustrate a point rather than offered as exemplary forms.

To establish the sociocultural meaning of these aesthetics, the application of what Furniss refers to as a "contextual approach of the study of aesthetics" is applied. She argues that it is necessary to understand the historical, economic, social, technological, and industrial context of the production of a media text.[134] In other words, the aesthetics of a media project are not simply the result of any of these elements alone, but rather the combination of these factors. The design and production of Flash animation on the Web, for example, is certainly impacted by the Adobe Flash software and the tools and menu options it provides, but it is also informed by the historical development of animation. In many ways, the case studies are an entry point into an investigation of the democratizing potential of user-produced media rather than an empirical investigation of a specific project.

One possible critique to this method is that there is a lack of specific ethnographic research such as interviews. However, Burgess and Green argue that such methods make research more about how media operate "as a part of the lived experience of the research participants" rather than about how media user-produced media operates in the

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[133] Crafton, *Before Mickey: The Animated Film 1898-1928*, 259.

[134] Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 7.

sociocultural context of "broader media and technological change."[135] Indeed, such an

approach would have resulted in a vastly different focus, one that informed about what

people *think* about the democratization of media production rather than the actual media

environment. While ethnographic research from other scholars is frequently included in

the analysis here, it too is simply included for elaboration. In sum, this dissertation takes

a decidedly theoretical approach, but this approach is necessary to problematize

assumptions about the democratizing nature of user-produced media.

1.5 A Note on Terminology

Gitelman notes that "one of the burdens of modernity seems to be the tendency to

essentialize or grant agency to technology" that leads to the propensity to "cede to

[media] a history that is more powerfully theirs than ours."[136] This "burden" is one of the

fallacies that can lead to an unquestioned belief in the power for digital media to

democratize media production and shift media and social power toward individuals. It is

evident in Gilder's statement that computers (rather than users) will bring down the

broadcast television industry. Statements such as these are indicative of the logical

fallacy of technological determinism and marginalize or ignore the actions of people as

well as relevant sociocultural, political, and economic contextualization. Though his

theories will also often be questioned here, one of Jenkins' most positive contributions is

an interpretation of the term "convergence" that eschews solely technological

perspectives and reinserts the actions of individuals into the discussion of media

production and use.

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[135] Burgess and Green, *YouTube*, 9.

[136] Gitelman, *Always Already New*, 2.

Avoiding a technological deterministic approach is necessary for any analysis of media, including this dissertation. References made here to "television's remediation" and other such "actions" are not meant to indicate that television as a medium has a particular agency. To do so would be just as misguided as assigning digital media an inherent power of their own. These phrases instead reference those within the television industry—media owners, broadcasters, producers, and so forth—who control the technological, economic, and discursive development of television and thus have significant influence in shaping the cultural understanding of television.[137] Similarly, references to the "power" or "enforcing" role of television do not mean to suggest these are fundamental characteristics of the medium, but rather refer to the constructed role of television in society, one that is informed by history and the actions of television producers and audiences. This perspective aims to avoid the essentialization of television and digital media and instead understand how these media operate in, influence, and are shaped by society which, as discussed above, is a foundational part of the theoretical framework that guides this research.

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[137] While it is important to avoid the issue of technological determinism, it is also important to note that there are national, regional, and local variations in the structure of the institution of television, just as the motivations, desires, and factors that influence the decisions of those within the television industry are varied. Certainly one of those forces is economic—that is, political economy influences media and cultural production and, therefore, aesthetics. A large body of work has well addressed this relationship. A small but influential list includes, for example, Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981), Douglas Kellner, *Media Spectacle* (London: Routledge, 2003), Michael Curtain and Thomas Streeter, "Media," in *Culture Works: The Political Economy of Culture*, ed. Richard Maxwell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), James R. Compton, *The Integrated News Spectacle: A Political Economy of Cultural Performance* (New York: P. Lang, 2004).

This dissertation does not specifically address that relationship, but is intended to be a companion to those discussions. In other words, it works from a cultural studies perspective to augment—rather than delegitimize—scholarly works that employ a political economy perspective. In many ways, this document reflects and critiques the homogeneity of the language of scholarly discourse that sets up a dichotomies of "old vs. new" and "mass vs. grassroots" that seemingly constructs television as a monolithic force while simultaneously assuming all user/producers are attempting to destabilize the power of mass media without any serious consideration of the true motivation behind their production of media texts.

1.6 Chapter Overview

As previously suggested, two case studies provide the basis for the analysis of the democratic or revolutionary potential of user-produced media. Chapter 2 is a case study on "liveness, immediacy, and the 'real'" and includes examinations of television news media, reality TV, web camera or "webcam" sites on the Internet, citizen journalism, and commentary-style video web logs or "vlogs." The connection between liveness, immediacy, and the construction of social "reality" is the primary focus of this chapter. It begins with an historical examination of the link between television and immediacy, arguing that while live broadcast was once a technological necessity, the use of the term today "confuses a historical period in the technological development of television, an ideological promise of television as live or real, and a particular televisual aesthetic." That is followed by an examination of the aesthetic characteristics that constantly reinforce television's essential-but-constructed liveness, and how liveness has become, to quote Gripsrud, "fundamental to television as an *ideological* apparatus."[138] The second section of the chapter consists of a similar historic and aesthetic evaluation of user-produced reality forms of the Web, as well as discourse that positions these user-produced forms as "better" and "more real" than television media. This idea is problematized through the discussion of the appearance of user-produced reality content on television, in which it is argued that the historical and cultural linkage between television, immediacy, and "realness" allows the television industry to effectively combat the challenge user/producers supposedly represent.

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[138] Jostein Gripsrud, "Television, Broadcasting, Flow: Key Metaphors in TV Theory," in *The Television Studies Book*, ed. Christine Geraghty and David Lusted (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 19-20. Emphasis in original.

Chapter 3 contains the second case study on animation, a form selected for two specific reasons. Outside of a handful of dedicated and talented scholars such as Furniss, Crafton, and Paul Wells, to name a few, most media academics have paid little attention to animation—particularly Web animation forms such as Flash cartoons. This chapter is one attempt to correct this oversight. At the same time, animation—a form often focused on fantasy, creativity, and imagination—offers a unique contrast to the discussion of reality media in Chapter 2. This chapter begins with an examination of the development of various animation techniques and aesthetics throughout history, from 17th century "magic lanterns" to film studio shorts from the first half of the twentieth century, to television animation of the following decades. Rather than being a simple historical account, this section focuses on the cultural interpretation of animation and traces its development from motion picture precursor to, in the words of long-time Warner Brothers animation director Chuck Jones, "crap" television for children.[139] This leads to a discussion of Flash animation or "Flashimation"—a form of animation specifically intended for distribution on the Internet. As with reality media, Flashimation is often presented as a new cultural form that is more democratizing than television animation with the potential to revolutionize animation production. The aesthetics of Flashimation, which are described in detail, play a significant role in the projection of this idea which again relies on the projection of a form of immediacy. The final section of this chapter, however, demonstrates how many of the aesthetic features of Flashimation are actually rooted in "cultural filters" that stem from television, which both problematizes the notion

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[139] Jason Mittell, "The Great Saturday Morning Exile: Scheduling Cartoons on Television's Periphery in the 1960s," in *Prime Time Animation: Television Animation and American Culture*, ed. Carol A. Stabile and Mark Harrison (New York: Routledge, 2003), 42.

that Flashimation is a new cultural form, and allows television to easily remediate the aesthetics of user-produced animation.

Chapter 4 returns to the concepts of habitus, the dominant and emergent, and the myth of the mediated centre in order to elaborate upon the sociocultural ramifications of the aesthetic remediation investigated in the case studies in Chapters 2 and 3. While other possible explanations for television's appropriation of user-produced media and aesthetics—such as economic considerations—are discussed, this chapter ultimately suggests that, intentionally or unintentionally, aesthetic remediation also has a distinct cultural effect, one that allows television to retain its role as a cultural authority and ideological force while simultaneously appearing more interactive, participatory, and democratic, effectively undercutting the subversive potential of user-produced media. In addition, aesthetic remediation positions television as an authority over user-produced content as well by suggesting it will present only the "best" the Web has to offer.

Chapter 5 acts as a counter-point to Chapter 4 and asks if, despite television's successful adaptation to digital media, user-produced forms can every truly be democratizing or revolutionary. It offers the concept of "counter-public spheres" as an alternative to the "emergent culture" approach "digital evangelists" often take in relation to digital media. The counter-public concept offers several advantages in that it avoids both the traps of technological determinism—instead placing emphasis on the actions and participation of individuals and groups—and also eschews grandiose notions such as Benjamin's *Urvergangenheit* in favour of a more realistic understanding of the relationship between a mass mediated public sphere and marginalized groups. Media ensembles and the need for a non-mediacentric approach are again highlighted. The

chapter concludes with suggestions on how to apply the concepts discussed through this

dissertation to future research on alternative and user-produced media, as well as renewed

calls to avoid assumptions about the inherent democratic potential of digital media, as

these suppositions can actually be detrimental to their revolutionary possibilities.

2 CASE STUDY: LIVENESS, IMMEDIACY, AND THE "REAL"

As the previous chapter demonstrates, digital media—especially the Internet—
have been frequently heralded for both their creative possibilities and their
democratizing, potentially revolutionary nature, narrowing the gap between users and
producers, and allowing for new forms of production.[1] One such technology is the web
camera or webcam, a simple image-capturing device connected to a computer that allows
a user to share still images or, increasingly common, live streaming video, either through
instant messaging programs such as Skype[2] or Windows Live Messenger.[3] As webcams
became less expensive and more popular, there was an increasing amount of discourse
about the ability for webcams to allow users to cheaply and easily create their own media
products, essentially transforming a formerly passive audience into new media
user/producers and Internet "stars."

A rash of webcam sites offering unfettered and unaltered glimpses into the daily
lives of their producer-stars began appearing on the World Wide Web in the mid-1990s,
with early and notable entries including Jennicam from Jennifer Ringley and anacam
from Ana Voog. These sites claimed to offer an unparalleled glimpse into "real life."
Michele White suggests that Ringley "renders her webcams as real by using the tag-line
'life, online.'"[4] Webcams were positioned as being more capable of representing and

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[1] Lunenfeld, *Snap to Grid: A User's Guide to Digital Arts, Media, and Cultures*, 37, Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 119-20.

[2] Skype is an Internet text, voice/audio, and video communication program available for free download. The program also allows users to call mobile or landline phones for a small fee. For more information, see http://www.skype.com.

[3] See http://download.live.com/?sku=messenger.

[4] Michele White, "Television and Internet Differences by Design: Rendering Liveness, Presence, and Lived Space," *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 12, no. 3 (2006): 347-50.

even projecting realness by providing viewers with a superior level of accessibility and presence than other media, including television. These characteristics, coupled with the Internet-aided ability for those outside established media structures to "broadcast" themselves were supposed to represent to a "media takeover" that would crack the dominance of established mass media. However, as Mark Andrejevic notes, existing media were unthreatened.[5] Though Ringley did receive some attention from mass media, her site and others like it eventually came to be regarded as mere Web-based curiosities rather than revolutionary user-produced media creations.

That said, user-produced videos have become an established media form, both on the Internet and, increasingly, on television. Many of these videos, called video web logs or "vlogs", are posted on sites such as LiveVideo.com or YouTube.com, the latter of which features the tagline "Broadcast Yourself." These videos sometimes feature helpful advice, but other times resemble diary-style direct address confessionals in which people discuss details of their life. Other user-produced postings to YouTube include displays of skills and talents—the performance of a particularly difficult piece on guitar, or a collection of skateboarding stunts—or candid, often humorous home videos (including some clips of when the aforementioned stunts go wrong). In addition, modern, easily portable digital still and video cameras have led to an increase in citizen journalism. Users with Internet-ready mobile phones, for example, can capture video of an event and post it to YouTube or Facebook[6] in a matter of seconds. These videos have become a staple of news broadcasts, especially 24-hour news stations in the US such as CNN, CNN

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[5] Andrejevic, *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*, 62.

[6] Facebook, available at http://www.facebook.com is a social networking site that allows users, among other things, to post digital images and videos, and share those videos with their online "friends."

Headline News, MSNBC, and Fox News. Most recently, pundit-style direct-address commentary recorded on webcam by at-home users has been increasingly common on "user-generated" websites such as iReport.com. Much like Ringley's Jennicam site, iReport attempts to position the videos on this site as unmediated "realness" because the content is from, or features, "real people." Some of these videos have also been featured on mass media channels. For example, selected videos from the iReport website, which is actually operated by CNN, receive airplay on the news network's corresponding *iReport* segment.

In all of these examples, discourse surrounding the "real" or reality is prevalent and implies a struggle over which medium—television or digital media—is the most capable of representing reality. All of these webcam sites, from early examples such as Jennicam to more recent examples such as iReport.com, position themselves as an improvement over the mediated representations featured on "old" media such as television. Tara McPherson suggests rhetoric from executives within the digital media industry surrounding the Internet and television in the late 1990s presented the Web as "a 'better' version of television, stressing particular aspects of the medium that illustrate its superiority to television while simultaneously linking the two media in a seemingly natural convergence."[7] White expands upon McPherson's observation, and suggests this talk implicitly ties the Web to the issue of liveness. For example, she discusses how Ringley "distinguishes her own project from reality television and renders her webcams as real by…indicating that she keeps 'Jennicam alive', and noting that 'seven strangers

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[7] Tara McPherson, "Reload: Liveness, Mobility, and the Web," in *The Visual Culture Reader: Second Edition*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (New York: Routledge, 2002), 458.

picked to live in a house' paid for by MTV is not real life."[8] Ringley's comments echo

most proponents of the Internet, who argue that the Web's version of liveness is similar

to, but better than, television's version.[9] This position reflects that offered by Jay David

Bolter and Richard Grusin in their discussion of "remediation," a term they use to

describe the representation of one medium within another.[10] Bolter and Grusin suggest

that remediation can take several forms, each giving the medium doing the remediating a

certain cultural purchase. In some cases, producers working in one medium want to

emphasize difference with another medium, rather than minimizing it.[11] In short, they

want to suggest that their chosen medium is like another, but somehow better. Ringley

and those who espouse a similar viewpoint are expressly using this tactic through the

articulation of "a set of distinctions in order to indicate that their medium is preferable to

other technologies and genres."[12] With online media, there is recognition of television's

historical role in the primary representation of reality in a pre-Internet age, but there is

also a clear delineation of the Web as a better, less mediated, more accurate

representation of reality rendered in real time.

And yet, television's position of dominance has remained relatively unthreatened

by this supposed new media revolution. In fact, the use of webcam and mobile phone

videos on television suggests that, rather than being vulnerable to user-produced digital

media texts, television is quite successful at adapting to and assimilating these texts. If

[8] White, "Television and Internet Differences by Design: Rendering Liveness, Presence, and Lived Space," 347.

[9] Ibid., 348.

[10] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 45.

[11] Ibid., 46.

[12] White, "Television and Internet Differences by Design: Rendering Liveness, Presence, and Lived Space," 348.

the Internet's version of liveness is supposedly superior, what allows television to adapt

so easily and successfully? To understand this, an historical investigation into the nature

of the term liveness and its relationship to television is necessary, and will demonstrate

why this term is insufficient for understanding the current state of remediation between

reality and news formats on television and the Internet.

2.1 Television and Liveness

Defining the term liveness is seemingly a relatively simple task. In her seminal

essay "The Concept of Live Television: Ontology as Ideology", Jane Feuer states that the

most basic definition of liveness is an event broadcast when it occurs, a capability

television has that other media, such as cinema, are unable to replicate.[13] Åsa Kroon

Lundell accurately states that the term "is a frequently used term in media studies,

stressing a medium's (most often television's) basic ideology of connecting us to events

as they happen. We get to experience reality 'as it is.'"[14] From this statement, it is easy to

understand why televisual liveness has been the subject of renewed interest in recent

years, coinciding with the dramatically increased popularity of reality media. Stephen

Heath and Gillian Skirrow argue convincingly that television, because of its "electronic

nature", is able to position itself as providing "absolute presence," thus allowing the

medium to suggest that everything it broadcasts is live despite the fact that very little

television programming actually is live. Liveness has evolved from a technological

characteristic of television into something that is somehow intrinsic, fundamental, and

particular to television.

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[13] Jane Feuer, "The Concept of Live Television: Ontology as Ideology," in *Regarding Television: Critical Approaches: An Anthology*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, 2003), 14.

[14] Åsa Kroon Lundell, "The Design and Scripting of 'Unscripted' Talk: Liveness Versus Control in a TV Broadcast Interview," *Media, Culture & Society* 31, no. 2 (2009): 272.

2.1.1 A History of Televisual Liveness

This association of television with liveness is due in part to the historical development of the medium. As Jérôme Bourdon states, liveness should only be understood as a "development within media history as a whole. Media technological history at least partially reflects an effort to reduce the gap between events and media users. It is intimately linked to a history of communication as speed[.]"[15] Liveness has always been one of the key aesthetic values of television, and television producers and broadcasters work very hard to construct the image of television as the closest medium to the "real."[16] Lynn Spigel's writings on television history demonstrate this well. She describes an article written in a 1912 issue of the periodical *The Independent* which predicts a future home theatre, with images and sound instantly transmitted through telephone wires, that would operate like a magic window through which distant actors and scenes could be viewed. The window would also offer "vistas of reality" far superior to the grainy, colourless images of early 20th century cinema and would be inexpensive enough to be in every home, allowing people to "go to the theater without leaving the sitting room."[17] The language of the article is worth noting. Despite being written two decades before the development of the first technologies that would become the modern understanding of television, there is an emphasis on both liveness—in the form of instant transmission of events—and reality. The comparison to cinema again recalls Bolter and Grusin's discussion of remediation; the suggestion here is that this future technology would remediate elements of cinema while presenting a superior image and

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[15] Bourdon, "Live Television Is Still Alive: On Television as an Unfulfilled Promise," 192.

[16] Gripsrud, "Television, Broadcasting, Flow: Key Metaphors in TV Theory," 19.

[17] Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*, 99.

representation of reality. Spigel notes that, despite the rudimentary description of television technology, this 1912 article "incorporates some of the basic social and cultural meanings that television would have for the public in the 1950s."[18] Spigel's emphasis on cultural and social meanings is well placed, as liveness has become less of a technical term and instead representative of a constantly reinforced socio-cultural understanding of the medium and industry of television that persists today.

The concept of liveness emphasizes time and temporality which, Mimi White argues, "distracts from consideration of the medium's spatial articulations."[19] This elevation of time is explained by Jostein Gripsrud, who states that "the capacity for simultaneity between a 'real' event and its transmission and reception as audio-visual representation is central among television's *differentia specifica*, its specificity as a medium."[20] Similarly, Mary Ann Doane suggests that "time, present-ness, and a 'celebration of the instantaneous' are important aspects of television's functioning."[21] In the late 1940s, as television was developing into a viable mass medium, it was faced with two distinct but related problems. First, technological limitations at the time meant that television was *forced* to be a live medium, as recording content for later transmission would not be become practical for a few more years. Second, content was relatively limited. To fill this programming void, producers poached a number of familiar formats from other media. As Spigel explains, "radio, burlesque, vaudeville, film, the circus,

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[18] Ibid., 99.

[19] White, "The Attractions of Television: Reconsidering Liveness," 79.

[20] Gripsrud, "Television, Broadcasting, Flow: Key Metaphors in TV Theory," 18.

[21] Qtd. in White, "Television and Internet Differences by Design: Rendering Liveness, Presence, and Lived Space," 343-44.

legitimate theater, and the nightclub all provided materials for producers."[22] William

Boddy makes a similar observation, noting that television was considered to be "a unique

synthesis of the immediacy of the live theatrical performance, the space-conquering

powers of radio, and the visual strategies of the motion picture."[23] Many of these forms,

especially theatre, vaudeville, and burlesque, are dependent upon the presence of a live

audience. Even radio, a broadcast medium, was originally dominated by live

programming in the form of comedy, variety, and music, often performed before a live

audience.

Reliance on these familiar genres and technological limitations that prevented the

ability to record content worked to establish television as a live medium. While the

situation comedy or "sitcom" made its debut early in television's broadcast history with

the premier of *The Goldbergs* in 1949, television of the 1950s in North America was

dominated by variety shows and live anthology dramas produced in New York and

intended to rival the quality of theatre.[24] Elana Levine claims that liveness and quality

were intricately related, as projecting liveness "has long been a key way in which certain

kinds of television programming have been culturally elevated over other kinds of

programming."[25] Vaudeville and, to a lesser extent, burlesque and nightclub

performances, were the antecedent of variety shows such as *Texaco Star Theater* (1948)

and *Your Show of Shows* (1950).[26] However, it was the "legitimate" theatre that served as

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[22] Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*, 137.

[23] William Boddy, *Fifties Television: The Industry and Its Critics* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 80.

[24] Sconce, "What If?: Charting Television's New Textual Boundaries," 96.

[25] Elana Levine, "Distinguishing Television: The Changing Meanings of Television Liveness," *Media, Culture & Society* 30, no. 3 (2008): 394.

[26] Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*, 138.

the inspiration for television's live anthology drama series, including such shows as *Kraft Television Theater* (1947), *Philco Television Playhouse* (1948), *Goodyear Television Playhouse* (1951), and *Playhouse 90* (1956). The live anthology era is often traditionally referred to as the "Golden Age" of television, during which television became recognized as a medium with a strong, even positive, cultural impact. Television critic Gilbert Seldes referred to these anthologies as the "top of the prestige pyramid of all television drama" and believed these shows to be "the most honorable accomplishments of television[.]"[27]

Indeed, rather than viewing the live nature of these shows as a restriction, broadcasting live offered certain advantages. The time from "script to screen" was minimized, allowing more time for last minute changes to please the show's (usually lone) sponsor. In addition, the visual quality of live shows was usually not directly compared to the superior production value of motion pictures.[28] The live anthology drama instead established a *televisual* aesthetic which embodied liveness and further differentiated television from other media. The "prestige aesthetic" of live anthologies served a public relations purpose as well, as it was easier to position live programming as being "in the public interest" since live programming was associated with "high-brow" entertainment such as theatre and prevented the airwaves from being "simply a conduit for grade B film genres."[29] Most importantly, live broadcasting had decidedly political benefits for the major networks; it was used as a justification for centralized television networks and allowed the three major networks in the United States to develop large,

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[27] Qtd. in Boddy, *Fifties Television: The Industry and Its Critics*, 85.

[28] Robert Vianello, "The Power Politics of 'Live' Television," *Journal of Film and Video* 37, no. 3 (1985): 33-34.

[29] Ibid., 33.

nationwide affiliate empires.[30] The absence of recorded programs available through

syndication or similar structures meant that, to carry popular programming, local stations

had to become affiliates of ABC, NBC, or CBS. While building these networks was

naturally a sound business decision, it also had marked cultural implications. Under this

system, independent and local productions were effectively limited during television's

Golden Age, and television was cemented as a national social institution and a definitive

source of culturally significant information and entertainment. As Robert Vianello states,

"'Live' television must be ultimately understood within this political context—the

domination of centralized power over culture in the period of history dominated by

television."[31] Originally chosen because of the technological need to broadcast live, the

live anthology drama established television as a source to which the general public could

refer when in search of "good content." Golden Age programming elevated television's

cultural status and, in turn, television began to dictate what was culturally significant.

Variety shows and anthology dramas often emphasized their live nature for this

very reason. Live programming, CBS executives claimed in 1957, was "the real magic of

television."[32] Variety shows often featured in-studio audiences, which were intended to

reinforce the sensation of being a part of a live audience. *Texaco Star Theater* host Milton

Berle, for example, would often use direct address in a manner that would conflate the in-

studio and at-home audiences. Even those anthology dramas that did not feature studio

audiences such as *Shirley Temple's Storybook* (1958) positioned the television viewing

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[30] Martin McLoone, "Boxed In? The Aesthetics of Film and Television " in *Big Picture, Small Screen: The Relations between Film and Television*, ed. John Hill and Martin McLoone (Luton, UK: University of Luton Press, 1996), 84.

[31] Vianello, "The Power Politics of 'Live' Television," 39.

[32] Qtd. in Boddy, *Fifties Television: The Industry and Its Critics*, 126.

audience at home as a part of a live audience. *Storybook*, for instance, would feature host Shirley Temple directly addressing the camera, providing a synopsis of the classic fairy tale to be featured during the episode. Afterwards, a series of curtains would be pulled back, displaying the opening scene of the story, which Temple would either narrate or, on some occasions, perform. Other anthology dramas may not have featured direct address, but often included extended soliloquies which, as Vianello states, were "not specifically coded as 'televised live,' but rather borrowed from the theater as the social institution of 'live performance.'"[33] This is an important distinction; television during this Golden Age was not yet claiming to present "the real" as much as presenting a form of live entertainment.

Indeed, tactics such as addressing the audience and the use of stage devices such as a curtain or soliloquy allowed broadcasters to idealize television as "a better approximation of live entertainment than any previous form of technological reproduction."[34] Of the media that served as an inspiration for early television programming, only cinema lacks an element of instantaneousness. Live television anthologies purposefully highlighted this difference, working to re-create the experience of seeing a stage play in person and establishing the live program as "the very definition of television."[35] It was this difference that allowed television producers to claim superiority over cinema.[36]

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[33] Vianello, "The Power Politics of 'Live' Television," 36.

[34] Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*, 138.

[35] Feuer, "The Concept of Live Television: Ontology as Ideology," 14.

[36] To further highlight the role of remediation in the establishment of television's early history, the medium was often also described by television producers as theatre, but better. While the anthology format did attempt to simulate the experience of going to the theatre, the fact that television was able to offer multiple viewpoints and close-ups of the actors and actresses allowed television executives to claim that

The anthology format was short-lived on television for a variety of reasons, however. In addition to the technological advances that made it easier to record shows, allowing for editing and later broadcast, cost-cutting considerations, such as moving away from temporary sets and large, short-term casts often featured both on variety shows and anthology dramas and towards standing sets and permanent ensemble casts, doomed the genre.[37] In a way, live entertainment was responsible for its own demise. Once the national broadcasters had established large affiliate networks, thanks in large part to an insistence upon live programming, they began to look for other ways to consolidate power and influence. Economic considerations were given increasing weight as television shifted from a single-sponsor model to spot advertisements, which allowed broadcasters more direct control over programs.[38] In the late 1950s, all three major networks in the United States, ABC, NBC, and CBS, steadily reduced the number of live anthology dramas in their primetime schedules, shifting to Hollywood-produced, filmed, action-adventure telefilms such as Westerns and police dramas. By the 1959-1960 broadcast season, only one live anthology drama remained.[39] Even so, television's capacity for liveness was not forgotten; as production gradually moved away from live broadcasts to Hollywood-based filmed programming, there was—and remains—a contradictory and renewed focus upon television's liveness.

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television offered, as Spigel states, "not just a view but rather, *a perfect view*" (emphasis in original). See Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*, 140.

[37] Sconce, "What If?: Charting Television's New Textual Boundaries," 96.

[38] William Boddy, "Operation Frontal Lobes Versus the Living Room Toy: The Battle over Programme Control in Early Television," *Media, Culture & Society* 9 (1987): 347-48.

[39] Boddy, *Fifties Television: The Industry and Its Critics*, 187.

2.1.2 Contemporary Television's Application of Liveness

Television's current emphasis on liveness does not centre upon television's capabilities for providing live entertainment, since most programming is now recorded, but rather upon television's ability to present "the immediate, the direct, the spontaneous, the real" in an effort to elevate television's representation of "realness."[40] As stated above, a sense of simultaneity and spontaneity is important to television's cultural specificity, but as television increasingly relies upon recorded material in order to produce better, more polished programming, it runs the risk of deemphasizing its image as a medium that offers "vistas of reality" and exposing its true purpose—the gathering of as large an audience as possible to be sold to advertisers. As Levine states, Feuer "famously argued that liveness is television's central myth, that assertions of liveness as the medium's essence serve to cover over the fact that all of television is deliberately constructed, and that much of it is constructed in the service of a commercial mission."[41] The current cultural understanding of televisual liveness, however, is somewhat more complicated than this statement would suggest in that it seemingly confuses a historical period in the technological development of television, an ideological promise of television as live or real, and a particular televisual aesthetic. This confusion is often exploited by the television industry in order to simultaneously construct television as more real, i.e., showing the world as it is, as well as a cultural authority. In short, it is necessary for television to convey a sense of liveness (or immediacy, as will be argued later) in order to continually reassert its place as a cultural and social dominant. The following section will briefly examine two programming formats or genres, television

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[40] Feuer, "The Concept of Live Television: Ontology as Ideology," 14.

[41] Levine, "Distinguishing Television: The Changing Meanings of Television Liveness," 394.

news and reality television, which demonstrate how a sense of liveness is conveyed and, in turn, exploited.

2.1.2.1 Television news broadcasts. As Gripsrud states, "liveness is particularly important to newscasts, since 'news' as a genre is based on getting as close to immediacy as possible."[42] He omits, however, that grounding newscasts in the present is also necessary for conveying a sense of truth. Until the early 1960s, television news was reliant upon weekly newsreels or, occasionally, locally filmed material; the ability to film original material was limited by the "meager resources of fledgling news departments."[43] Some sense of liveness was maintained through the direct address of the newscaster, a tactic similar to that used in live television anthologies and variety shows. As Vianello states, the newscaster anchors news as "live" simply by presenting it in the present.[44] However, once inexpensive video tape and cameras became widely available in the 1960s, news broadcasts increasingly incorporated the news "remote" or "stake out"— sending a reporter and camera crew to the scene of some event such as a car accident, court proceeding, or political rally. The news remote, whether live or pre-recorded, continues to serve an important purpose: having a reporter at the scene of an event, even if the actual event is over, is a substitution for an actual live broadcast of the event. To enhance the sense of liveness, the on-the-scene reporter, similar to the in-studio anchor, directs his or her commentary directly to the camera and, through it, to the viewing audience.

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[42] Gripsrud, "Television, Broadcasting, Flow: Key Metaphors in TV Theory," 19.

[43] Vianello, "The Power Politics of 'Live' Television," 34.

[44] Ibid., 38.

Thus, the remote is one of the most important sources of liveness in news, giving the illusion the report is an unmediated presentation, even more so than an anchor's commentary. Bourdon suggests that this "trick" not only increases a sense of liveness or presence, but also makes the report seem more authoritative.[45] The on-the-scene report is intercut with live or "recorded live" footage, which offers viewers a break from verbal reporting and commentary and increases audience engagement.[46] Video also suggests the possibility that something spontaneous and unexpected might occur, one of the primary appeals of news coverage.[47] The remote has long been a staple of the television news report, as it not only gives the viewer a sense of seeing something as it happens, but also suggests that he or she is in the scene, enhancing the broadcast's realness.[48] The use of phrases such as "breaking news" or "this just in," during the remote heightens this sense of liveness and realism. Interestingly, the remote conveys two distinct and somewhat contradictory messages. First, reporters often justify their presence at an event by referring to the event as somehow important, historic, or otherwise significant. At the same time, having a reporter at the scene of an event also demonstrates the authoritative role television news can play, as it suggests to the viewing audience that an event is somehow important or significant simply because television news chose to cover it.

As Michael Schudson demonstrates, this demarcation of certain events as important has significant social ramifications; television news continues to act as a central institution in the evolution of modern society, taking on roles as both repository of

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[45] Bourdon, "Live Television Is Still Alive: On Television as an Unfulfilled Promise," 188.

[46] Lunt, "Liveness in Reality Television and Factual Broadcasting," 331.

[47] Levine, "Distinguishing Television: The Changing Meanings of Television Liveness," 397.

[48] Lundell, "The Design and Scripting of 'Unscripted' Talk: Liveness Versus Control in a TV Broadcast Interview," 273.

public knowledge and cultural authority.[49] Specifically, the television camera suggests

that what is being seen is true, while the reporter and anchor indicate why the event is

important to the viewer and society. The importance is emphasized through the

development of a story or narrative; rather than simply reporting events, reporters,

anchors and pundits continually position events as part of a larger narrative, partly to

increase the dramatic impact. Neil Postman has discussed how television news regularly

builds narratives during coverage of political events, such as positioning live debates as

boxing matches, reducing them to entertaining, rather than educational, exercises.[50] Pierre

Bourdieu notes a similar trend, suggesting that the desire for an entertaining story has led

to mere talk show hosts replacing serious commentators and investigative reporters, and

resulting in a dearth of analysis, in-depth interviews, and expert discussions in favour of

"mindless talk show chatter between 'approved' and interchangeable speakers."[51]

     Liveness, it could be argued, is even more important in an era of when digital

cable and satellite systems have greatly expanded the number of available channels,

including a multitude of 24-hour cable news networks in the U.S. The current CNN news

program *The Situation Room* (2005) demonstrates the continuing value of liveness to

television news. The show, which bears the same name as a room in the White House in

which the U.S. President and intelligence staff monitor and address issues of national and

international importance, claims to be "the command center for breaking news, politics

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[49] Qtd. in Thussu, *News as Entertainment*, 8.

[50] Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Showbusiness* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 97.

[51] Pierre Bourdieu, *On Television*, trans. Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson (New York: The New Press, 1998), 2-3.

and extraordinary reports from around the world."[52] The main feature of the show's set is a large video wall composed of several screens which can either feature a different image on each, or be combined to form a larger image. Each screen image features a live video feed from one of several remotes to be featured during the broadcast, or related text and graphic information. The use of multiple remotes and screens serves two purposes. It heightens the sense of simultaneity of the show primarily by covering several events at once. At the same time, as a camera crew is in each location or event, *The Situation Room* suggests each event must be of national and/or international importance just like events dealt with in its White House *doppelgänger*. Host Wolf Blitzer acts as host, moderator, interviewer, and anchor, guiding the viewer from story/screen to interview to panel discussion and back again. His role not only puts him in a position of authority on the set—all other reporters, guests, and pundits defer to him—but his use of direct address to the camera establishes Blitzer as an authority to the audience as well. Every element of *The Situation Room*—including the sets, Blitzer's mode of address, the on-screen graphics, the narrative style, and the incorporation of remote reports—suggests the show and its reports will tell (if not dictate to) the audience which events of the day are important and worthy of discussion.

2.1.2.2 Reality TV. With industry-generated discourses of liveness working to construct television as a medium that "cannot lie" because it is capable bringing viewers "reality in the raw"[53], the introduction and continued success of the reality television or "reality TV" genre is not terribly surprising. The success of *Survivor* (2000) in the United

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[52] "Show Pages - the Situation Room - Cnn.Com," CNN,
http://www.cnn.com/CNN/Programs/situation.room/.

[53] Gripsrud, "Television, Broadcasting, Flow: Key Metaphors in TV Theory," 19-20.

States and *Big Brother*, which was a hit in several European countries starting with the Netherlands in 1999, helped cement reality TV as a genre worthy of discussion and study. Annette Hill describes reality TV or "popular factual entertainment" as a "catch-all category" which can be used to describe a large number of shows with a wide variety of formats.[54] This "catch all" status stems from the fact that what we now call reality television has a long and convoluted evolution, culminating in an amalgamation of television genres from several decades including documentaries, game shows, and soap operas.[55] Jonathan Bignell suggests that, due to this mixing of genres, which has increased in pace since the mid-to-late-1990s, recent reality television productions are moving away from a strict observational style and instead feature highly constructed environments; the goal of reality TV producers, particularly in the United States, is to develop an entertaining show for a general audience. Guiding their production is the assumption that ordinary people are more appealing to audiences than unfamiliar cultures, and that television is primarily approached as a relaxing, rather than active, activity. Thus, Bignell states, "[t]he attractions of risky activities, controversy,

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[54] Annette Hill, *Reality TV: Audiences and Popular Factual Entertainment* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 14.

[55] Though it is beyond the scope of this project to provide a detailed account here, several authors offer excellent discussions of reality television including Andrejevic, *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*, Bignell, *Big Brother: Reality TV in the Twenty-First Century*, Bradley D. Clissold, "*Candid Camera* and the Origins of Reality TV," in *Understanding Reality Television*, ed. Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn (New York: Routledge, 2004), Alison Hearn, "Hoaxing the 'Real': On the Metanarrative of Reality Television," in *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, ed. Laurie Ouellette and Susan Murray (New York: New York University Press, 2009), Hill, *Reality TV: Audiences and Popular Factual Entertainment*, Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn, "Introduction: Understanding Reality TV," in *Understanding Reality Television*, ed. Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn (New York: Routledge, 2004), Misha Kavka, *Reality Television, Affect and Intimacy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), Anna McCarthy, "Stanley Milgram, Allen Funt, and Me: Postwar Social Science and the 'First Wave' of Reality TV," in *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, ed. Laurie Ouellette and Susan Murray (New York: New York University Press, 2009), Susan Murray, "I Think We Need a New Name for It: The Meeting of Documentary and Reality TV," in *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, ed. Laurie Ouellette and Susan Murray (New York: New York University Press, 2009), Laurie Ouellette and Susan Murray, "Introduction," in *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, ed. Laurie Ouellette and Susan Murray (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

entertainment, excitement, and identification have become increasingly significant in comparison to information, argument, or specialist knowledge."[56] Other scholars have made similar observations, with Laurie Oulette and Susan Murray stating that all current reality TV programming can be linked by its "often playful look into what might be called the 'entertaining real'"[57] while Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn state that the genre puts an emphasis on "documentary as diversion"[58] rather than education.

In contrast to an older reality-based series such as the PBS show *An American Family* (1972), which adopted a direct cinema observational mode within the actual home of the Loud family, the recent wave of diversion reality programming always features scenarios and situations that are carefully fabricated by the shows' producers. For example, the premise of *Big Brother*, which involves a dozen complete strangers living together in a house with no contact with the outside world, certainly cannot be described as a "natural" situation. *Survivor* features a similar premise, but abandons the strangers in a remote, often exotic location such as the Amazonian rain forest or the Australian Outback. These two examples also include a game show element, as the "house guests" or "survivors" compete for a large cash prize; each week, the participants are gradually eliminated through a voting process until a winner is declared. Each show usually involves a series of mental and physical challenges which allow the participants to win special rewards or "immunity" from being voted off that week.

Though *Survivor* and *Big Brother* are often cited as the source of this new wave of diversionary reality programming because of their success in the United States and

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[56] Bignell, *Big Brother: Reality TV in the Twenty-First Century*, 9-10, 18-19.

[57] Ouellette and Murray, "Introduction," 5.

[58] Holmes and Jermyn, "Introduction: Understanding Reality TV," 2.

Europe respectively, earlier examples could be found on the US cable channel MTV. The

docusoap *The Real World*, which premiered in 1992, involved a group of total strangers,

with strong and often conflicting personalities, suddenly becoming roommates. Its

reality-game show cousin *Road Rules* followed in 1995. All of these programs

incorporate elements of a traditional documentary such as the inclusion of "real" people,

the frequent employment of an observational camera perspective, and the apparent lack

of a script. However, they also feature a number of elements that would seemingly

undermine their claims to reality: the participants are people who would not normally

know each other, interacting in an environment they otherwise would not be in, with a

clear ulterior motive. Despite the artificiality of these programs, scholars, producers, and

viewers refer to them as "reality programming" in large part due to their projection of

liveness. Just as with television news, the presence of the camera suggests to the audience

that what they are watching is raw, unmediated, and real.[59] In this case, the "realness" of

these programs comes from the high level of spontaneity *guaranteed*, rather than diluted,

by the carefully constructed situations. As Andrejevic states, "On the one hand, we know

all this is contrived; on the other, we seem to demand more and more punishing

contrivances in the hopes of squeezing out a bit of authenticity."[60] Here he is referring to

the actions and reactions of a reality show's participants; the circumstances might be

fabricated, but the events that derive from those circumstances are supposedly genuine.

For Andrejevic, the performance of the cast members is so important to the audience's

perception of the realism of the show that, when possible, viewers of reality game shows

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[59] Gripsrud, "Television, Broadcasting, Flow: Key Metaphors in TV Theory," 19-20, White, "Television and Internet Differences by Design: Rendering Liveness, Presence, and Lived Space," 349.

[60] Andrejevic, *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*, 197-207.

like *Big Brother* and *Survivor* work to "make good" on the show's premise of reality by working to eliminate the "actors."[61] While this might be true, this statement needs to be amended to consider the competitive nature of some shows, which makes acting, manipulation, and theatrics a potential winning strategy.

To help combat the idea of performance as strategy which can weaken reality TV's claims to the real, *Big Brother* and *Survivor* feature moments during which the contestants can directly address the camera without other participants watching, allowing them to be, in theory, completely honest. *Big Brother*, for example, features a special room called the "diary room" in which the participants discuss events within the house and share personal stories (usually at the prompting of "big brother"). Their direct address to the camera, and in turn to the television audience at home, is an attempt to project honesty and realism. Direct address is frequently used in *The Real World* as well, even though that show lacks a competitive element. Each cast member is required to discuss their interpretation of the events within the *Real World* house at the end of each week in what is referred to as a "confessional." Since then, a number of reality shows, both of the gamedoc and docusoap variety, feature similar moments of direct address. Even lifestyle or "do it yourself" (DIY) shows such as the Canadian reality series *Restaurant Makeover* (2005), in which a professional chef and an interior designer remodel a struggling restaurant and overhaul its menu, feature confessional-style moments. The goal in all cases is to project liveness, and therefore realism. Even terms like "diary" and "confessional" emphasize truth; both a diary and a confessional booth are traditionally places where people confess their desires and transgressions.

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[61] Ibid., 129.

Through the combination of observation by the camera (or multiple cameras) and diary or confessional moments, reality TV participants tend to exhibit "a thoroughly contemporary, almost 'hip', lack of squeamishness toward surveillance."[62] For these participants, the camera is as much a guarantor of realism as it is for the audience—in effect shifting the camera from a passive, observational role to a more active, constructive role. The gaze of the television camera works to confirm and validate the TV participants' reality for both the participants themselves and the audience. As Nick Couldry states, "[s]uch programmes, by affirming television as the site for watching such 'reality' footage...simply extend the ambit of media's 'naming' authority; they legitimate television as a ritual form of public surveillance."[63] Surveillance is the guarantee that the people and events being seen are real, and consequently reaffirm television as the authority in determining what is real.

Reality television producers recognize the importance of surveillance, of submission to the camera, to a show's projection of liveness and realism, and thus highlight the camera and its role in the production. The premiere episode of *Big Brother*'s first season in the United States, for example, began with host Julie Chen speaking from the show's control room. She does not begin with an introduction of that season's participants, but rather with a detailed description of the production process, including the equipment that would be used to surveil the participants:

> I'm inside one of the most sophisticated TV control rooms ever built. Behind me, twenty-eight monitors, one for each camera inside the *Big Brother* house. In less than an hour, ten people will move in, and their every action will be recorded by these cameras, believe me. There's absolutely no place to hide. We've got

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[62] Mark Andrejevic, "The Webcam Subculture and the Digital Enclosure," in *Mediaspace: Place, Scale and Culture in a Media Age*, ed. Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy (New York: Routledge, 2004), 200.

[63] Qtd. in Andrejevic, *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*, 122.

cameras in the yard, we've got cameras in both bedrooms, even this one above the toilet, and yep, one in the shower. Who would want to subject themselves to all of this? We'll find out in a few minutes. We won't miss any conversations either. Nope, sixty microphones will make sure of that.[64]

The implication is that the sheer multitude of cameras guarantees that what is eventually broadcast is real. This self-reflexive approach to production is used to position reality TV as more honest and real than documentaries, despite the obviously constructed realities and environments. Alison Hearn notes that "hoax" reality shows such as *My Big Fat Obnoxious Fiancé* and *The Joe Schmo Show*, which "feature unwitting contestants who believe they are participating in a reality show but are actually subject to an extended practical joke", demonstrate what she calls the "metanarrative" of reality TV: "television's modes of production and promotional values constitute the only 'reality' that matters."[65] This metanarrative is also evident in comments from Peter Bazalgette, a *Big Brother* producer from the UK, who states that reality TV exposes the "tricks" of documentary film makers:

> "We're completely up front about it. When we want [the contestants]…to talk about their first love, you hear Big Brother say 'hey – would you talk about your first love?', but documentary filmmakers have always manipulated their material both in the ways in which they edit it, and the ways they shoot it."[66]

Bazalgette is essentially acknowledging the inherent speciousness of reality TV, but defends it by suggesting documentary filmmakers also manipulate their material in order to construct a position or narrative. Producers of *Big Brother* described the show as a "real-life soap" because of the involvement of editing and "narrative construction."[67] Henry Jenkins similarly notes that reality shows are "edited to emphasize immediacy and

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[64] From *Big Brother* episode 1.1 (5 July 2000). Transcribed by the author.

[65] Hearn, "Hoaxing the 'Real': On the Metanarrative of Reality Television," 177.

[66] Qtd. in Holmes and Jermyn, "Introduction: Understanding Reality TV," 12.

[67] Ibid., 7-8.

spontaneity."[68] Thus, reality TV producers do indeed tease out a narrative using editing and a subjective camera, but they disguise the subjective nature of this editing by using transparency to argue for the honesty of what is being depicted.[69] In the words of Misha Kavka, "[T]he appeal of reality TV lies precisely in its performance of reality in a way that *matters*."[70] The constructed narrative helps contextualize what is being shown, allowing the audience to more easily relate to the participants, which enhances the show's entertainment value. In order to disguise this construction, however, factual television has adopted an aesthetic approach meant to exploit the cultural understanding of liveness as truth.

2.1.3 Aesthetics of Liveness on Television

As Holmes and Jermyn state "Ultimately, and importantly, it is perhaps only possible to suggest that what unites the range of programming conceivably described as 'Reality TV' is primarily its discursive, visual and technological *claim* to 'the real'."[71] That claim to the real is one shared by television news, which suggests that liveness, rather than being the providence of one particular genre, might best be understood as the result of a particular production approach adaptable to a number of televisual forms. While television's technological and historical claim to liveness has been discussed, the connection between aesthetics and liveness has been underdeveloped, usually ending with general statements that suggest video looks "more live" than film.[72] While this

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[68] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, 30.

[69] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 192, White, "Television and Internet Differences by Design: Rendering Liveness, Presence, and Lived Space," 350.

[70] Kavka, *Reality Television, Affect and Intimacy*, 23. Emphasis in original.

[71] Holmes and Jermyn, "Introduction: Understanding Reality TV," 5. Italics in original.

[72] Humm, "Real TV: Camcorders, Access and Authenticity," 230-31.

might be true, a closer examination of the aesthetics of reality television programming is required, especially in an era during which reality—including television news—is more sophisticated, constructed, and increasingly marketed as entertainment.

The notions of spontaneity and unpredictability remain important to television and its claims to liveness. Even shows that are recorded before broadcast often announce that they are taped before a live studio audience, though this particular announcement is probably more a remnant of television's early attempts to recreate the experience of live, stage entertainment as much as it is an attempt at conveying realness. Yet many television programs employ a language and aesthetic which constantly reaffirm their essential liveness, with the goal of suggesting that television does not simply say "this really happened" but rather "this really happens, right now!"[73] Thus, phrases such as "Live from New York", show titles such as *Live with Regis and Kelly*, and on-screen graphics during sporting events or newscasts that indicate they are being broadcast live work to actively reify television as not just technically capable of live transmission, but "*alive*; television is living, real, not dead."[74] Positioning television as "alive" does more than construct television as contemporaneous. Rather, it works to position television as unpredictable, unprompted and natural, and therefore "more real" than other media. Levine refers to this unpredictability as television's "admirable and distinguishing feature."[75] In the 1990s and early 2000s, promotional material for live episodes of shows normally recorded before broadcast, such as *The Drew Carey Show, ER*, and *Mad about You*, all highlighted the unpredictable nature of these episodes. There is an attempt to

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[73] Gripsrud, "Television, Broadcasting, Flow: Key Metaphors in TV Theory," 19.

[74] Feuer, "The Concept of Live Television: Ontology as Ideology," 14. Emphasis in original.

[75] Levine, "Distinguishing Television: The Changing Meanings of Television Liveness," 397.

generate a feeling of excitement and presence related to the voyeuristic qualities of reality TV; the audience gets to view something as it happens, including possible mistakes, which makes the production more genuine and real.

Creating a similar reaction with recorded programs is difficult but, as suggested earlier, the use of video as opposed to film does indeed provide an aesthetic representation of liveness, partially because "the industry tells us it is 'live.'"[76] With this comment, Feuer is really making two observations: first, that footage shot on video and live broadcast footage tend to have a very similar aesthetic quality visually distinct from footage shot on film; second, that shows which present themselves as "live" or "real," including many talk shows, news, and reality programs, are regularly recorded on video rather than film not only for the economic advantage video provides over film, but also to capitalize upon those same aesthetic qualities. The look of video may be culturally devalued compared to film, but it is also perceived as more immediate.[77] Television news has often benefited from this association of video with liveness.

Both Lunt and Lundell have noted that there is a tension between the desire for the spontaneity of live broadcasting and a desire for control over a production in factual programming on television.[78] The use of video recordings, both professional and amateur, allows producers to resolve this tension. As mentioned above, the availability of cheap videotape and equipment in the 1960s allowed local news outlets to end their dependence upon weekly newsreels and begin making their own taped on-location reports during and after major news events. As home video cameras became more widely available over the

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[76] Feuer, "The Concept of Live Television: Ontology as Ideology," 14.

[77] John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 132.

[78] Lundell, "The Design and Scripting of 'Unscripted' Talk: Liveness Versus Control in a TV Broadcast Interview," 273, Lunt, "Liveness in Reality Television and Factual Broadcasting," 330.

following years, amateur video, such as the now infamous video tape of the Rodney King

beating by members of the Los Angeles Police Department on March 3, 1991, became

regularly used on television news. The Rodney King event was captured by George

Holliday who turned the tape over to local television station KTLA. The video's airing on

that station and other news networks such as CNN is sometimes credited with starting

both the Los Angeles riots and the phenomenon of citizen journalism.[79] The video

features many of the aesthetic characteristics often associated with amateur video: poor

audio quality and a grainy, inadequately lit, unsteady image—the result of being shot

with a hand-held Sony Handycam. The aesthetic of amateur videos, John Dovey

suggests, "depends on our tendency as viewers to interpret low resolution as veracity; the

'amateur video' tag on newscasts signals subjectivity but also immediacy and truth."[80]

Similarly, lower aesthetic quality became culturally associated with truth with the

production of reality shows starting in the 1980s.[81] Crime and emergency reality shows

such as *COPS* (1989) regularly featured on-the-scenes footage and led to the cultural

association of reality television with "cameras following people around."[82] Because these

shows often required the use of handheld cameras, the recorded image was shaky and

unstable, featured moments of poor or non-existent lighting, and other qualities

associated with amateur video. What started as a necessary production approach ended up

inadvertently reinforcing the shows' claims to realism. In the case of *COPS*, the jittery

images, scenes captured in dark alleys or neighbourhoods, and even the muffled

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[79] Michael Goldstein, "The Other Beating," Los Angeles Times, http://www.latimes.com/features/magazine/west/la-tm-holidayfeb19,0,782232.story.

[80] Qtd. in Humm, "Real TV: Camcorders, Access and Authenticity," 230-31.

[81] Levine, "Distinguishing Television: The Changing Meanings of Television Liveness," 402.

[82] Hill, *Reality TV: Audiences and Popular Factual Entertainment*, 50.

breathing and footsteps of the cameraperson made the show feel more immediate and spontaneous. As Peter Humm suggests, "The clumsiness is a ploy designed to prove that what we are about to hear and see is real, authentic, unmediated by what professionals call over-fondly 'the magic of television.'"[83]

Humm's use of the word "ploy" is significant here. The particular aesthetic may be accidental—running with a camera does usually result in a shaky image—but it is welcomed rather than avoided. Night vision technology, which results in a grainy and green-tinted image, and closed circuit television (CCTV) videos that resemble security camera footage have also been frequently used in both reality and news programming. Night vision camera footage was popularized by CNN during the first Gulf War, but is now regularly featured in the production of reality programming such as *Survivor* and *Big Brother*. Security camera footage is also frequently used during news broadcasts concerning, for example, robberies, while the *Big Brother* house is wired with at least two dozen CCTV cameras. Much like the use of amateur footage, the raw aesthetic of the night vision and CCTV formats is often deployed to underscore a sense of the veracity of the images being shown. The combination of these elements builds an aesthetic of realness in which a degraded image signifies truth.

The use of direct address is another aesthetic tactic used to enhance the realness of both news and reality programming. The confessional-style video diaries discussed above, a regular feature on many reality programs, usually involve participants talking directly to the camera either to reveal strategy or to discuss their personal reactions to events and the other participants. This type of address "encourages the viewer to have a

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[83] Humm, "Real TV: Camcorders, Access and Authenticity," 230.

more personal engagement by making it seem as though the technology is only speaking to the individual."[84] However, both reality and news programming also often feature direct address from a host, news anchor, or reporter. This form of direct address is reserved for those who are "designated politically neutral" and therefore trustworthy—a news anchor, for example—or those who have "ultimate political power" and therefore authority, such as a head of state.[85] Much like the direct address of reality TV participants, this type of commentary is used to create a narrative in order to "engage the audience in what is shaped as a story or argument or both."[86] James Friedman argues that television "does not simply portray a window onto a real world 'out there' but frames the world, contextualizes the narrative, and argues for the integrity of the reality it depicts."[87] While the collected video footage and related video diaries can be informative, it is the job of the newsperson or reality TV host to handle that contextualization and define what is important for the viewer to notice. In essence, the audience is told or led to believe that all of the important events are being shown, while the unimportant or uninteresting events are set aside for their benefit. It is for this reason that anchors and reporters are increasingly "cast" for their ability to convey trustworthiness rather than for their training and experience.[88] John Ellis suggests that direct address also reaffirms television's essential liveness by positioning television as being "present tense."[89] The news anchor's

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[84] White, "Television and Internet Differences by Design: Rendering Liveness, Presence, and Lived Space," 343.

[85] Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video*, 132-34.

[86] Bignell, *Big Brother: Reality TV in the Twenty-First Century*, 75-76.

[87] Qtd. in White, "Television and Internet Differences by Design: Rendering Liveness, Presence, and Lived Space," 350.

[88] Thussu, *News as Entertainment*, 30.

[89] Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video*, 134-35.

address remains important to television news' liveness, leaving Bourdon to say that he

has been "driven to treat 'live broadcasting' and the 'look to the camera' of the

newscaster as nearly equivalent."[90] This combination of factors leads Kavka to rightly

suggest that "now-ness" and "here-ness" are effects of mediation more than actualities.[91]

Reality-based programming such as reality TV and news actively construct their

supposedly essential liveness, validating Adorno's claim that the "mechanisms of

television often operate under the guise of false realism."[92] John Fiske demonstrates the

construction of "realism" in television news interviews:

> [I]nterviews are normally shot with a single camera trained on the interviewee. After the interview is finished, the camera is then turned onto the interviewer who asks some of the questions again and gives a series of "noddies," that is, reaction shots, nods, smiles, or expressions of sympathetic listening. These are used to disguise later edits in the interviewee's speech. When a section of this speech is edited out, the cut is disguised by inserting a "noddy," this hiding the fact that any editing of the speakers words has occurred.[93]

This strategic editing demonstrates why the reporters' ability to convey

"trustworthiness" has become increasingly important and the reason Fiske argues that

realism can be defined by its form, as well as by its content."[94]

2.1.4 Television Liveness and Ideology

The discussion of the aesthetics of liveness validates Gripsrud's claim that

"[t]elevision's technological capacity for liveness is…not just the basis for a certain

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[90] Bourdon, "Live Television Is Still Alive: On Television as an Unfulfilled Promise," 185.

[91] Kavka, *Reality Television, Affect and Intimacy*, 16. Kavka's argument is reminiscent of Roland Barthes' analysis of a French advertisement for Panzani pasta, pasta sauce, and cheese, in which the text, the "direct address" if you will, serves as an anchor for the ad's imagery and signifies what he calls "Italianicity". In this case, this Italianicity is mediation rather than actuality. See Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in *The Visual Culture Reader: Second Edition*, ed. Nicholas Mirzeoff (New York: Routledge, 2002).

[92] Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991), 158.

[93] John Fiske, *Television Culture* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 29.

[94] Ibid., 24.

aesthetic, it is also fundamental to television as an *ideological* apparatus."[95] Indeed, that

"certain aesthetic" is representative of television's ideological aims. With this in mind,

Feuer's use of the term "ideology" in her discussion of liveness is compelling but

appropriate, as many connotations of the term, especially in Marxist theory, place

ideology in direct opposition to concepts such as truth and reality, the very ideals

televisual liveness hopes to project.[96] Karl Marx regularly used the term as a pejorative in

his writings. In Chapter 1 of *Capital,* Marx outlines how ideology is intrinsically linked

to the concept of "false consciousness" which itself extends from the idea of "commodity

fetishism." Essentially, as people increasingly fetishize commodities, their relationships

with these objects replace their relationships with other people, effectively obscuring the

producer-consumer relationship. Furthermore, the institutional exploitation of workers

within the capitalist system was systematically obscured, and replaced with a false

consciousness, or a set of rules and beliefs that led workers to believe competition over

commodities was natural, thus aligning the interests of the worker with that of the

capitalist. For Marx, ideology is central to this process, making false consciousness not

simply an illusion that can be easily disproven, but rather a fundamental part of the

worker's understanding of the functioning of society.

Antonio Gramsci also emphasises ideology's importance to and influence upon

everyday social existence and the struggle between different classes or groups, but

complicates the monolithic orthodox Marxist view on ideology. In his discussion of

hegemony, he suggests that power and dominance are obtained through discourse and

ideology, which is produced by those in power in order to maintain their advantageous

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[95] Gripsrud, "Television, Broadcasting, Flow: Key Metaphors in TV Theory," 19-20. Emphasis in original.

[96] See Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (London: Penguin Books, 1976).

position.[97] His emphasis on the constant reproduction and maintenance of cultural

dominance suggests that a dominant group is regularly challenged by emergent or

subversive groups. Ideology, therefore, is the site at which dominance takes shape and

public consensus is attained. Liveness is not simply a characteristic, but an ideological

apparatus constructing television as "real." Promoting television's liveness is an attempt

to generate expectations of spontaneity in the audience.[98] These expectations add further

weight to television's claims on the real. In essence, television *creates* a social and

cultural reality by claiming to *show* reality. Indeed, Fiske argues that we call television a

"realistic" medium "because of its ability to carry a socially convincing sense of the real.

Realism is not a matter of any fidelity to an empirical reality, but of the discursive

conventions by which and for which a sense of reality is constructed."[99]

The notion of liveness emphasizes the importance and even necessity of

centralized broadcasting in presenting reality to a geographically dispersed audience. As

Couldry states, "Liveness—or live transmission—guarantees a potential connection to

shared social realities as they are happening."[100] Couldry, like Spigel and Feuer, is

describing liveness as more than the mere technical feat of broadcasting live. In this case,

he is emphasizing the shared cultural experience of watching a (possibly live) broadcast

along with an imagined, distant audience in addition to sharing a temporal proximity with

the actual event. "Thus," Couldry states, "liveness can be understood as a category

crucially involved in both naturalizing and reproducing a certain historically distinctive

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[97] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishing, 1971), 12.

[98] Bourdon, "Live Television Is Still Alive: On Television as an Unfulfilled Promise," 183-86.

[99] Fiske, *Television Culture*, 21.

[100] Couldry, "Liveness, 'Reality,' and the Mediated Habitus from Television to the Mobile Phone," 355.

type of social coordination around media 'centers' from which images, information, and narratives are distributed and (effectively simultaneously) received across space."[101] The importance of these distribution centres is elevated in an era of mobile privatization, a term coined by Raymond Williams which describes increasingly privatized viewing experiences in the home during an era of literal mobility provided by technological improvements in transportation, and imagined mobility in part due to centralized broadcasting.[102] For Williams, mobile privatization allowed for increased social and geographic freedom, i.e. mobility, at the expense of older, traditional social communities. Centralized broadcasting, then, became necessary for "the production of the harmonizing, stabilizing 'imagined community' of the nation-state."[103]

The concept of liveness is employed not only to connect individuals to particular events, but also to construct a particular vision of nation, society, and culture with shared values, beliefs, and understandings of reality. In this sense, liveness, rather than being a characteristic of television, becomes an ideological tool that establishes and naturalizes power relationships between mass media and the general public. As Couldry states, it is "a term whose use depends on its place within a wider system or structured pattern of values, which work to reproduce our belief in, and assent to, something wider than the description carried by the term itself: in this case, media's role as a central institution for representing social 'reality.'"[104] The term is not only used to differentiate television from other media, but also to preserve television as the most trustworthy, and therefore

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[101] Ibid., 353-54.

[102] Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 19-26.

[103] Gripsrud, "Television, Broadcasting, Flow: Key Metaphors in TV Theory," 23.

[104] Couldry, "Liveness, 'Reality,' and the Mediated Habitus from Television to the Mobile Phone," 354.

culturally dominant, medium. As more technologies are developed that make television

inherently less live (in the literal sense), maintaining an aesthetic of liveness becomes

even more important.

Couldry best summarizes the role of liveness in the construction of social reality

and identity:

> Because liveness is not a natural category but a constructed term, its significance
> rests not on technological fact, but on a whole chain of ideas:
>
> 1. That we gain access through liveness to something of broader,
>   "central" significance, which is worth accessing now, not later;
>
> 2. That the "we" who gain live access is not random, but a
>   representative social group;
>
> 3. That the media (not some other social mechanism) is the privileged
>   means for obtaining that access.[105]

These ideas work in concert to position television as the best medium through

which people can observe and understand reality, or at least the events and reality

important enough to be shown on television. In other words, the cultural understanding of

televisual liveness has been exploited in order to construct and present a particular world

view. Feuer claims that liveness is often used to hide television's commercial nature. It is

difficult to dispute this claim. Television news, for example, has always been a

commercial enterprise in the United States and is becoming increasingly commercialized

globally as a growing number of private broadcasters compete for audiences.[106] This

competition has led to attempts to make news more entertaining—a shift exacerbated by

the proliferation of 24-hour news networks. By exploiting "its assumed 'live' ontology as

ideology," to borrow Feuer's phrase, those involved in the production of shows like *The*

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[105] Ibid., 356.

[106] Thussu, *News as Entertainment*, 2-3.

Situation Room and other television news programs suggest they are presenting the best, unmediated reality in order to excuse the entertaining elements.

Producers of Reality TV make the same promises; the success of reality TV hinges on the ability to be entertaining while offering "moments of truth." Criticism of the often specious situations featured in these programs is countered with claims of transparency in the production process and promises of more genuine reactions that stem from the fabricated settings. This promise of more "reality" from fabrication combined with the narrative construction often featured in reality TV approaches Jean Baudrillard's notion of "hyperreality"—a representation in which mere signs of the real substitute for reality, and the distinction between reality and fabrication is blurred or unrecognizable. The resulting representation or simulacrum becomes something disengaged from reality to the point that it is "realer than real."[107] Both news and reality TV programming, while claiming to show reality, are in actuality defining it.

2.1.4.1 Liveness and Immediacy. Since discussions of liveness confuse a technological capability, an historical period, and, as shown above, a particular aesthetic, the definition of the term has expanded to the extent that it has become a "master term or key word that subsumes a host of other qualities and characteristics" while also "foreclosing the range of theoretical approaches to understanding the appeals—aesthetic and social—of the medium."[108] Indeed, liveness is a politically charged, ideological term used to position television as superior to other media. The term immediacy, on the other hand, seemingly avoids many of these complications. Unlike liveness, immediacy is not

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[107] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 2-6.

[108] White, "The Attractions of Television: Reconsidering Liveness," 81-82.

often referenced as a characteristic of one particular medium, nor does it conflate a

historical period with a technological capability or aesthetic and the term liveness now

does. The inclusion of hypermediacy also allows for the recognition of the constructed,

mediated nature of television—recall that hypermediacy references "frank

acknowledgement of the medium…not based on the perfect visual re-creation of the

world"—a stark contract from the false ontological realness of television represented by

the term liveness. Furthermore, one can recognize the role aesthetics or the capability for

interactivity or simultaneity play in the generation of immediacy, and do so in relation to

a variety of media forms throughout history. In other words, immediacy *stems from* a

variety of "qualities and characteristics" without necessary subsuming those

characteristics, a conceptual difference that broadens, rather than limits, theoretical

approaches to understanding the appeal of all media. For these reasons, I prefer the term

immediacy to liveness, while recognizing the relationship between the two concepts.

Indeed, a number of scholars often confuse or combine immediacy with liveness.[109]

Immediacy both fuels and is fuelled by a belief in television's capability to

present an unmediated reality, making it fundamental to the genres of television news and

reality TV. Since its introduction and rapid dissemination in post-war North America,

television became a primary supplier of entertainment, information, and cultural

authority, quickly establishing itself as the dominant information and entertainment

medium, and continues to play a central role in the shaping of reality and culture in North

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[109] For example, Bolter and Grusin state that "[t]elevision's claim to immediacy depends not only on its transparency…but also on its ability to present events 'live.'" Gripsrud states that "[i]mmediacy or 'liveness' is a key aesthetic value in television" and Berenstein makes multiple references to both "immediate" and "live", sometimes using the two words interchangeably. See Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, Gripsrud, "Television, Broadcasting, Flow: Key Metaphors in TV Theory.", White, "Television and Internet Differences by Design: Rendering Liveness, Presence, and Lived Space."

America. The introduction of cable and satellite television further cemented television's role in the home and, while these technologies offered an increase in channel and programming selection, the modes of viewing television and television's dominant cultural role remained mostly unchallenged until the introduction of new media and the Internet.[110]

2.2 The Webcam: Immediacy on the Internet

The beginning of this chapter reviewed the rise of the web camera or webcam, a digital image capturing device which connects to a personal computer and allows for the transmission of still images or video over the Internet. Some authors, such as Manovich and Lunenfeld, claim digital technologies such as the webcam allow users to cheaply and easily create their own media texts, narrowing the gap between users and producers and leading to new forms of production. It is difficult to argue against the observation that the accessibility and affordability of digital media and Internet access in North America has led to the production of a great amount of content by formerly passive audience members, people referred to here as user/producers. However, the assumption that often follows these claims is that this type of production is a challenge to the concentration of power of mass media such as television.

For Bolter and Grusin, media production by user/producers is a form of remediation and participation that signifies freedom. From this perspective, the creation of Internet-distributed media texts is presented as political reform, moving the locus of control away from television's hierarchical structure and to the individual.[111] The success of this political shift is heavily dependent upon the perceived ability for digital media to

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[110] Cartwright, "Film and the Digital in Visual Studies: Film Studies in the Era of Convergence," 417.

[111] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 60.

convey a superior sense of immediacy. As with television, liveness and immediacy have been considered central characteristics of Internet-based, user-produced reality media.[112] As Manovich succinctly summarizes, "[I]n the case of computer media, immediacy is reality."[113] The webcam, and the popularity of websites that feature user-produced videos such as YouTube and CNN's iReport, provide a perfect opportunity to examine these assertions. Many of these web videos make the same claims to reality as television news and reality TV, while offering the advantage of democratizing or even revolutionizing the media production process. And yet, as Michele White claims, "there has been much less critical attention paid to the similarities in television and Internet narratives about live transmission, the establishment of spatial and temporal connections between viewers and images, and depictions of live interfaces."[114] The following section addresses these narratives as a precursor to examining the aesthetics of these digital media.

2.2.1 Webcams, YouTube, and Immediacy

The earliest recognized webcam existed before access to the Internet was publicly available. The Trojan Room Coffee Pot Cam or *XCoffee* was programmed in 1991 by Quentin Stafford-Fraser and Paul Jardetzky, two Cambridge computer scientists who worked in a computer lab called the Trojan Room. They developed the webcam in order to post real-time images of the lab's coffee machine over the building's local area network. *XCoffee* originally served a utilitarian, informational purpose; the coffee pot, Stafford-Fraser explains, was shared by a number of researchers that "lived in other parts

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[112] Ibid., 197-203, Couldry, "Liveness, 'Reality,' and the Mediated Habitus from Television to the Mobile Phone," 355.

[113] Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 38.

[114] White, "Television and Internet Differences by Design: Rendering Liveness, Presence, and Lived Space," 341-2.

of the building and had to navigate several flights of stairs to get to the coffee pot; a trip which often proved fruitless if the all-night hackers of the Trojan Room had got there first. This disruption to the progress of Computer Science research obviously caused us some distress, and so *XCoffee* was born."[115] In 1993, the site was moved from the local network to the Internet, making it what Andrejevic calls the "first live, twenty-four-hour webcam show."[116] *XCoffee* was eventually shut down for good in August of 2001, but not before the site received over two million visitors from around the world.

The utilitarian nature of *XCoffee* mirrors the original information-sharing mission of the early Internet. However, the later visits by those outside of the Trojan Room's building suggest that the webcam site became a bit of an international curiosity. Part of this curiosity was undoubtedly technical; many people were simply fascinated by the ability to transmit a real-time image to the emerging World Wide Web. Others might have been equally delighted at being able to catch a (live) glimpse of a coffee pot that would be otherwise unknown to them, of a place or object they would not otherwise be able to see. In this sense, the fascination with the *XCoffee* image stems from a form of hypermediacy similar to that of the *See It Now* broadcast of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Others replicated the basic format of *XCoffee*, and soon webcam sites featuring fish tanks or cityscapes were common. By 1997, thousands of webcam sites in several countries offered glimpses of everything from street corners in cities around the world, national monuments such as the Eifel Tower, natural wonders such as Mount Fuji, or

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[115] Quentin Stafford-Fraser, "The Trojan Room Coffee Pot: A (Non-Technical) Biography," http://www.cl.cam.ac.uk/coffee/qsf/coffee.html.

[116] Andrejevic, *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*, 74.

remote locations such a research base in Antarctica.[117] Since then, many of these sites

have stopped operating or disappeared altogether. A site featuring a webcam on

Manhattan's upper west side, for example, displays a static image from January 3,

1999.[118] Others, such as the "Window on the Wall," which offers a view of the Western

Wall in Jerusalem, still dutifully capture images at regular intervals[119] and webcam portal

sites such as EarthCam, which operates with the tagline "Where the world watches the

world," continue to offer catalogues of still and streaming webcam sites from across the

world.[120]

In 1996, a webcam site called Jennicam[121] would appear that both signalled a shift

to diversionary, personal "homecams" and led to a flurry of discourse about the

webcam's ability to democratize and revolutionize media production. Site creator and

college student Jennifer Ringley started the site using an inexpensive webcam attached to

a computer in her dorm room and posted a new image to the Jennicam site, originally,

every three minutes. The site expanded over time to include a total of four webcams as

well as an archive of past images or "grabs." The site's primary subject or "star" was

Ringley herself. Over its seven year run, the webcam, which was left on at all times,

occasionally captured Ringley in various states of undress—she was not shy about sitting

at her computer topless—performing strip teases or masturbatory displays (both of which

became less frequent over time), or engaging in sexual acts. However, the webcam

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[117] Thomas J. Campanella, "Be There Now," Salon Magazine, http://www.salon.com/aug97/21st/cam970807.html.

[118] See http://www.zeitgeist.com/camera/.

[119] See http://www.aish.com/w/.

[120] See http://www.earthcam.com/.

[121] The Jennicam site, which could be found at http://www.jennicam.org and later at http://www.jennicam.com, was shut down by Ringley on December 31, 2003.

usually captured images that featured "an ordinary young woman's life in all its drabness. Jenni talks on the phone, washes her hair, goes to sleep for eight hours a night."[122] The combination of exhibitionism and banality underscored the primary goal of the site, which "promised access to uncut, uncensored, and unedited reality."[123] In a way, banality actually guaranteed the reality of what was being seen. Jennicam quickly became an Internet sensation, eventually attracting as many as five million hits per day. Andrejevic attributes this popularity to a confluence of factors, which, in theory, demonstrated the revolutionary potential of the Internet:

> After all, she was but a young woman with paltry resources and no background in media production, and she managed to produce a popular show on a shoestring budget without the benefit of a production crew. Single-handedly, she seemed to herald the success of an alternative media model—one that had haunted the imagination of media critics for decades: an ordinary person seizing control of the means of media production. Furthermore, she attracted her millions of fans in two ways—first by taking on the active role of producer rather than the passive one of the viewer, and by similarly encouraging her audience to talk back via online chats; second, by providing them with a steady diet of 'reality' in place of the pre-digested news and entertainment programming that are staple formats of the mass media.[124]

The establishment and success of Jennicam made Ringley one of the Internet's earliest successful user/producers and Web reality stars, and the site eventually began to signify the supposed independence of user-produced media distributed on the Internet. User/producers embody two distinct roles: a media producer who could reach a large audience, just like television, while also remaining a member of a formerly voiceless mass audience of television with a supposedly new ability to "speak back."[125] Her

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[122] Hari Kunzru, "The Story of the Eye," Mute Magazine, http://www.metamute.org/?q=en/The-Story-of-the-Eye.

[123] Andrejevic, "The Webcam Subculture and the Digital Enclosure," 193.

[124] Andrejevic, *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*, 76.

[125] Andrejevic, "The Webcam Subculture and the Digital Enclosure," 193.

success inspired other webcam sites such as Ana Voog's anacam, established in August 1997. Much like Ringley's Jennicam, anacam features images captured every five minutes by a webcam in Voog's home. On her website, which is still operational, Voog describes anacam as "a window into my house, into my life (not my life itself, a PICTURE of my life, please note the difference), my art, how i view things." The site also features moments of nudity and sexuality, leading Voog to comment, "this site isn't about sex, but sexuality and SENSUALITY is a PART of this site because that is part of my life."[126] These comments parallel Ringley's claims that the webcam provides its viewers with a completely unmediated reality, and echoes the acceptance of surveillance seen in reality TV participants. Though Voog describes her site as an art project, her own comments show she considers her site and similar projects as a direct challenge to television's centralized structure. For example, in a September 2000 public posting on her website, she states "i like it cause i'm in control, not anyone else :) … it is going to be a VERY interesting day indeed, when streaming with sound is available to everyone and EVERYONE has a tv show :) i can't wait!"[127] Elsewhere she addresses the issue of control over production, relishing the fact that her website requires "no middleman! no marketing strategy! no political showbiz bullshit! yay!"[128] Notions of democratizing or revolutionizing media production are implicit in these statements.

By 1999, over one quarter of a million people were "exposing their lives part-time" online in a similar manner.[129] Currently, true homecams such as anacam or

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[126] Ana Voog, "Anatomy," Anacam, http://www.anacam.com/anatomy/.

[127] See http://www.anacam.com/analog/analog091200.html

[128] Voog, "Anatomy."

[129] Andrejevic, "The Webcam Subculture and the Digital Enclosure," 194.

Jennicam are seemingly overrun by sites geared more towards pornography than "real

life." Many of the webcam sites that appeared after Jennicam's original success were

(and continue to be) pay sites usually featuring scantily clad women or, less frequently,

men or couples—forms of personal amateur porn. A 1998 report on the webcam

phenomenon from the online magazine *Salon* notes: "Some of these sites are clearly

presenting professional sex workers masquerading as amateurs, or are fronts for

conventional X-rated businesses. But many are apparently owned by women who have

welcomed cameras into their lives as a convenient way of earning hard cash at home to

help support a baby or to put them through college."[130] The immediacy provided by

webcams, however, is different from mass produced pornography, reliant upon the

development of a personal presence more than mere voyeuristic appeal. Calling them "a

set of wired eyes, a digital extension of the human faculty of vision," Thomas J.

Campanella suggests webcams offer a near-magical but limited sense of telepresence that

radically alter our perception of space and time.[131] Bolter and Grusin note immediacy

does not necessarily commit the viewer to "an utterly naïve or magical conviction that the

representation is the same thing as what it represents" but rather involves "the belief in

some necessary contact point between the medium and what it represents."[132] Campanella

makes a similar observation, noting that in a spatially abstract Internet, "webcameras can

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[130] Simon Firth, "Live! From My Bedroom," Salon Magazine.,
http://www.salon.com/21st/feature/1998/01/cov_08feature.html.

[131] Thomas J. Campanella, "Eden by Wire: Webcameras and the Telepresent Landscape," in *The Visual Culture Reader: Second Edition*, ed. Nicholas Mirzeoff (New York: Routledge, 2002), 264-67.

[132] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 30.

be interpreted as mediating devices—points of contact between the virtual and the real."[133]

Michele White challenges this claim, however, stating interface designers such as webcam operators suggest that they "facilitate entrances into a *material* internet space and interactions with people" which promises that what is being seen is happening in real time, and that everything shown within the frame is "real life."[134] The promise of real time heightens the possibility of unexpected, spontaneous events occurring while present in this material Internet space. As with reality television, the camera is the guarantor of authenticity and reality. Ana Voog readily acknowledges this idea when she states she enjoys her webcam because she prefers to "share and communicate to a worldwide 'audience' in a totally spontaneous and immediate way[.]"[135] As Michele White states, webcam operators "use these descriptions to articulate the importance of webcams, indicate the popular entertainment functions of webcams by relating them to television, suggest that their practices occurred before the start of the reality television genre even though this is not the case, and note that television and webcams have a lifecycle and thus render the technologies as alive."[136]

A third iteration of webcam video coincided with the emergence of video sharing websites. One example is YouTube, launched in 2005 by co-creators Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim.[137] The site allows users to upload both favourite and user-

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[133] Campanella, "Eden by Wire: Webcameras and the Telepresent Landscape," 267.

[134] White, "Television and Internet Differences by Design: Rendering Liveness, Presence, and Lived Space," 348-50. Emphasis added.

[135] Voog, "Anatomy."

[136] White, "Television and Internet Differences by Design: Rendering Liveness, Presence, and Lived Space," 348.

[137] Burgess and Green, *YouTube*, 1.

generated videos, which are then made publicly available for viewing. Coming up with a

definitive description for all of the videos posted to YouTube is a difficult if not

impossible task. The ability to upload any video file, whether personally created or

collected from elsewhere, means there is an incredible array of video clips available.

Hurley, Chen, and Karim originally envisioned YouTube as a video repository and

sharing site. In fact, one of the first major YouTube hits was a sketch from the NBC

comedy show *Saturday Night Live* (1975) called "Lazy Sunday." The video was viewed

more than five million times in less than three months before NBC's parent company,

NBC Universal, demanded YouTube remove it (along with 500 other NBC Universal

video clips) or face the threat of a lawsuit.[138] Even though YouTube complied, the

popularity of the sketch and press coverage of the threatened lawsuit helped elevate

awareness of the site in the public consciousness. Now, according to its website, "People

are watching 2 billion videos a day on YouTube and uploading hundreds of thousands of

videos daily. In fact, every minute, 24 hours of video is uploaded to YouTube."[139] These

statistics mark YouTube as the most popular video sharing site in the world. Google Inc,

which had set up a competing but less successful video sharing service called Google

Video, purchased YouTube for a reported $1.65 billion US in November 2006.[140]

Videos currently available on YouTube include clips from television news and

fictional programming, do-it-yourself home repair tips, music videos, commercials,

drama and comedy shorts (both professional and user-produced) made specifically for the

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[138] Ibid., 2-3.

[139] See http://www.youtube.com/t/fact_sheet

[140] Marko Ala-Fossi et al., "The Impact of the Internet on Business Models in the Media Industries - a Sector by Sector Analysis," in *The Internet and the Mass Media*, ed. Lucy Küng, Robert G. Picard, and Ruth Towse (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008), 159.

Web, addresses from political figures and world leaders, videos of families and pets, and

documentaries. The site has been credited with creating several Internet sensations. For

example, YouTube clips of Susan Boyle's appearance on an April 2009 episode of the

UK reality show *Britain's Got Talent* (ITV1, 2007) helped to turn a national surprise into

an international sensation. The YouTube video of the "short, plump, 47-year-old

spinster" from Scotland received over twenty-five million views in the week following

her television appearance, and Boyle was inundated with offers from agents and talk

shows.[141] She subsequently recorded an album entitled *I Dream a Dream*, the name of the

song from the stage musical *Les Misérables* she sang during her breakout performance.

Boyle's album became the fastest selling debut in UK history, the best selling debut

album in the US since 1993, and topped record charts in Australia, Canada, Ireland and

New Zealand.[142]

The increased availability of affordable video capturing and editing software,

however, allows for the development of specific kinds of reality-based, user-produced

videos. Among these are user-produced videos in the vein of citizen journalism, in which

an extraordinary event is captured on a video camera, mobile phone camera, or webcam,

digitized if necessary, and uploaded to the site. These videos are reminiscent of

Holliday's 1991 video of the Rodney King beating, but differ in they are made available

publicly without the intervention of a mass-media broadcaster. For example, the 2005

bombing of the London Underground in the UK and the 2004 tsunami in the Indian

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[141] "Profile: Susan Boyle - Britain's Got the Unlikeliest Angel," The Times Online, http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/tv_and_radio/article6122834.ece.

[142] Ben Sisario, "Susan Boyle, Top Seller, Shakes up CD Trends " The New York Times, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/03/arts/music/03sales.html?_r=1&hpw.

Ocean provided thousands of examples of citizen journalism.[143] Many of these videos are

still available on YouTube and other video sharing sites.

Candid amateur videos are also popular. These videos are also often captured via

video camera, mobile phone camera, or webcam, but tend to feature people or animals

doing humorous or interesting things, many times unintentionally, in otherwise ordinary

settings or circumstances. One example of a candid video is "David after Dentist" which

features a young boy experiencing side effects from painkillers received during a dental

visit.[144] The video was named the #2 YouTube hit of 2009, behind the *Britain's Got*

Talent clip of Susan Boyle, after having been viewed over 37 million times that year.[145]

Finally, video Web logs or "vlogs" enjoy a certain amount of popularity on

YouTube as well. A vlog, which usually features a single person talking directly to the

camera, are "different things to different people, but most broadly it is an expression of a

self."[146] Many are like public video diaries in which the user/producer discusses his or

her feelings on personal issues such as family, school, or relationships. Others are more

like editorials, in which the user/producers address current events or politics. Some vlogs

combine the two, such as the 2007 video "LEAVE BRITNEY ALONE!" in which

YouTube user Chris Crocker tearfully condemns public and media criticism of pop singer

Britney Spears.[147] The video achieved cult status and spawned a number of imitations and

spoofs on YouTube, and was featured on several television shows. Crocker currently

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[143] Thussu, *News as Entertainment*, 161.

[144] See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=txqiwrbYGrs.

[145] Mercedes Bunz, "Susan Boyle on Britain's Got Talent Is Youtube's Top Video of 2009," The Guardian, http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/pda/2009/dec/16/susan-boyle-britains-got-talent-youtube.

[146] Aymar Jean Christian, "Real Vlogs: The Rules and Meanings of Online Personal Videos," *First Monday* 14, no. 11 (2009), http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/viewArticle/2699/2353.

[147] See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHmvkRoEowc.

boasts over 300,000 subscribers to his YouTube "channel" and still posts new vlogs about once a week. Again, Crocker's own comments echo discourse about control and challenging hierarchy: "Some call me a cartoon, but I don't care. I'm one cartoon that can't be erased, because I am the drawer of this cartoon."[148]

These videos in particular are emblematic of YouTube's democratizing-centred slogan "Broadcast yourself." The reference to broadcasting is appropriate, as these videos remediate the confessional style featured in many reality television shows or the direct address style featured in opinion and pundit-based news shows such as *The O'Reilly Factor* (1996) on the Fox News Channel in the US. However, as opposed to the authoritative nature of direct address in television news media, this form of direct address is intended to convey a sense of personal connection. The user/producer is making a direct, individual, emotional or issues-based appeal to the viewer.

2.2.1.1 Webcam videos and "real time." As these examples illustrate, discourses surrounding webcams position user-produced media as both a "'better' version of television" while also inexorably linked to television and televisual liveness "in a seemingly natural convergence."[149] While this suggests that televisual liveness and Internet liveness are essentially the same, I believe this comparison results in a false equivalency that disguises or glosses over fundamental differences between the two media. Mark Williams notes this contrast by separating the concepts of "televisual *liveness*" and "new-media *real time*." Whereas liveness "can be understood to be a historically mutable, situational *effect* that leans upon or is propped onto history as a key trope of its temporal *dispositif*", real time:

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[148] http://www.youtube.com/user/itschriscrocker

[149] McPherson, "Reload: Liveness, Mobility, and the Web," 458.

can be understood to be propped on the near future. The evident demand in contemporary media society for faster processing, fatter data pipelines, and immediate downloads is constitutive of the real-time desire. This desire is crucially entwined with the overall purchase on the popular imagination and conceptualization of the near future that relies on the claims and promises made about digital culture.[150]

For Williams, new media real time is as much a construct as televisual liveness, as "each names an act of mediation but also the desire to experience this act as unmediated."[151] Amyar Jean Christian makes the same observation, noting new media such as vlogs "offer individuals the chance to broadcast their private lives, promising a human and real experience while disguising the constructed nature of the experience[.]"[152] Thus, the mediated event is even elevated to the point that it is perceived as more immediate than if the event was unmediated.

Because there is an active construction of immediacy, Andrejevic believes webcam videos are more about performance and the democratization of *celebrity* than the democratization of media production itself. Despite revolutionary claims, the real promise of these user-produced media is that "the manipulated can become the manipulators."[153] Indeed, a number of YouTube vloggers in particular are more concerned with popularity "alongside but never reliant upon self-expression."[154] Similarly, some supposedly candid videos feature an element of performance. Jean Burgess and Joshua Green discuss a 2005 YouTube video entitled "Hey Clip" in which two teens, Lital Mizel and Adi Frimerman, lip-sync and dance to the song "Hey" by the

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[150] Mark Williams, "Real-Time Fairy Tales," in *New Media: Theories and Practices of Digitextuality*, ed. Anna Everett and John T. Caldwell (New York: Routledge, 2003), 163. Emphasis in the original.

[151] Ibid., 163.

[152] Christian, "Real Vlogs: The Rules and Meanings of Online Personal Videos."

[153] Andrejevic, "The Webcam Subculture and the Digital Enclosure," 204.

[154] Christian, "Real Vlogs: The Rules and Meanings of Online Personal Videos."

Pixies.[155] The video, which has now been viewed over 30 million times, is heavily edited, with cuts timed precisely to the beat of the song.[156] Mizel suggests in a 2006 interview in the newspaper *USA Today* that the popularity of the video is attributable to its "reality": "We just turned on the camera and danced funny…. I keep asking people why do you like it, and they say, 'Because it's reality.' You see it's homemade, that we're so spontaneous and natural—dancing, having fun."[157] Interestingly, Mizel's own discourse ignores, intentionally or unintentionally, the performative and constructed aspects of the video, instead emphasizing its homemade and "spontaneous" nature.

The importance of simultaneity is problematized in Williams' concept of real time. Compared to news and reality television's immediacy which is centred on the appearance of a presentation of events as they happen, the Internet is "increasingly organized as continuous ('24/7 instant access') rather than punctual."[158] In the case of homecams or "window on the world" webcams, the event is the update of the image on screen rather than what is depicted in the image. This update is the source of access to something otherwise unattainable—the daily routine of a stranger, a foreign cityscape, or a coffeepot in Cambridge. The "near future" upon which real time is propped is experienced in the expectation of the next image, the next update. Vlogs and YouTube videos display an even more complex relationship with time. Here the "near future" is visually represented in the ubiquitous "progress bar" seen as a video downloads and buffers, or represented in the "experience of data 'on the fly.'"[159] Like television,

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[155] Burgess and Green, *YouTube*, 26.

[156] See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_CSo1gOd48.

[157] Qtd. in Burgess and Green, *YouTube*, 26.

[158] Michael Warner, qtd. in Gitelman, *Always Already New*, 136.

[159] Ibid., 138.

webcam videos can still offer a sense of immediacy despite the fact a significant amount of time may pass between when something is recorded and then presented. The difference, however, is that YouTube videos are available for "24/7 instant access" long after their initial posting to the site, resulting in a distinct lack of an ephemeral nature or urgency that television events carry. Web-based videos are seemingly always accessible, allowing users to view them at their leisure in a way that has little to do with simultaneity. Hence, the sense of immediacy must be generated though alternative means. As with reality-based media on television, the immediacy of user-produced reality media is often conveyed through aesthetics.

2.2.2 Webcam Aesthetics and Immediacy

Constructing a definitive, all-encompassing list of characteristics for every webcam site and user-produced video available on the Internet is a daunting task. However, it is possible to identify a set of aesthetics that are common to a number of these videos. An examination of these aesthetics needs to include a consideration of how webcam technology and software—including built-in tools, interfaces, and menus—work to limit or construct the way user/producers conceive and develop their projects. The earliest webcams, in part due to their automatic, surveillance-style nature, offered "often blurry views, hesitant and out of focus."[160] The most basic and inexpensive webcams provided a limited set of tools with which to work. For example, focusing the webcam image involved manually adjusting the camera's lens. While some webcams allowed viewers and user/producers limited control, such as basic pan and zoom functions, most continuously offer the same image or view unless purposefully repositioned by the

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[160] Campanella, "Be There Now."

webcam operator. However, most early "window on the world" webcams and homecams were intended to be set in a static position and kept in continual operation with few adjustments from the site operator. Most came with a short pedestal or base designed to sit on a tabletop, offering limited height and adjustment options. Usually, the movement upon the base was limited to spinning the camera laterally or tilting the lens vertically. The software that accompanied these early webcams similarly offered only a limited ability to adjust the image quality, providing adjustment sliders for brightness, contrast, and colour saturation. These settings were usually insufficient for the range of conditions in which the cameras operated. A webcam focused on a cityscape, for example, might provide a detailed image during daylight, but a grainy and murky image with little detail at night. Similarly, a homecam such as Jennicam might operate well in low-lighting conditions, such as when Ringley's face was lit solely by her computer monitor, but give a washed out, low contrast image in more abundant lighting.

While more modern webcams and webcam software improve upon these options, including features for automatic lighting adjustments and colour balance, the low quality of the cameras themselves tends to capture lower-resolution images. This resolution is in part a consideration of the technological limitation of operating over the Internet, namely bandwidth. Early webcams operated in an era during which low-bandwidth, dial-up Internet connections were most common, thus necessitating the display of low-resolution images that could be downloaded quickly. Only in the modern area when broadband Internet access is more widespread have high-definition, streaming webcams become a viable option. However, Jennicam and other early webcams established the devalued image and aesthetics of webcam images and video. Coupled with discourse about the

immediacy and realness of these webcams, this devalued image came to signify

contemporaneousness and constant access, in addition to suggesting a lack of mediation.

Similarly, vlogs often rely upon a usually-stationary camera. Unlike homecams

and "window on the world" cams, these user-produced videos tend to be more polished,

usually featuring a clearer, high-resolution image and, frequently, editing and graphics.

However, many of these videos also feature aesthetics that mark them as being produced

by someone without a background in media production. For example, Crocker's video

discussed above features a sagging bed sheet as a backdrop and a poorly calibrated colour

balance that gives the entire video a yellowish tint. Others feature similar problems as the

early webcams described above, such as issues with contrast or colour saturation, again

the result of limited software tools, or user/producer unfamiliarity with them. Unlike

early webcams, however, many of these videos by necessity offer sound, the production

of which is usually as undeveloped as the visuals. Many vloggers rely on a low-quality,

omnidirectional microphone built into the webcam, or an equally low-quality computer

microphone. Compared to unidirectional lavalier or lapel microphones, which usually

capture only the speaker's voice, omnidirectional microphones capture sound from all

directions. As a result, the speaker's voice sounds hollow and distant, especially when

recording inside, and overall sound quality is degraded by background and ambient noise.

Also unlike early webcams, these videos regularly feature what Burgess and Green refer

to as a "talking head speaking straight-to-camera" style reminiscent of the diary and

confessional rooms in reality TV programming.[161] This framing serves two purposes.

First, due to the camera being positioned on a desk or built into the computer or monitor

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[161] Burgess and Green, *YouTube*, 28.

frame, this head-on shot is the easiest view to offer. Rarely do vloggers have more than

their head and upper torso in frame.[162] Second, direct address, often confessional in

nature, is meant to foster a sense of immediacy and personal connection between

user/producer and the viewer.[163] A casual, conversational form is common to these videos

and works to further develop this personal connection.[164] Editorial-style vlogs, such as a

collection of comments from "iReporters" featured in a CNN iReport video on Obama's

December 2009 decision to send 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan, share many of these

same visual and audio characteristics.[165]

     User-produced videos in the vein of citizen journalism, such as those captured on

increasingly sophisticated digital video cameras or uploaded from Internet-capable

mobile "smart" phones, have many of the same characteristics as of previous examples of

citizen journalism produced with video cameras. Many modern digital cameras feature

the ability to capture high-definition images and video, and make adjustments to colour,

brightness, and contrast, resulting in images that have a much higher resolution than

videos shot on a video camera. Other less sophisticated models only allow for a pixelated,

low-resolution image. Because of the often spontaneous nature of the recorded events and

the handheld filming that is usual for these types of videos, the resulting images are often

shaky and unsteady. Furthermore, despite the options available for improving the image

quality, lighting, contrast, and colour can often be degraded simply because the user does

not have time to adjust these settings for the environment. For example, the tasering and

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[162] Christian, "Real Vlogs: The Rules and Meanings of Online Personal Videos."

[163] Burgess and Green, *YouTube*, 53-54, White, "Television and Internet Differences by Design: Rendering Liveness, Presence, and Lived Space," 347.

[164] Burgess and Green, *YouTube*, 43.

[165] http://us.cnn.com/video/?/video/ireports/2009/12/02/bts.irpt.obama.afghan.reax.ireport.

subsequent arrest of University of Florida student Andrew Meyer at a town hall event

with senator and former U.S. Presidential candidate John Kerry in 2007 was captured by

a number of audience members using digital video and mobile phone cameras. Many of

these videos were later posted on YouTube. One such video captured on a more

sophisticated camera by Kyle Mitchell and later obtained by the local newspaper *The

Gainesville Sun* features the use of zooming capabilities common to most video cameras.

In addition, despite somewhat low colour saturation, the video image is relatively focused

and clean.[166] In comparison, a video of the same event captured on a lower-resolution

mobile phone camera and uploaded by YouTube user fozzymandias is heavily pixelated

and often out of focus.[167] Both videos, however, are incredibly shaky and unstable,

mirroring the handheld quality of Holliday's video of the Rodney King beating.

Interactivity is often discussed as an important aspect of these homecam sites. By

positioning the web's version of immediacy as superior to television's, user/producers

attempt to discuss television as "domestic rather than public, as old-fashioned rather than

edgy, as a product of commercial constraints rather than artistic expressiveness, and now,

in the new media age, as static and unidirectional rather than mobile and interactive."[168]

In this discourse, the ability to talk back pertains not only to the individual user/producers

but also to their audience. Message boards, live chats, e-mail, and other communication

tools supposedly allow users to interact directly with content creators, rebuking the elitist

stance of mass media producers.[169] However, the same discourse that touts the Web's

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[166] See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bVa6jn4rpE.

[167] See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iqAVvlyVbag.

[168] Levine, "Distinguishing Television: The Changing Meanings of Television Liveness," 405.

[169] Andrejevic, *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*, 48.

immediacy in relation to webcams might also undermine these interactive elements. As

Michele White states:

> Describing the webcam, as well as other computer and internet technologies, as windows de-emphasizes the graphics, subtitles, archives, blog entries, and other features that contribute to the viewer's experience. The discourse about liveness, aliveness, and physical entrances focuses the spectator's attention on the material within the frame and supports the idea that webcams are also "real life."[170]

White's comment suggests that webcam operators rhetorically minimize the interactive

elements in order to purposefully accentuate the "reality" of the webcam images.

Aesthetic elements of webcam and YouTube videos thus become more significant than

interactive elements.

The homemade aesthetic of vlogs, YouTube videos, and webcams is important to

the cultural understanding of these videos for two reasons. It signifies the supposed

democratization and revolution of media production, shifting power over cultural

production away from centralized mass media structures and towards the independent

user/producer. It is also important to projecting reality, immediacy and presence. Internet

real time, however, lacks the technological, social, and cultural ties that televisual

liveness has to simultaneity, instead being reliant upon the "24/7 instant access" that

suggests these videos are always available, ready to be called upon or downloaded by

users at any time. In addition, users look to the Internet for an intimacy that is "produced

solely for them"[171], fuelling utopian visions of a grassroots driven media takeover—a

takeover that has yet to materialize. In fact, rather than being threatened by Web media,

television has increasingly welcomed user-produced materials, in part due to the aesthetic

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[170] White, "Television and Internet Differences by Design: Rendering Liveness, Presence, and Lived Space," 350.

[171] Ibid., 349.

qualities of both television and Internet reality media. Despite fundamental differences

between Internet and televisual immediacy, the aesthetics of reality-based texts on these

two media are related, reliant upon tactics such as degraded production quality, direct

address, and observational or surveillance camera modes. Indeed, while claiming that

webcam sites "anticipated the reality-programming trend," Andrejevic also notes that

user/producers, rather than revolutionizing television production, are merely reproducing

it.[172] This allows television to actively appropriate the aesthetics of user-produced media

and their associated "realness." Since digital media's supposedly superior immediacy is

at the root of its advantage over television, this remediation problematizes the

revolutionary potential of digital media.

2.2.3 Webcam Aesthetics on Television

Television's remediation of a Web aesthetic is just the latest iteration of

transmedia appropriation. In discussing the concept of remediation, or the representation

of one medium in another, Bolter and Grusin are careful to state that remediation is a

reciprocal process, meaning new media can remediate the aesthetics of older media and

older media can appropriate elements of newer media. Television has been engaging in

the aesthetic remediation of user-produced texts meant for distribution on the Internet

since the introduction of the Web in the mid-1990s. Television news in particular has

long been actively remediating the aesthetics of the Internet. Several scholars have

already detailed the ways in which television news programs readily assimilate or

remediate the aesthetics of informational websites, partially in an attempt to replicate the

immediacy of their information-dense layouts. For example, Lynne Cook conducted an

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[172] Andrejevic, "The Webcam Subculture and the Digital Enclosure," 193, 207.

aesthetic analysis of several television news broadcasts and informational websites in the

United States, noting an increasing visual similarity in the structure of these various

media, as well as in the graphics and pictorial representation these media employ.[173] June

Deery makes a similar observation, stating television news is imitating the busy look of

websites, using split screens and news tickers in what she calls the "CNN Effect."[174]

Anna Everett also comments on the changing aesthetics of television news, suggesting

that its "congested image," multiple news areas, text bars, and news tickers are an attempt

to create an information rich environment and compete with (and simulate) Internet

sites.[175] The Toronto news channel CP24 exemplifies this in the extreme, with a screen

area broken up into as many as eight distinct informational areas including spaces for live

video and news reports; the current date, time and temperature; the upcoming weather

forecast; live traffic camera feeds; news headlines in a text format; sports scores; and as

many as three spaces for the display of stock prices and market averages. Television

news programs are essentially trying to compensate for the lack of access to information

afforded to users by the interactive nature of hypertext on the Internet by presenting as

much information to the viewer as possible. Viewers can browse through information by

glancing at different areas of the screen, forming their own informational maps in a

manner similar to Internet surfing.

User-produced digital video has also had a profound effect on television news.

Since Holliday's videotape of the Rodney King beating, citizen journalism has regularly

been featured on news broadcasts, which has turned some local events into national

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[173] Cooke, "A Visual Convergence of Print, Television and the Internet: Charting 40 Years of Design Change in News Presentation," 29.

[174] Deery, "TV.Com: Participatory Viewing on the Web," 162.

[175] Everett, "Digitextuality and Click Theory," 10-12.

debates. For example, video of the tasering of Andrew Meyer at the University of Florida was not only on YouTube's most viewed list the following day, but was also featured on several national and international news broadcasts.[176] According to William McKeen, a journalism professor at the University of Florida, the story would have been "a short, little story about a student being removed from an event" without video footage and the ensuing national attention.[177] While the YouTube video received a number of viewings online, its broadcast on national news networks instigated national debates on police brutality and free speech. Without national news coverage, "Don't tase me bro," the phrase Meyer shouted as he was being held to the ground by campus police, would have been the providence of a small number of Internet users. With it, the plea became a national pop culture catchphrase, featured on everything from *The Daily Show* (1996) to t-shirts.[178]

The event also highlights the interest in citizen journalism in a digital age, made evident by a series of mass media initiatives to encourage user-production. For example, CNN features special *iReport* segments both during its newscasts and on its official website. The content for both the website and the television show are user-produced segments such as the webcam recorded commentary or events captured on digital camera discussed above. Users new to the site are presented with the following message upon their first visit:

> Welcome to iReport, where people take part in the news with CNN. Your voice, together with other iReporters, helps shape how and what CNN covers every day.

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[176] Megan Rolland, "Taser Footage Electrifies National Media," The Gainesville Sun, http://www.gainesville.com/article/20070919/NEWS/70918028.

[177] Anthony Violanti, "Taser Incident a Case Study in Newsmaking," The Gainesville Sun, http://www.gainesville.com/article/20070920/NEWS/70920011.

[178] See http://www.bustedtees.com/donttasemebro.

> So you know: iReport is the way people like you report the news. The stories in this section are not edited, fact-checked or screened before they post. Only ones marked 'CNN iReport' have been vetted by CNN.[179]

This language emphasizes the ostensibly democratic nature of the site. The ability for user/producers to submit videos affords a sense of interactivity and participation in mass media, through which users are promised the ability to shape CNN's broadcast content. However, as Andrejevic states, participation does not "necessarily contest the media's social power to frame the issues."[180] In reality, it is CNN that benefits. The news organization vets each submitted video and showcases only the "most newsworthy" during televised newscasts. This selective use allows CNN to maintain a position as a cultural authority while capitalizing upon each video's aesthetic signification of immediacy and authenticity and the free labour of the user/producers submitting these videos. The user/producers submitting videos to CNN are *seemingly* participating in a democratizing, potentially subversive activity, but this participation instead works to reinforce the hegemonic relationship with television it supposedly destabilizes. Participation only gains significance when recognized by those within existing media structures and, through that relationship, the centralized power of "old" media is heightened rather than weakened.

CurrentTV, a dual television and Internet media channel co-founded by former U.S. Vice President Al Gore in 2005, also promises to democratize television by featuring content and clips made by user/producers mixed with programming made by traditional television producers.[181] User-produced videos are first made available for

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[179] See http://www.ireport.com.

[180] Andrejevic, *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*, 121.

[181] Thussu, *News as Entertainment*, 159, Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, 133.

viewing on the CurrentTV website. The website's "frequently asked questions" page or

FAQ describes the rest of the process:

> [O]ur community actively votes and comments on contributions made to
> Current.com. We pile all of these comments and votes into an algorithmic blender
> that helps determine which items, stories, and videos are pressing and popular.
> Popular contributions bubble up onto the homepage, and are eligible to be picked
> to air on TV in a Current News pod.[182]

As with CNN's iReport site, viewer participation in the form of production is equated to

democratization, but even the most popular videos according to member votes are only

"eligible" rather than guaranteed to air on television. The network can claim to offer

democratization while maintaining the control to highlight certain issues and stories.

A number of other television shows are similarly selecting and featuring user-

produced videos from outside the realm of citizen journalism. For example, the Chris

Crocker video discussed above was featured on several news broadcasts and late-night

talk shows including *Jimmy Kimmel Live* (2003) on ABC. Stephen Colbert, host of the

U.S. cable channel Comedy Central show *The Colbert Report* (2005) regularly challenges

his audience to make and upload videos to YouTube for unofficial contests such as his

"Colbert Nation Green Screen Challenge."[183] A number of these videos were aired on his

show. The show *Attack of the Show!* (2005), which airs on the U.S. cable network G4,

features a segment called "Around the Net" which highlights "the most hilarious videos

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[182] See http://current.com/s/faq.htm.

[183] The original "Green Screen Challenge" featured Colbert performing in front of a green screen with a toy "lightsaber" popularized by the *Star Wars* movie series. Colbert's performance was an apparent parody of the "Star Wars Kid" which itself was an incredibly popular Internet video featuring a young Canadian teenager Ghyslain Raza pretending a golf ball retriever was a lightsaber and simulating fighting moves. Colbert asked his audience to edit the film by replacing the green screen with other imagery. In a later version of this challenge called the "Make McCain Exciting Challenge", viewers were challenged to take footage of then Republican U.S. Presidential nominee John McCain speaking rather tediously in front of a mostly green background and make it more exciting.

hidden there, either intentional or unintentional."[184] The segment is so popular that the network now features a show called *Web Soup* (2009), in which a comedian named Chris Hardwick "riffs on the Internet's most talked about videos and previews the ones you'll be forwarding to your friends tomorrow."[185] This latter example not only positions television as a cultural authority in deciding what is significant enough for television broadcast, but also as an authority and cultural judge of Internet content as well.

Similarly, reality TV programs frequently mimic the feeling of immediacy provided by digital media, in part by remediating the aesthetics of the webcam. Indeed, reality TV has proven to be incredibly savvy in its incorporation of new media. For example, the various iterations of *Big Brother* not only feature multiple television cameras within each house, but also a series of webcams which stream live to the *Big Brother* website. These "official" webcams possess the same aesthetic markers of immediacy as user-produced webcams on the Internet. For an additional fee, fans of the show can have access to these always-available webcam streams. However, footage from these webcams is sometimes also featured on the television broadcasts despite the presence of higher quality cameras. Ostensibly this helps to advertise the existence of the subscription-based streams on the website, but has the added benefit of conveying a sense of authenticity and immediacy to viewers.

Reality TV is also adept at using the fabricated settings and social situations common to reality shows to provide "relatively unconstrained, apparently spontaneous social interaction."[186] The use of editing and narration to actively develop or construct a

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[184] See http://e3.g4tv.com/attackoftheshow/aroundthenet/index.html.

[185] See http://g4tv.com/websoup/.

[186] Lunt, "Liveness in Reality Television and Factual Broadcasting," 329.

narrative provides reality television with a distinct advantage over YouTube videos and homecams in that this narrative actually heightens the immediacy of reality programming. Interestingly, Couldry, drawing on Bourdieu, notes how reality TV ritualizes certain forms of social interaction, which in turn naturalizes existing power relations by defining which "realities" are important to society.[187] Contextualization through narrative construction exacerbates that naturalization and allows television to maintain an authoritative role. User-produced videos on the Web, in contrast, tend to lack a strong characteristic of authority. While they may contain elements such as a narrator or direct address, these videos are meant to be consumed separately and at the whim of the user. Therefore, any connection to other material is individual rather than imposed.

One of the primary advantages the Internet supposedly offers is the ability for interactivity. Attempts to position webcams and YouTube videos as "real time" also emphasize the content inside the video frame and deemphasize other elements— including interactive elements—at the user's disposal. In addition, actual real time interaction is only rarely possible. This advantage is further minimized and subverted by reality-based television for several reasons. June Deery notes that reality TV shows "attempt to recreate the interactivity, direct participation, and validation of so-called ordinary people and their experiences that users find online."[188] Jane Roscoe sees this interactivity as a fundamental and inherently democratizing component of reality programming: "Interaction and participation are central to the idea of being a fan, and there are three important ways in which *Big Brother* has created spaces for fans to directly engage with the show…. They are as much producers of the text as they are

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[187] Couldry, "Liveness, 'Reality,' and the Mediated Habitus from Television to the Mobile Phone," 357-59.

[188] Deery, "TV.Com: Participatory Viewing on the Web," 170-71.

consumers of it."[189] Andrejevic takes the opposite stance, suggesting interactivity results only in the promise of cultural control and power, which is necessary to hide the fact that power is really becoming ever more concentrated.[190] In short, reality TV's inclusion and remediation of the aesthetics of user-produced media hints at democratization while hiding a concurrent and contradictory reaffirmation of mass media control over social and cultural development.

2.3 Conclusion

In a 2003 essay, Jeffery Sconce admonishes media scholars who "debate endlessly the politics of a largely irrelevant phenomenon like 'Jenni-cam'" and "dismiss a half century of television history as merely an annoying distraction dividing the celluloid and digital ages."[191] I, like Sconce, am not so eager to ignore the technological and cultural development of television in a pre-digital era. However, it is hoped that the historical examination of televisual liveness and immediacy, juxtaposed with the discussions of the Internet's immediacy and democratizing potential, has demonstrated that examinations of user-produced projects are also not worthless pursuits. Interestingly, and somewhat contradictorily, Jennicam is an important object of study *because* it is irrelevant. When Ringley started the site in 1996, it was hailed as a revolutionary force, a direct challenge to centralized mass media that put the power of media production, and therefore cultural and social development, in the hands of formerly passive audience members. Webcam and homecam sites, it was said, would trump television's constructed and heavily mediated version of reality by appropriating and perfecting the trait often

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[189] Jane Roscoe, "Multi-Platform Event Television: Reconceptualizing Our Relationship with Television," *The Communication Review* 7, no. 4 (2004): 366.

[190] Andrejevic, *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*, 67.

[191] Sconce, "What If?: Charting Television's New Textual Boundaries," 93.

used to define television's specificity as a medium: liveness. By 2003, Jennicam was shut down, Ringley herself was relegated to mere "curiosity" status, and television's claim to reality was being reinvigorated by the widespread popularity of diversionary reality TV. The meteoric rise of YouTube's popularity since its founding in 2005 has reignited debates about liveness, immediacy, and mediated reality. Once again, the democratizing power of the Internet and user-produced media is in the forefront, and the complete revolution or dissolution of television as a medium, industry, and cultural force at the hands of digital media is assumed to be on the horizon. Levine, for example, believes that television is losing its "cultural purchase" because "televisual liveness cannot sustain the designations of uniqueness and quality, the claims of distinction, it once did" in the face of liveness claims from new media such as the Internet.[192] Certainly, television's version of liveness and immediacy are being challenged but, as the above discussion of the aesthetics of reality-based media on television and the Web demonstrates, television has adapted as a result of these challenges and remains a dominant social and cultural medium, despite significant structural changes in the way televisual content is produced, distributed, and accessed. Rather than being weakened by digital media such as the Internet, television has incorporated the aesthetics and structures of user-produced media to strengthen its claims to reality, and expand the definition of television so that it is linked to the very new media supposedly destined to destabilize it, weakening the potential for the revolution or democratization of media production.

Television's construction of liveness, immediacy, and reality can be traced back to the medium's introduction. Therefore, it may not be completely surprising that

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[192] Levine, "Distinguishing Television: The Changing Meanings of Television Liveness," 406.

television, as an institution, has successfully responded to similar claims from user-produced media. The next step, then, is to examine whether the same dynamic, the same aesthetic remediation, is applicable to other genres and forms of media production. The next chapter aims to do just that by examining television and user-produced animation. Examining animation offers several advantages. While reality-based media can be described as emblematic of television's ontology, animation is a form that, in many ways, runs counter to this ideology. Animation enjoys a long, rich history that extends back well before the invention and introduction of television, and primarily deals with the presentation of fantasy rather than reality. Despite this, immediacy is as important to animation as it is to reality-based media, and television has played a significant role in the aesthetic, cultural and social development of the genre. These differences and similarities make an examination of animation a perfect counterpoint to the discussion of reality media above.

3 CASE STUDY: ANIMATION AND FLASHIMATION

In many ways, animation involves an approach that is the reverse of that used with the production of "reality" media. Unlike news reporting, webcams and reality television, both Web and television animation abandon any pretence of offering reality and instead present the opportunity for the audience to experience a text that is completely based in fantasy, allowing the audience to more readily accept things that appear unrealistic.[1] Despite the different frameworks, there are some similarities between these media. Animation, which has a much longer history than reality television, has always incorporated a sense of immediacy that is heavily influenced by elements such as design, colour, and movement. While Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin argue that immediacy allows users to lose awareness of a medium, so that they stand in an "immediate relationship" to the contents of that medium, they are also careful to clarify that "the logic of transparent immediacy does not necessarily commit the viewer to an utterly naïve or magical conviction that the representation is the same thing as what it represents"[2]—an observation important for animation in particular.

The methods used to achieve a sensation of immediacy in animation have changed over time, just as the genre itself has adapted to technical and cultural changes as outlined in the sections below. Experimental animation shown in theatres and travelling shows in the early 1900s often relied upon the generation of a sense of wonder—the experience of life being created (through motion) before the viewers' eyes—to generate an affective response which in turn lent these animations a sense of immediacy. Others exuded hypermediacy in the form of self-reflexivity, an on-screen or on-stage recognition

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[1] Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 157.

[2] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 24.

of the skill and craft of the animator that highlighted the medium of presentation rather than rendering it transparent. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, however, popular animation experienced a period of standardization in which self-contained stories—still heavily dependent upon the illusion of motion as a communicative device—became the norm and would only occasionally approach the level of self-reflexivity seen in some animated texts just after the turn of the century.

The cartoon-as-story concept guided the development of television animation as well. However, the development of a new animation style called "limited animation" would have an impact on the immediacy of television animation; rather than relying on motion to generate an affective response, limited animation cartoons on television such as *Rocky and His Friends* (1959) relied on scripted elements such as topical references to current events to generate immediacy. In short, the simultaneity important to reality TV and television news also became important to television animation. The quality of television animation steadily declined after the 1960s, however, as skilled writers and animators were stretched thin over an ever-expanding number of television cartoons, leading to a social redefinition of animated content as children's fare churned out in an assembly-line style that effectively shackled the creativity of those involved in their production.

It was in this environment that a new form of animation, user-produced Web animation, developed in the 1990s. Like webcam and Web-disseminated videos, the development of tools such as Adobe Flash—designed to help user/producers and professionals create digital animated projects for dissemination over the Internet—has allowed the parallel development of a new visual style that, in part, actively remediates

the aesthetics of television—in this case, limited cel animation. The unpolished, degraded

aesthetic frequently seen to user-produced Flash animation recalls the devalued aesthetics

fundamental to the immediacy of user-produced vlogs, citizen journalism, and webcams.

In addition, digital animation tools allow an artist to have a greater role in the production

process and, therefore, facilitate the development of more personal projects.[3] This

inclusion of personal stories enhances the potential for independent animation such as

Flash to generate greater identification between producers and audience. At the same

time, these projects can also be produced at greater speed, which allows user-produced

animation to echo the contemporaneousness of television animation exhibited in the

1950s and 1960s.

This chapter explores how changes in production have altered the nature and

cultural understanding of animation in North America, the varied sources of immediacy

that corresponded to these changes, and the role remediation between television and Web

animation plays in this process. This evaluation will begin with a discussion of historical,

technological and economic developments in animation and their impact on the aesthetic

development of animation. The production and animation techniques of traditional cel

animation and Flash animated cartoons sometimes referred to as "Flashimation" will be

compared in the process. Semiotic analysis will be used to explore the various cultural

meanings that have attached to these different animation aesthetics.

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[3] For examples, see Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 69, Vlad Strukov, "*Video Anekdot*:
Auteurs and Voyeurs of Russian Flash Animation," *animation: an interdisciplinary journal* 2, no. 2 (2007):
131, 49., as well as Pilling qtd. In Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 241. Both Pilling and
Furniss discuss how they believe the nature of independent animation allows for the inclusion of more
personal stories and information, while Strukov equates independent Flash animation with freedom of
expression and a more immediate control over the final product.

3.1 Animation History

As Charles Solomon notes, "animation (and all filmmaking) emerged from a fascination with light and motion[.]"[4] This observation leads many discussions of animation history to associate the beginnings of modern animation with the use of "magic lanterns" first developed during the 17th century.[5] These devices combined a rudimentary lens projector with coloured slides and light provided by a candle or lantern. The light passed through a small hole in the device's housing, illuminating the slide positioned over the lens, and allowing the image on the slide to be projected on a wall or screen in a dark room.[6] This process would become the basis for film projection in the 19th and 20th centuries, but it was initially limited to still images, or rudimentary movement created by moving one or more of these lanterns.

A series of inventions in the 19th century with "classically intoned" names such as the thaumatrope (1820s), the zoetrope (1836), the kinetograph or flipbook (1868) and the praxinoscope (1877), along with Eadweard Muybridge's experiments with sequential photography in the late 1870s, led to a greater understanding of the ability of ordered images to recreate motion.[7] These devices presented short motion clips that could often be presented as a cycle of movement, a series of images printed on a disc or ring. When the spinning disc was viewed through a small slit in many of these devices, the images appeared to move. Of these inventions, Emile Reynaud's praxinoscope was the most

[4] Charles Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings* (New York: Wings Books, 1994), 3.

[5] In particular, both Giannalberto Bendazzi, *Cartoons: One Hundred Years of Cinema Animation* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1995). and Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*. begin with discussions of these devices.

[6] Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*, 3-5.

[7] Ibid., 8, Carol A. Stabile and Mark Harrison, "Prime Time Amimation: An Overview," in *Prime Time Animation: Television Animation and American Culture*, ed. Carol A. Stabile and Mark Harrison (New York: Routledge, 2003), 3.

advanced, combining a strip of painted images placed on a rotating drum and a projector that allowed the presentation of short animated stories.[8]

However, Donald Crafton suggests that, while these early experiments produced animated drawn or painted images, they were more often attempts at simulating and representing motion rather than *creating* motion. Therefore, they should be considered precursors to motion pictures and cinema rather than true early animation; it is the emphasis on created movement that lies at the heart of animation.[9] With this in mind, Solomon assigned "animation" a particular set of characteristics: "(1) the imagery is recorded frame-by-frame and (2) that the illusion of motion is created, rather than recorded."[10] Norman McLaren expands on this definition, stating, "animation is not the art of drawings that move but the art of movements that are drawn; What happens between each frame is much more important than what exists on each frame; Animation is therefore the art of manipulating the invisible interstices that lie between the frames."[11] This focus on movement is important because moving images are more immediate than static images.[12]

That said, early attempts at creating motion—such the use of sequential images, loops, and even hand drawn images—do illustrate the relationship and common ancestry of animation and motion pictures. Lev Manovich contends, however, that the two are quite distinct; as motion picture technology progressed, everything that characterized moving pictures before cinema was relegated to animation, a sub-genre of

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[8] Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*, 8.

[9] Crafton, *Before Mickey: The Animated Film 1898-1928*, 9.

[10] Qtd. in Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 5.

[11] qtd. in ibid., 5.

[12] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 37.

film he claims came to be considered "cinema's bastard relative" because of its lack of realism.[13] Whereas animation was an obvious fabrication, cinema, for most of the 20th century, tried to erase any reference to its production. In other words, cinema positioned itself as the representation of reality, while animation became centred on the "exhilarating sensation that life is somehow being fashioned before the spectator's eyes."[14] Movement was not simply a method used to propel a plot; rather, it had meaning and purpose and, especially in early animation, represented (re-)creation.

3.1.1 Early Animation: Movement, Life, and Reflexivity

This creation of life and movement is a founding principle of animation. In fact, it can be argued that it is this impression of invoking or even creating life, of movement *qua* movement, which provides early, pre-television animation its sense of immediacy. Crafton's suggestion that a better starting point for animation history might be the introduction of stop-motion and "trickfilms" in the early 20th century seems apt.[15] These films, such as those from Georges Méliès, often featured live action, but used editing tricks such as jump cuts to replace objects—the first special effects. It was artist, stage performer, and filmmaker J. Stewart Blackton, however, who was one of the first to develop animated filmmaking using a process that combined changing illustrations, stop motion, and live action footage.[16]

Blackton began his career in the theatre as part of an unsuccessful stage show in which he performed lightning sketches for uninterested audiences. During lightning sketch performances, artists would create a simple drawing that they would then turn into

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[13] Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 298-300.

[14] Crafton, *Before Mickey: The Animated Film 1898-1928*, 12.

[15] See ibid., 9.

[16] Ibid., 12-14.

a succession of other images by gradually adding a few lines at a time.[17] These performances often featured three primary components: (1) the artist, often the protagonist of the act, (2) a drawing surface, and (3) the images themselves.[18] Lightning sketches were also frequently the subject of early short films, which often were combined with rudimentary editing techniques to bring the drawings to life and provide a simple narrative structure: "The artist makes his drawings and they become endowed with the magic ability to move, spontaneously change their shape, or become 'real' (three-dimensional). They may attempt to assert their independence from the artist by teasing him or by refusing to be eradicated."[19] Crafton notes that self-reflexivity is an important part of these lightning sketch films. While it might be tempting to view the tricks as an attempt at transparency, the artist-as-protagonist never lets the audience forget they are indeed watching a performance. In this manner, the artist's presence provides a sense of hypermediacy, making the audience aware of the performative nature of the film. The audience is constantly reminded of the medium (in this case, trickfilm) and "delights in that awareness."[20] The artist is exploring the possibilities of the medium, but shares that exploration with the audience rather than trying to make it transparent. As Crafton states, "the audience knew that camera trickery was involved, but easily accepted the invitation to suspend disbelief and imagine a world in which an artist's drawings could become real."[21] Their active participation in the illusion increased the audience's sense of immediacy.

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[17] Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*, 11-12.

[18] Crafton, *Before Mickey: The Animated Film 1898-1928*, 49-50.

[19] Ibid., 50.

[20] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 41-42.

[21] Crafton, *Before Mickey: The Animated Film 1898-1928*, 57.

Blackton himself made several of these films, including what many consider to be the first animated short called "The Humorous Phases of Funny Faces" (1906). In it, Blackton adapts many of his vaudeville sketches into a series of unrelated vignettes. In one, Blackton draws a man and a woman, whose facial expressions change after he withdraws his hand from the frame, courtesy of a jump cut.[22] The animation is rudimentary, at best, but it shows Blackton was beginning to consider the possibilities of changing, sequential, animated drawings.

It was also Blackton, along with his stage partner, Albert E. Smith, who came across the technique of stop-motion animation. In stop-motion animation, three dimensional objects, drawings, or even live actors are posed and recorded frame-by-frame, with the positioning of the models or actors changed slightly between frame captures.[23] Blackton and Smith were not the only filmmakers experimenting with the technique, but Blackton's film *The Haunted Hotel* (1907) showed the true potential of stop-motion animation. In it, Blackton played upon the novelty of ghosts and haunted locations, where objects seem to move on their own accord, such as a knife slicing a loaf of bread or furniture moving around a room.[24] While the theme of haunted environments had been common in other short films and stage plays in Europe and North America, Blackton's "technical aplomb" which resulted in a lack of visible wires or other obvious film tricks—not to mention the aggressive American-style advertising techniques of Smith and Blackton's film company, Vitagraph—made the film an international

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[22] Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*, 13.

[23] Crafton, *Before Mickey: The Animated Film 1898-1928*, 3, Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 17.

[24] Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 17, Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*, 13, Crafton, *Before Mickey: The Animated Film 1898-1928*, 14-17.

success.[25] Blackton managed to capture the imagination and awe of his audience through the apparent creation of life and motion. His film and other stop motion projects embody what Crafton calls the animator's "enduring concern" with the notion of autokinesis.[26] Here, Crafton is again emphasizing the central role of created movement in animation.

Blackton's experiments with two-dimensional (2D) and stop-motion animation, and the popularity of *The Haunted Hotel*, directly inspired what can be considered the first true animated films. Film studios across North America and Europe attempted to discover the secret to Blackton's film. Emile Cohl, then a relatively new employee at the Gaumont film studio in Paris, worked out the technique of modifying a film camera to expose only one image at a time. He modified the technique to photograph drawings and other 2D images and made over 250 films between 1908 and 1921.[27] His first animated film, *Fantasmagorie* (1908), featured over 700 India ink drawings on rice paper, each photographed individually to complete a two minute film in which most of the plot action was performed by the drawings.[28] As a result, the film lacked much of the self-reflexivity of Blackton's work, but much of Cohl's success with animation and the establishment of animation as a viable art form separate from vaudeville and other stage routines in general were due to this approach. Rather than seeing animation as a novelty or a collection of tricks, Cohl understood the potential for animation as a storytelling device and the importance of motion to the storytelling process. As Crafton states, "Cohl was the first to bring to the cinema the necessary qualities of intellect, imagination, patience, and

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[25] Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*, 13.

[26] Crafton, *Before Mickey: The Animated Film 1898-1928*, 33.

[27] Ibid., 59-60.

[28] Ibid., 60-61.

the obsessive love of drawing that would mark other great animators."[29] In addition to his hand-drawn work, Cohl made several films using "pieced animation" where characters were made from cardboard or paper cut-outs that could be positioned between exposures. Cohl found the results of this type of animation to be too stiff and wooden, however, stating, "Without making drawings for each frame, work was greatly economized obviously, but to the detriment of suppleness."[30]

Like Cohl, American animator and stage performer Windsor McCay also understood that the power of animation was in its ability to create movement and life. It was McCay whom Solomon credits as having "demonstrated the artistic potential of the new medium and inspired generations of animators."[31] McCay originally achieved moderate success as a print cartoonist with such titles as *Dream of a Rarebit Fiend* and *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, but was inspired to investigate animation after viewing some of Blackton's lightning sketches.[32] McCay first experimented with bringing some of those characters to life on screen, beginning with a short animated version of *Little Nemo* in 1911, consisting of approximately 4000 individual drawings.[33] The technical limitations of the time, namely the lack of transparent celluloid sheets or cels, required McCay to re-draw every element for every frame including the backgrounds. As a result, McCay became adept at using line and form sparingly, allowing for maximum expression with minimum effort. This technique would prove useful in what is widely acknowledged

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[29] Ibid., 60.

[30] Ibid., 76.

[31] Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*, 14.

[32] Crafton, *Before Mickey: The Animated Film 1898-1928*, 55.

[33] Ibid., 100.

as McCay's most significant animated work, *Gertie the Dinosaur* (1914), which featured a playful brontosaurus brought to life on screen.

McCay designed *Gertie* to be a part of his stage act and it was this public presentation that ultimately led to his success as an animator.[34] The short film, which was about twelve minutes in length, consisted of over 10,000 individual drawings, all completed by McCay and an assistant who was charged with tracing the sparse background. The large number of drawings allowed Gertie to have realistic movement.[35] However, Gertie's movements also became the vehicle through which the dinosaur's personality was developed; they showed her to be child-like and playful. This believable movement encouraged the audience to treat the dinosaur as an autonomous, engaging, and likeable character in turn, and provides an example of just how important motion was to the notion of immediacy in early animation. In this particular case, the realistic movement reinforced the notion that McCay was creating life through drawings or, rather, *between* images. On stage, McCay would interact with Gertie using meticulously timed cues, and even ended the film by "walking into the screen"—or rather walking behind the screen only to be replaced by an on-screen animated likeness.[36] This live interaction at public screenings was essential to the success of the film because it allayed any suspicions about the use of wires or other tricks. At the same time, McCay's interactions with his animated alter-ego also reminded the audience that the piece was, in fact, artifice (or at least "magical"). The choice of a dinosaur—an extinct creature—not only emphasized the ability of animation to create life, but also reinforced the self-

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[34] Ibid., 111.

[35] Ibid., 113.

[36] Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*, 17.

reflexive and magical qualities of the film. In short, both the animation of the dinosaur, and McCay's interaction with the character, worked to increase the film's immediacy; McCay was both sharing his talent and exhibiting his creation. It was McCay's blending of performance, detailed movement animation, character and story development, and use of line and form that made *Gertie* the "masterpiece of pre-Disney animation."[37]

While these animators experimented with characters and form as a way to expand their stage acts or storytelling abilities, others focused more on the actual processes involved in the creation of movement and form in animation, a curiosity that led to *avant garde* experimentation in abstract films. The film *Rhythmus 21,* a black-and-white, Cubism-inspired film produced in 1921 by German Dadaist Hans Richter is one example. According to the Lenbachhaus Städtische Galerie, "An understanding of abstraction is articulated in this work, which places the geometry and construction of abstract forms in the foreground" (translated by the author).[38] However, this film suggests that the movement of these forms, not simply their design, can be a source of meaning. Richter presents different types of movement in his film, allowing rectangles of various sizes to pop into existence and move stutteringly or glide fluidly across the screen, sometimes increasing in size or shrinking back toward an undefined horizon. Those viewing the film get to "observe the increasing self-reflexivity of the art."[39] In other words, Richter is experimenting with the capabilities of animation *qua* animation, and demonstrates the ability for movement to convey meaning. While his approach is significantly different

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[37] Crafton, *Before Mickey: The Animated Film 1898-1928*, 110.

[38] "Rhythmus 21: Positionen Des Abstrakten," (München, Deutschland (Munich, Germany): Lenbachhaus Städtische Galerie, 2008). The original text reads: "*In diesem Werk ist ein Verständnis von Abstraktion artikuliert, welches die Geometrie und die Konstruiertheit abstrakter Formen in den Vordergrund stellt.*"

[39] Ibid. Original text reads: "*steigernde Selbstreflexion der Kunst zu beobachten.*"

from Blackton, Cohl, or McCay, Richter's pioneering work again highlights the integral nature of movement in animation.

Paul Wells connects the work of McCay, Cohl, and other "primitive" animators to the limited animation of Hanna-Barbera, claiming the "graphic freedoms afforded by the simple use of lines and shapes" led to "less concentration on animation itself, and more in the ingenuity of visual joke-making and creating characters as graphic ciphers for specific ideas."[40] While Wells is correct to suggest Hanna-Barbera employs a more abstract and simple aesthetic, he fails to notice that the use of line and form in these early cartoons emanate from the opposite: a complete focus upon movement and animation as meaningful. It would take a particular set of economic and technological developments, spanning several decades, before the focus shifted from movement as animation.

3.1.2 Cel Animation and Taylorism

Interestingly, the introduction of the celluloid sheet often heralded as one of the most important animation innovations of the 20th century also allowed for increased modernization and standardization that limited experimentation. A more Taylorist approach to animation began in the 1910s. Taylorism or "Scientific Management" is a management theory named for Fredrick W. Taylor, who suggested that more ideas, not more labour, are required for more efficient and standardized production of commodities. A division of management from labour and uniformity in production are required to achieve this efficiency of production. Early animation was hindered by production and technical issues, not the least of which was the significant time required to draw a single frame of a cartoon, including backgrounds, characters, and other decorative elements.

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[40] Paul Wells, ""Smarter Than the Average Artform": Animation in the Television Era," in *Prime Time Animation: Television Animation and American Culture*, ed. Carol A. Stabile and Mark Harrison (New York: Routledge, 2003), 19.

Illustrator and animator Joseph Randolph Bray, sometimes referred to as the "Henry Ford of animation", was one of the first in the animation industry to recognize the potential of a Taylorist approach in animation, and identified four processes necessary to modernize cartoon production: improved and systematic reproduction technology such as using zinc etchings for background reprinting; an established division of labour including inkers, colourers, and a director; protecting new animation processes with patents; and improved distribution and marketing. By introducing these four steps, Bray effectively moved animation from an experimental novelty to a modern, capitalist commodity.

Using his four principals as a guide, Bray pioneered an assembly line system of making cartoons by using a team of artists in combination with his patented system for printing backgrounds on sheets of paper, circumventing the need to reproduce them by hand.[41] Bray, who owned his own film animation studio, compartmentalized and streamlined the production of cartoons by using a team of animators, each of whom was given a specific task. This approach allowed Bray to significantly reduce production time and costs, but it also suppressed individualism. The success of Bray's application of Taylorism eventually allowed it to become the "praxis" of studio animation.[42] Bray was able to set the foundations of American animation by "rationalising labour, cutting out unnecessary effort, and speeding production line."[43]

In 1914, another inventor and animator, Earl Hurd, patented an animation process that involved using sheets of celluloid, or "cels" to further streamline the animation process. Cels are flexible sheets of drawing material, that are "better for moving

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[41] Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*, 23-4.

[42] Crafton, *Before Mickey: The Animated Film 1898-1928*, 163-67.

[43] Bendazzi, qtd. in Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 19.

parts...since the clear sheets allow an animator to redraw only the moving portion of a figure[.]"[44] The use of cels required animators to redraw only parts that move, such as an arm, or even simply shifting the position of an existing cel, before photographing a frame, further reducing production time.

This process was not without its drawbacks; early cels were expensive, thicker, and not completely clear. Usually, only three cels could be stacked before a visible haze began to obscure the background. Even so, the cel system quickly became an industry standard and remains the standard for hand-drawn animation today.[45] Bray had also experimented with cels but without the same level of success. He quickly hired Hurd, who brought his patented process with him.[46] The two men eventually became partners, forming the Bray-Hurd Processing Company in 1916.[47] The partnership was lucrative; the men were able to establish a virtual patent monopoly on the animation process in the silent era until cel animation became public domain with the expiration of the patent in 1932.[48]

Though pioneering, the work from Bray's studio and other animation houses at the time did not feature sophisticated narratives. As Solomon notes, they were "something to be finished, shown and forgotten in a short time on a small budget."[49] Bray and Hurd's most positive contribution to the animation industry was the development of an assembly line approach to cartoon production, reliant upon the use of cels, which

[44] Ibid., 19.

[45] Ibid., 19, Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*, 24-25.

[46] Crafton, *Before Mickey: The Animated Film 1898-1928*, 148.

[47] Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*, 25.

[48] Crafton, *Before Mickey: The Animated Film 1898-1928*, 153-54, Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 20, Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*, 25.

[49] Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*, 28.

simplified and increased the speed of the animation process. But, this Taylorist approach allowed individual artists less artistic control over their products. The lack of narrative sophistication in these early cartoons contributed to the notion of animation as inferior to live-action film and relegated the use of cartoons to filler between the live action motion pictures. This view of animation was commonly held for several decades until animation began to play a resurgent role in special effects. Everything that characterized moving pictures before cinema was pejoratively categorized as animation and deemed inferior, as cinema tried to erase any reference to its production process until the 1990s.[50]

The adoption of a Taylorist approach to animation also meant that the design and development of an animated film could be more easily dictated and controlled by a central figure—either a head artist, producer, or director—and curtailed the amount of aesthetic experimentation in popular animation. The kind of *avant garde* experimentation seen in early works from McCay or Richter was only found in the rarely-seen work of independent artists. Popular animation became constrained by a "diminishing number of codes and forms", restricting and limiting definitions of the genre in the late 1920s.[51] The genre shifted away from experimental forms and towards character-driven shorts. It took another decade before the term "animation" began to represent a more structured type of full-motion animation, one that ostensibly still dealt with the creation of life through the use of movement but increasingly shifted toward the development of a linear narrative.

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[50] Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 298-302.

[51] Crafton, *Before Mickey: The Animated Film 1898-1928*, 259.

3.1.3 The Disney Aesthetic

Though several studios were producing animation in the 1920s and 1930s, none are more famous or more influential than the Walt Disney studios.[52] Like other animators in the early 1920s, Disney's studio began by producing short films such as the "Alice Comedies" which featured a live action girl in an animated Wonderland. While the series was unique due to its combination of animation and live action footage in addition to the fact the main character was female, it also featured a simplistic formula: "constant gags with little emphasis on plot development."[53] Letters from Disney to his distributor, Margaret Winkler, however, indicated that Disney was not very comfortable with this approach and suggested that he wanted to shift away from gag comedies and toward "dignified" comedies that featured a narrative.[54] The move to plot-driven cartoons was complete by the time the Disney studio began producing Mickey Mouse cartoons in the late 1920s (beginning with the infamous *Steamboat Willie* in 1928), though they were still punctuated by visual gags.

Disney cartoons also increasingly adopted an aesthetic found in motion pictures, including complex staging, different perspectives and camera angles, and complicated character movements. This shift to a cinema aesthetic coincided with the fact that there was more money to be made in feature-length animated projects and led to one of Disney's most well-known and impressive animation feats, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in 1937. The film was the first feature-length animated film ever produced and

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[52] While it is not possible to provide a complete history of the Disney Studios here, there are several available histories such as Solomon's *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings* or Merritt and Kaufman's *Walt in Wonderland: The Silent Films of Walt Disney.*

[53] Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 107-8.

[54] Ibid., 109.

features a combination of "cartoonish" dwarfs and several "relatively realistic" human characters. [55] It is no mistake that the main characters were the more realistically animated, while the dwarfs in supporting roles were animated in a style common to the Bray and Hurd animated shorts. This differentiation was indicative of the emphasis on realism and full motion that became defining characteristics of the Disney aesthetic. Even though the dwarfs were less realistic in appearance, their development also relied heavily on full animation. As Solomon notes, "to create a single believable personality on screen and imbue it with a unique style of movement is difficult enough; to create seven characters who look alike but think and act differently and who can interact presented enormous difficulties."[56] While each of the dwarfs were indeed similar in appearance— bulbous noses, rotund frames, and oversized feet, for example—their individual personalities were expressed through often exaggerated facial expressions and bodily movements, something only possible in full animation. Though the definition of animation had been narrowed by the popularity of a Disney aesthetic and the shift to plots with a linear narrative, the use of movement in defining character personality remained important.

Disney went to great lengths to cultivate the full animation skills of his artists. In the early days of the animation studio's existence, Disney brought in the then-legendary Windsor McCay to teach "pose-to-pose" animation, a technique that aids in the development of smooth, fluid animation by having the artists draw important poses or "key frames" and then connect them by drawing the images in between—a process called

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[55] Ibid., 112-13.

[56] Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*, 61.

'in-betweening' or, more simply, 'tweening.'[57] These terms will have increased

importance later in television animation. McCay actively discouraged the use of stock

movements, cycles, or loops, insisting instead that all movements should be drawn for

each scene. He also initiated 'Action Analysis' classes designed to help the artists

'understand the mechanics of real life and animated movement.'[58] The goal of these

classes was not only to recreate realistic movements such as walking, but also to

demonstrate for the artists how motions and actions vary in response to different

moods—in other words "personality animation." For example, in order to make Snow

White more realistic, believable, and feminine, several hours of dancer Marge Belcher

were shot and used as reference footage.[59] Personality animation was a technique

dependent upon the use of full animation.

Disney and those who mimicked his aesthetic would usher in what Solomon calls

the "Golden Age of Animation", which spanned from the debut of *Steamboat Willie* until

the start of the Second World War. As with early experimental animation, movement,

particularly in the form of full animation, remained an integral part of cartoons, but the

animation in Disney cartoons was designed to recreate real-world movements. Even

animated films that featured fantastic elements such as talking animals, witches, and

fairies were grounded in reality. In other words, animation became secondary to

character. Yet even in the face of the shift to cel animation, Taylorist production

approaches, and limited artistic freedom, the basic premise of animated films remained

unaltered: drawn motion was a primary vehicle for expression. This full motion approach

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[57] Ibid., 56.

[58] Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 78.

[59] Ibid., 115, Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*, 58.

would remain the dominant mode of Western animation until the 1950s, when animation

moved from cinemas and onto the small screen.[60]

3.1.4 Television Animation and the Development of Limited Animation

Animation would take on a renewed importance after the Second World War.

Domestic appliances such as the dishwasher or television began to replace community

facilities, resulting in a drop in attendance at sporting events, theatres and, for the first

time since the Great Depression, movies.[61] A weakening of the film studio system in the

late 1940s and early 1950s also led to a weakening of the animation film industry.[62] As

the studios began to take financial losses, animation studios were among the first victims

of job and budgets cuts. Even with increasing sophistication in cel animation techniques,

animation was far more expensive to produce than live-action films. A major blow was

dealt in 1948, when an anti-trust case against Paramount studios hastened the end of the

studio system by ending vertical integration. This subsequently led to the closure of most

studio animation houses.[63] As a result, many animators and producers looked to the

emerging medium of television. Animation was seen as an ideal source of content to fill

empty airtime in expanding broadcast schedules. Rather than employing the life-like

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[60] Other popular studios that worked in the 1930s and 1940s, such as Warner Brothers and the Walter Lantz Studios, also produced full animation cartoons. However, unlike Disney animation, cartoons such as "Looney Toons", "Woody Woodpecker", and "Popeye" chose to recreate older silent movies in animated form. Warner Brothers director Chuck Jones (qtd. in Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*, 74.) freely admits animators from these studios would study and steal from Disney cartoons, but adapted Disney's animation techniques to better fit the visual gag-oriented plots. In many ways, the less rigid storylines allowed for more creativity, exaggeration, and experimentation that allowed animation to be pushed in new directions. However, it was the Disney aesthetic that eventually became associated with the word "animation."

[61] Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies (Paperback)* 279, Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*, 106.

[62] Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 141.

[63] Ibid., 144, Mittell, "The Great Saturday Morning Exile: Scheduling Cartoons on Television's Periphery in the 1960s," 35.

animation of popular Disney animated features or the comedic, full-motion animated studio shorts from the 1940s by artists such as Bob Clampett, Tex Avery, and Fritz Freleng, television increasingly relied upon the technique of "limited animation."

3.1.4.1 Limited animation characteristics. Maureen Furniss suggests the use of four criteria when analyzing animation: movement of images, metamorphosis of images, number of images, and dominance of visual and aural components.[64] In limited animation cartoons, the movement is kept as simple as possible in order to reduce costs and production time. As the name implies, limited animation has the most direct effect on the role of movement in cartoons. It is an approach to animation that makes heavy use of cels and layering. Rather than being drawn on a single cel as a complete entity and redrawn for each frame, characters are instead segmented into several parts on different cel layers—a head on one layer, a torso on another, each arm and leg on their own cels and so on. This allows the animator to selectively animate some parts of a character while leaving others still.

3.1.4.2 Full animation. While the term "full animation" seems relatively self-explanatory, an understanding of the processes it involves is necessary in order to appreciate the development of animation. Full animation employs constant movement with a minimum of cycles or repeated elements and movements. Images are generally in constant motion, a necessary result of the more frequent redrawing and repositioning of figures. In addition, full animation allows for the development of personality through

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[64] Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 133.

motions such as gestures or facial expressions and relies less upon auditory elements such as dialogue.[65]

3.1.4.3 Limited animation and aesthetics. The use of limited animation techniques has other significant effects on the aesthetics of animation. First and foremost, it amplifies the role of design in cartoons.[66] Background, lines, colour, and character shape often became more abstract and are more expressive than realistic.[67] For example, backgrounds rarely represent a realistic, three dimensional setting depicting realistic textures and lighting. Instead they rely on flat areas of colour or patterns combined with selectively placed "props" such as a window, trees, or mountains to suggest location.[68] The use of line also becomes important. Hand-drawn lines, because of their "imperfect" nature, have a texture and beauty that can imply movement and life, helping to offset the absence of full animation.[69] Colour also plays a significant role, as it is able to "create *any* effect, whether it be dramatic, sombre, joyous, or otherwise."[70] Television, especially the tube television that was the industry standard until the flat-screen television became widely available in the 2000s, has a poorer resolution than film, and as a result colours in television cartoons are often bolder, high contrast, and feature less subtle shading. Finally, limited animation requires methods other than movement for personality and narrative development, since there are fewer possibilities for "personality animation" and

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[65] Ibid., 133-34.

[66] Amid Amidi, *Cartoon Modern: Style and Design in Fifties Animation* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2006), 40.

[67] Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 140.

[68] Amidi, *Cartoon Modern: Style and Design in Fifties Animation*, 11.

[69] Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 79.

[70] Ibid., 71-3. Emphasis in original.

visual gags. Therefore, there is an increased emphasis on dialog and writing in limited animation cartoons.[71]

While the term "limited animation" can be interpreted as implying an inferiority to full animation, this is not necessarily the case. As Whitaker and Halas note, "limited animation requires almost as much skill on the part of the animator as full animation, since he must create an illusion of action with the greatest sense of economy."[72] Furniss argues that we tend to construe limited animation as inferior due to the prevalent cultural equation of value with labour.[73] Rather than thinking of limited animation as a simplified form of full animation, however, it is more fruitful to think of it as a completely different form of animation—one that relies on a different set of techniques, use of motion and, most importantly, sources of immediacy.

3.1.4.4 Early limited television animation. The first television cartoon to feature limited animation was the show *Crusader Rabbit,* the first iteration of which ran from 1949-1951.[74] Episodes were generally only four minutes in length, making it easy to insert them into television schedules.[75] The show took the idea of "limited animation" to the extreme; co-creator Jay Ward stated the goal of the production team was "to get the effect of an animated comic strip."[76] Each episode featured still-frame storyboard drawings occasionally linked by simple camera pans or a walk loop. Despite the limited animation, the show was modestly successful, mostly due to recognition of the need for a

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[71] Ibid., 134, Harold Whitaker and John Halas, *Timing for Animation* (New York: Focal Press, 1981), 10.

[72] Whitaker and Halas, *Timing for Animation*, 10-11.

[73] Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 136.

[74] Ibid., 101, Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*, 229.

[75] Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 101.

[76] Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*, 230.

good script on the part of Ward and fellow creator Alexander Anderson Jr. As Solomon

states, "the clever scripts often featured sophisticated humor in an ingenuous guise…. All

of the humor and most of the action came from the scripts[.]"[77] Ward and Anderson

would later apply the combination of limited animation and clever scripts in the cartoon

series *Rocky and His Friends*. The show, which debuted in 1959, was a "zany,

freewheeling spoof of old movie serials."[78] The animation was very limited—sometimes

as slow as four frames per second, and marred with mistakes. However, it is considered

to be one of the best cartoons of the era because of its witty, topical scripts full of pointed

satire intermixed with shameless puns. These examples highlight the importance of the

script in limited animation cartoons; without the support of detailed, animated gags, a

good script becomes a necessity. Unlike previous full animation cartoons, here,

immediacy emanates from the script itself. In many ways, the topicality of the scripts,

such as their references to Cold War politics, was the source of immediacy. The cartoons,

for the first time, demonstrate the importance of production speed to immediacy.

3.1.4.5 UPA and Gerald McBoing Boing. In the early 1950s, while television

animation was still in its infancy, several studios began experimenting with limited

animation in a way that resembled the early experiments of Cohl or Richter. In contrast to

those earlier animators, who focused mostly on the role of movement, however, these

television animators played with the other characteristics that were necessarily

emphasized in limited animation, such as colour, line, and form in addition to increasing

the importance and impact of aural elements including the script. One of the studios

credited with some of the most creative work in this period was United Productions of

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[77] Ibid., 229-30.

[78] Ibid., 233.

America, or UPA. Many of the animators from this ground-breaking studio came from one of the most restrictive: Disney. During a Disney strike in 1941, many young, talented animators left to explore other opportunities in studios that allowed them more creative freedom. Some of these artists came together in 1943 to form the Industrial Film and Poster Service, which would be reorganized as UPA in 1945.[79]

The studio was responsible for many of the most recognizable cartoons of the era, including *Hell Bent for Election*, a campaign film for Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and *Mr. Magoo* (1960). However, no show epitomised the studio's experimental nature more than *Gerald McBoing Boing* (1956). This series, which featured a little boy named Gerald who "can't speak words but only goes 'boing boing'", marked a "clean break" from the Disney style of animation and remains a masterpiece in minimalist animation.[80] *Boing Boing*, like other limited animation cartoons, often relied upon the script, usually in the form of a voice-over narration, to drive the story. Amid Amidi notes, however, that "stylization—in design, color and animation—served a higher purpose of communicating emotional value to the audience."[81] Unlike cartoons such as *Rocky and His Friends* which used well-developed scripts to increase the communicative potential of limited animation, the animators at UPA were able to use aesthetic elements such as line and colour to enrich their animations. The characters are simplistic in form, usually nothing more than a series of rounded lines and suggestive shapes. The colour of the backgrounds and Gerald himself would change to match the mood of the characters or the scene. The "sets" were often sparse, devoid of perspective lines. Only the occasional prop suggested

[79] Amidi, *Cartoon Modern: Style and Design in Fifties Animation*, 112-15, Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*, 207-10.

[80] Amidi, *Cartoon Modern: Style and Design in Fifties Animation*, 133.

[81] Ibid., 133.

distance and location. Even the motion was stylized. Director Bobe Cannon allowed the

characters to change poses without in-betweens and unrealistic motion was sometimes

used to convey certain attitudes. In other words, the series used the limitations of the

animation to develop and explore other artistic possibilities. In the following decade,

however, the process of limited animation was applied in a "nonartistic" way to simply

reduce the production time and costs of television animation.[82] The creation of movement

and life, once the impetus for the development of animation as a media form, had now

become subordinate to the realities of production, leading to another significant shift in

the understanding of western animation.

3.1.4.6 Hanna-Barbera. The closure of MGM Animation in 1957 caused two

former MGM director-producers, Joseph Barbera and William Hanna, to form the Hanna-

Barbera studio.[83] If Ward and Anderson were the pioneers of limited animation, and UPA

demonstrated its full potential, it was the Hanna and Barbera studio that set the standard

for decades to come. Like the animators discussed above, the pair turned to television,

perfecting an animation technique that involved breaking character body parts down into

layered pieces, and streamlining the drawing and animation process.[84] The cartoon *Ruff*

and Ready (1958) was the first to use Barbera's system of limited animation, which

amounted to adding minor animations to the duo's "pose reels." As Hanna-Barbera

animator Mike Lah explains:

> Bill and Joe's pose reels were funny, but when it came to the finished pictures, we
> saw a change. On the pose reel, a drawing would read—it would be there and you
> could see it. But when you added the animation, the timing was so fast you
> couldn't see that drawing anymore—it wasn't there long enough….When we

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[82] Ibid., 11, Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*, 228.

[83] Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*, 236.

[84] Sandro Corsaro, *The Flash Animator* (Indianapolis: New Riders, 2002).

> analyzed the pictures to see how we lost a certain amount of funniness, we would say: 'It might be fun just to add a few little leg walks and head moves, and we'd have limited animation, like "Crusader Rabbit."'[85]

The application of this process resulted in incredibly cheap cartoons.[86] Six-minute episodes of *Ruff and Ready* were produced for roughly $2,700 USD, less than a tenth of the cost of six-minute episodes of full-animation cartoons.[87] Hanna-Barbera repeated the process with a string of memorable shows such as *The Huckleberry Hound Show* (1958), *The Yogi Bear Show* (1961), *The Jetsons* (1962), and their biggest hit, *The Flintstones* (1960). Most of these shows relied on witty scripts, and, according to Solomon, featured "some of the most excruciating puns in cartoon history."[88]

The Flintstones was the last landmark for an animation industry about to face a "dark age" that would last over two decades. While the show was not anywhere near as artistically and visually creative as *Gerald McBoing Boing*, it did feature some ingenious character designs from animator Ed Benedict. It was also structured as a sitcom rather than a collection of 4-7 minutes shorts, complete with a laugh track and a full 22-minute plot line. Many have noted that *The Flintstones* was basically an animated version of *The Honeymooners,* but, nonetheless, it was unique in that it was the first show animated for prime time, and was easily the most successful until *The Simpsons* debuted in 1989.[89] Part of that success was due to the fact that it was developed for a general audience comprised of adults and children and was the first cartoon to feature a pregnant character,

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[85] Qtd. in Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*, 237.

[86] Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 141-42.

[87] Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*, 236-37.

[88] Ibid., 235-6.

[89] Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 143, Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*, 238-39.

with Fred Flintstone's wife Wilma giving birth to daughter Pebbles during the third season.[90]

Despite these innovative elements in *The Flintstones*, the Hanna-Barbera studio was— and still is—the focus of criticisms that accuse the show, and limited animation in general, of degrading the quality of animation. While *The Flintstones* enjoyed a short period of success in the prime time slot, the writing eventually faltered, partly due to increased demand placed on the studio due to *The Flintstones'* success. The increased airtime demands created by the spread of cable television in the 1970s and 1980s exacerbated the issue. Leonard Maltin noted that the repetition of plots and character design that resulted from the volume of work the studio took on eventually defeated all the "good intentions" of the early shows' clever comedy scripts.[91] Like many critics, Maltin felt that the studio lowered the artistic standards of animation. Others within the animation industry agreed. Director Chuck Jones, who did most of his work with the Warner Brothers studio, called television animation "crap" and "illustrated radio", while voice actor Mel Blanc, also a Warner Brothers mainstay, claimed television animation "kill[ed] the cartoon industry."[92] In many ways, this criticism is unfair. A direct comparison between these limited animation projects and the full motion shorts produced for the movie screen ignores the fact that they are two fundamentally different types of animation. In spite of the fact that they lack the visual sophistication of the UPA shorts of the 1950s, *The Flintstones* (and other Hanna-Barbera cartoons from the late 1950s and

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[90] Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*, 237.

[91] Qtd. in Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 143.

[92] Mittell, "The Great Saturday Morning Exile: Scheduling Cartoons on Television's Periphery in the 1960s," 42.

early 1960s) still exhibit some of the most skilfully designed characters in animation, in

many cases employing far more creative uses of line and form than do the film shorts.

There is, however, a significant falloff in the quality of the scripts even within the

latter three seasons. Rather than relying on its sometimes-satirical look at suburban life,

the show began to rely on a series of repeated gimmicks that put the regular characters in

increasingly extraordinary circumstances. Originally, television and film stars from the

1960s began appearing as Stone Age "Hollyrock" celebrities with names based on puns

involving rock or stone. Among the guest stars were Cary Grant as "Gary Granite", Ann-

Margaret as "Ann-Margrock" and Tony Curtis as "Stony Curtis."[93] These guest

appearances, which were undoubtedly included in order to boost ratings,[94] also served to

separate the show from its strength: clever writing that examined, and sometimes

skewered, suburban life using its pre-historic time setting as a way to mask its subversive

content. However, while the guest appearances provided the occasional distraction, it was

the introduction of the character The Great Gazoo in the show's sixth season that

signalled the beginning of the end of *The Flintstones*.[95] Gazoo is a short, green alien,

visible only to Fred Flintstone, his friend and neighbour Barney Rubble, and their

children Pebbles and Bamm-Bamm. He can appear and disappear at will, and his

appearances (or ill-timed disappearances) often lead to mischief for Fred and Barney. The

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[93] See episodes 2.6: "The Rock Quarry Story" (20 October 1961), 4.1: "Ann-Margrock Presents" (19 September 1963), and 6.3: "The Return of Stony Curtis" (1 October 1965), respectively.

[94] See Caldwell, "Convergence Television: Aggregating Form and Repurposing Content in the Culture of Conglomeration," 61, Caldwell, "Second-Shift Media Aesthetics," 134. Caldwell calls the use of guest stars and other tactics that break from a show's standard formula "stunting" and notes it most often occurs during sweeps weeks to "spike" ratings.

[95] The Great Gazoo, voiced by Harvey Korman, first appeared in episode 6.7: "The Great Gazoo" (29 October 1965), and would appear in nine of 26 episodes in season 6.

futuristic extraterrestrial ruined the show's "Stone Age sitcom" premise. The shift to gags

and stunts detracted from the sardonic and clever nature of the earlier scripts.

Unlike *Gerald McBoing Boing*, which made clever use of limited animation to

place emphasis on movement as an integral part of animation, the limited animation in

the Hanna-Barbera cartoons was far less inspired. Repeated walk cycles, background

images, even eye movements distracted from the illusion of the creation of life that

marked early animation. One example, in episode 1.4: "No Help Wanted" (21 October

1960), had Fred and Barney walk through Fred's house, passing the same curtained

window in the background several times, a tactic that is later spoofed in several cartoons

including *Family Guy*.[96] The movement of many of the people and animals in the show

was similarly repetitious to the point where it began to emphasize the lack of motion (and

therefore life), rather than giving the illusion that motion was created. A lobster in

episode entitled 3.21: "Mother-in-Law's Visit" (1 February 1963), for example,

replicated the same claw-snapping motion for several seconds, even after being smacked

on the head with a spoon by Wilma Flintstone, who was in the process of cooking it for

dinner. The biting motion of an alligator bag featured in the same episode (which actually

is a live alligator with a handle strapped to it) is similarly repetitive and limited; the jaw

opens and closes, but the rest of the animal's body remains strangely lifeless. Later

Hanna-Barbera cartoons rehashed many of the same gags, plots, and character designs of

The Flintstones.

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[96] See episode 2.11: "A Picture is Worth 1,000 Bucks" (18 April 2000). In one scene, the characters Peter and Meg walk through a scene in which background images are noticeably repeated. They then walk into a Flintstones scene, featuring stone houses in the background. Once they notice this, they appear frightened, and back out of the Flintstones scene slowly.

Lack of experimentation with the form meant animation on American television had become stagnant. As Jason Mittel notes, "the immediate success of Hanna-Barbera's original television animation led to an overhaul of what animation would look and sound like for years to come."[97] The success of Hanna-Barbera also exacerbated the second major change to the cultural understanding of animation. Whereas early experiments with animation as a storytelling device and the eventual introduction of Taylorist approaches and celluloid sheets led to Crafton's "diminishing of codes", the prevalence of limited animation on television split the genre; limited animation became the standard, and full, realistic animation became something extraordinary or special. Full animation gained an aura of mystique and helped 3-D animated films to be accepted as viable motion pictures over three decades before the release of Disney/Pixar's *Toy Story* (1995).[98]

3.1.4.7 The shift to Saturday morning. Apparently, critics were not the only people noticing the lowered quality of animation on television. Most animated series aired during prime time in the 1960s quickly failed, with *The Flintstones* being the exception. However, network executives quickly realized there was another audience for these shows: children. Networks began scheduling failed prime-time animation cartoons on Saturday mornings, where they were joined by showings of other, earlier animated shorts from the studio era. This shift to Saturday mornings was fuelled by a few factors. First, it was believed that children would be less critical of the lower quality of the shows. As Maltin notes, "kids didn't seem to mind, so advertisers and television executives had

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[97] Mittell, "The Great Saturday Morning Exile: Scheduling Cartoons on Television's Periphery in the 1960s," 42.

[98] Full, 2-D animation would see a brief resurgence mostly thanks to Disney films like Beauty and the Beast (1991) and Aladdin (1992), but the company suspended most of its 2-D animation operations in 2004. Computerized, 3-D animation, would be accepted back into film earlier in the form of realistic special effects. See Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 287-8.

no cause for complaint. Other studios followed Hanna-Barbera's lead, and soon this kind of assembly-line product was considered the norm."[99] This approach further degraded the animation quality. As Solomon notes, "the artists at UPA had developed limited animation as an aesthetic response to the problems of moving flattened, graphically sophisticated figures. The Saturday-morning producers used limited animation to cut costs."[100] Tangential to this application of limited animation to save production costs was the recognition of children as a profitable demographic for advertisers. In the early 1950s, toy manufacturers avoided advertising to children because they were not "active consumers." However, a successful experiment by Mattel, which advertised its new toy, the "Burp Gun", in 1955 on *The Mickey Mouse Club*, demonstrated the value in advertising to children.[101]

The increased desire to advertise to children required more programming—and scheduled blocks of programming—specifically for children, and Saturday mornings became the natural choice. The change was rapid. In 1957, animated programming was scattered throughout the weekly television schedule, with few or no cartoons scheduled on Saturday mornings. By 1966, all three major US networks had blocks of animated programming scheduled on Saturdays.[102] This led to an increased demand for animated children's programming. Film shorts from the studio era in addition to reruns of television animated shows provided much of the content, but the syndicated market

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[99] Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 143.

[100] Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*, 241.

[101] Mittell, "The Great Saturday Morning Exile: Scheduling Cartoons on Television's Periphery in the 1960s," 41.

[102] Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 145, Mittell, "The Great Saturday Morning Exile: Scheduling Cartoons on Television's Periphery in the 1960s," 34, Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*, 241.

quickly ran thin, as demand was high and many old black and white series were undesirable.[103] In response, animation studios began to produce cartoons at amazing speed. By the 1980s, with children firmly established as a desirable target market for advertisers, cartoons became specifically designed to promote products, leading to a rash of toy-based cartoon series in the 1980s such as *Transformers* (1984), *G.I. Joe* (1985), *ThunderCats* (1985), and *My Little Pony* (1986). Writing suffered further with the increased speed of production and a growing focus on the visibility of the characters/products. Cartoons in the 1970s and 1980s lacked both the attention to movement characteristic of full animation and the witty scripts necessary for positive limited animation.

As Solomon suggests, television animation reached its low point in the late 1970s: "in the never ending search for quantity, quality was gradually compromised out of existence."[104] Many animation professionals were concerned by the steadily declining quality of visuals and writing in animation. One of the harshest critics of the new television animation was Warner Brothers animator and director Fritz Freleng, who stated, "[T]he networks go for numbers (or viewers). They don't care what the quality of the show is—I don't even think they watch the shows. As long as it's got high numbers, it doesn't matter whether the show is good or not."[105] In a separate interview, he stated: "TV is such a monster. It swallows up all this animation so fast that nobody seems to care whether it's good or bad... The networks don't look at the show, they just look at the ratings. If the ratings are good, to heck with the show. They don't care whether it's just a

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[103] Mittell, "The Great Saturday Morning Exile: Scheduling Cartoons on Television's Periphery in the 1960s," 51.

[104] Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*, 241.

[105] Qtd. in Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 145.

bouncing ball."[106] The spread of cable television in the 1970s and 1980s only expanded

airtime demands, with animation filling a significant amount of that void. By 1990,

despite the introduction of *The Simpsons*, the first successful prime-time cartoon in thirty

years, television animation remained associated with children and children's

entertainment.

<p style="text-align:center">3.1.5 The Birth of Flashimation</p>

Canadian-born John Kricfalusi gained fame as an animator in this environment.

Though a talented modern animator, Kricfalusi was well versed in animation history.

Throughout his childhood he drew caricatures of Hanna-Barbera animator Ed Benedict's

characters.[107] Some of his other influences included other Hanna-Barbera and Warner

Brothers animators Bob Clampett, Chuck Jones, and Tex Avery, famous for their Bugs

Bunny and Daffy Duck cartoons for the Warner Brothers studio.[108] It was Kricfalusi's

ability to connect past and present that helped him become a lead animator for Ralph

Bakshi's new Mighty Mouse cartoon *Mighty Mouse: The New Adventures* in 1987. He

and his creative team adopted an unrestricted style when creating scripts, allowing

anything funny or strange into the cartoon. In fact, the show was cancelled after an

episode in which Mighty Mouse energized his super powers by sniffing a wild flower, as

some concerned parents protested what they perceived to be a reference to cocaine. This

anecdote exemplifies the ways in which the social designation of cartoons for children

can effect production. It was not the only such challenge Kricfalusi experienced.

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[106] Solomon, *The History of Animation: Enchanted Drawings*, 229.

[107] Martin Goodman, "'When Cartoons Were Cartoony:' John Kricfalusi Presents," Animation World Magazine, http://mag.awn.com/index.php?ltype=pageone&article_no=2214, Amidi, *Cartoon Modern: Style and Design in Fifties Animation*, 40.

[108] Chuck Crisafulli, "Future of Entertainment," The Hollywood Reporter, http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/hr/search/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1001096312.

In 1991, Kricfalusi began production on the highly successful *Ren & Stimpy* for

Nickelodeon, a children's network in the U.S. His deference for 1940s style animation

was evident in the show, in which he both honoured and parodied the limited cel

animation styles made famous by Hanna-Barbera.[109] His maintenance of a writing style

that accepted anything that inspired laugher among the staff writers, no matter how

juvenile or bizarre, led to him being labelled a renegade. This storytelling approach also

led to the creation George Liquor, a character that only made a couple of appearances

before Nickelodeon fired Kricfalusi and his staff due to the network position that this

"foulmouthed, red-blooded (and red-nosed) American" was too indecent for the show's

young audience.[110] In addition to removing him from the show, the network retained the

rights, allowing it to continue producing the series without Kricfalusi's involvement.[111]

To reassert his creative freedom and gain independence from corporate control,

Kricfalusi turned to a previously untapped and uncensored technological resource—the

Internet.[112] In fact, the animator saw the Web as his salvation and "the future of

everything."[113] In an interview with *Wired* in 1997, Kricfalusi said, "what you see every

day on the street and laugh at, you aren't allowed to see in a cartoon. Well, now you

can."[114] As noted above, Kricfalusi started his own animation studio called Spümco and

began experimenting with creating short cartoons designed for distribution over the Web

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[109] Goodman, "'When Cartoons Were Cartoony:' John Kricfalusi Presents."

[110] Steve Tanner, "Toon in, Turn On," Streaming Media, http://www.streamingmedia.com/article.asp?id=6720.

[111] Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 203-04.

[112] Jennifer Sullivan, "In His Way, John K. Will Challenge the World," Wired News, http://www.wired.com/news/culture/0,1284,7566,00.html.

[113] Tanner, "Toon in, Turn On."

[114] Sullivan, "In His Way, John K. Will Challenge the World."

using Macromedia Flash.[115] This experimentation provided Spümco with certain

advantages. By producing his own cartoon exclusively for distribution on the Internet,

Kricfalusi was able to circumvent the corporate censorship that had led to his dismissal

from Nickelodeon. In addition, the relatively new medium of the Internet represented an

opportunity to escape the association of animation with children's content. Kricfalusi's

direct control over production and distribution allowed him and his staff to reintroduce

crude elements without fear of reprisal, permitting George Liquor to become television's

"first cartoon ambassador to the Internet."[116]

The Goddamn George Liquor Program, the first professionally produced cartoon

for the Web, premiered on October 15, 1997.[117] The show was full of imagery,

vocabulary, and characters that would be deemed unfit for broadcast on American

television including the title of the show itself and a detailed animation of a dog passing

excrement. Later episodes featured limited interactivity—lending them a sense of

immediacy—with explicit imagery that would be censored on U.S. broadcast television,

such as the ability to remove the clothing from the series' only female character. As

Furniss points out, the two primary concerns related to censorship on American television

are taste and control—moral concerns in terms of taste and access concerns in terms of

control.[118] Kricfalusi's shift to the Internet allowed him to escape these concerns. Though

only eight one-minute episodes of the program were produced, the Web cartoon can be

seen as the starting point of the genre of Flashimation.

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[115] Macromedia was bought by Adobe Systems Incorporated in 2005. Adobe`s information on the merger can be found online at http://www.adobe.com/aboutadobe/invrelations/adobeandmacromedia.html.

[116] Tanner, "Toon in, Turn On."

[117] Sullivan, "In His Way, John K. Will Challenge the World."

[118] Furniss, Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics, 199.

Much like his television cartoons, Kricfalusi's online cartoons, which include a later series entitled *Weekend Pussy Hunt* (1999),[119] relied on a combination of classic and modern animation techniques. The approach provided *George Liquor* with a solid cult following. As Funiss states, "computer-generated animation flourishes when it is approached with an artistic sensibility developed through broad-based experience in animation and other art practices and knowledge of their historical precedents."[120] Kricfalusi used what were, at the time, new animation technologies, but his appreciation and incorporation of elements of animation history made these initial forays into Web animation successful and entertaining. A *Wired* article states, "the cartoon is full of John K. trademarks: quirky gestures and hilarious expressions, and combines a modern gross, fun and violent sensibility with a soft spot for old animation techniques, like intricately detailed landscapes and orchestra music."[121] Even the advertising model Kricfalusi followed stayed true to an historic formula. Recalling Jack Benny's in-show advertisements for Lucky Strike Cigarettes, Kricfalusi animated his characters "plugging" his sponsors' products. His sponsors included conventional stores such as Tower Records and online retailers such as the now defunct CDnow; individual episodes provided links or automatically redirected the viewer's browser to those retailers' websites. Even this advertising model reflects an "ironic echo of earlier broadcast advertising practices in the

[119] While the title of this series is probably a purposeful double entendre, the show's main character—a dog—does often battle a cat. The series also features characters from *The Goddamn George Liquor Program* including Jimmy the Idiot Boy and George Liquor himself. Plus, like *George Liquor*, the series features very limited animation, and is full of imagery and other content that would have been considered improper for television cartoons. One major difference between *Weekend Pussy Hunt* and *George Liquor* is the inclusion of more interactive elements; the viewer can interact with the characters at certain points by clicking certain areas of the screen with the mouse. These moments, however, usually have no direct affect on the plot of the episode, which is a standard linear narrative.

[120] Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 192.

[121] Sullivan, "In His Way, John K. Will Challenge the World."

new world of digital television, including the return of single sponsorship, the integration

of commercial and program, and the reprise of the celebrity pitch man."[122] Despite all of

the claims of a revolutionary new format and distribution method, much of television and

animation history—and their respective cultural meanings—is integrated in these Flash

cartoons.

3.2 Flashimation: A New Aesthetic Style from Old Ideas

While Kricfalusi's graphical style was heavily influenced by previous animators

and cartoons, Furniss notes that technological innovation in animation usually results in

new aesthetics.[123] This was certainly the case for Flash-animated cartoons. In the mid-to-

late 1990s when the first experiments with Flash were taking place, online new media

developers faced limitations, namely bandwidth. As Vlad Strukov notes, Flash cartoons

were "a type of visual art that exclusively involves computers as a tool for the processing,

production and circulation of a moving image."[124] The process of creating a cartoon for

the Web resulted in a new visual and animation style developed out of real-world

restrictions. This was no mere technical hurdle, since the visual style of his cartoons was

of paramount importance to Kricfalusi: "The whole point of a cartoon is the visuals first.

It should be fun to look at before anything else happens."[125] But Flash was also designed

to be an easy to learn, affordable, and accessible tool for independent and professional

animators alike.[126] The software's tools not only helped reduce the file size of the

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[122] Boddy, "Interactive Television and Advertising Form in Contemporary U.S. Television," 127.

[123] Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 24-5.

[124] Strukov, "*Video Anekdot*: Auteurs and Voyeurs of Russian Flash Animation," 130.

[125] Sullivan, "In His Way, John K. Will Challenge the World."

[126] Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 175.

completed Flashimation projects, but also aided animators in the construction of those projects. In short, Flash cartoons were originally designed to be a Web-specific genre.

One of the ways Flash works to reduce bandwidth is through the use of vector, rather than raster, images. As opposed to raster images such as the JPEG and GIF image types common to the Web, which must store colour information for every pixel to create an image, the vector image is defined mathematically by its essential coordinates. For example, a square is defined by its four vertices or a circle by its centre and radius, with the shape calculations completed on the viewer's computer. Since significantly less data is stored for each shape, vector images are considerably smaller in file size and more compact than similar raster images.[127] In addition, since vector images are based on coordinates, images can be scaled to any size without degrading the overall quality of the image. Raster images, in comparison, can suffer from visible "pixilation" if their overall side is increased. The colour of the image is affected as well, since the colour of an entire shape is also determined by similar math-based variables rather than stored for each visible pixel. Because of this reliance upon mathematic calculations, Flash animation tends to feature "flat colour and simple shapes."[128] The result is a shape that is cleaner and simpler than a raster shape, but also one that lacks the inherent sense of motion afforded by hand-drawn animation. As Manovich states, new media such as Flash tend to replace every constant in old media with a variable.[129] Therefore, elements such as colour, shape, character, and trajectory are variable, but are also measurable and

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[127] Ibid., 175, Katherine Ulrich, *Macromedia Flash for Windows and Macintosh* (Berkeley, California: Peach Pit Press, 2004), 5, Strukov, "*Video Anekdot*: Auteurs and Voyeurs of Russian Flash Animation," 130, Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 26.

[128] Strukov, "*Video Anekdot*: Auteurs and Voyeurs of Russian Flash Animation," 147.

[129] Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 43-44.

incremental. The reliance upon automatic calculation makes it incredibly difficult to re-create the human "imperfection" in line, shape, and movement that aids in a sense of immediacy.

While bandwidth concerns have led to a unique Flashimation aesthetic, Flash employs several techniques borrowed from traditional cel animation, particularly the limited animation frequently seen on television. One example is Flash's use of the technique called "tweening," which is short for "in-betweening", just as in cel animation. In Flash, however, the process of generating incremental frames between "keyframes" to give the appearance that the image in the first key frame evolves smoothly into the second is usually automatically calculated by the software.[130] This process removes the need to animate every frame. Since these calculations take place on the user's computer, the download time for a Flash cartoon is significantly reduced; only the coordinates of the shapes and their positional movements are downloaded. The result is a much smoother and simpler animation than that usually seen in cel animation. These tweens or movements can also be set to automatically loop, removing the need to repeatedly animate repetitive actions. This looping function, which is an option built directly into Flash's menu system, is reminiscent of the repetition of walk cycles in limited cel animation such as that seen in *The Flintstones*. Loops are integral to new media, just as they are in traditional cel animation, in order to save time and money.[131]

Another technique that Flash employs to reduce file size is the "symbol." A symbol is basically an element—a graphic, tween, movie clip, or button—that can be repeatedly used within a Flash animation. Katherine Ulrich describes the symbol as a

[130] Ulrich, *Macromedia Flash for Windows and Macintosh*, 335-39.

[131] Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 318.

"master recipe."[132] Each instance of a symbol refers back to the master, with any changes size, colour, and orientation recorded; it is a method of representation even more efficient than the use of duplicate vector shapes. In addition, symbols themselves can contain other symbols allowing for a modular structure. Thus, seemingly complex characters or animations can be constructed from simple elements which, as Manovich explains, can be "assembled into larger-scale objects but continue to maintain their separate identities."[133] These symbols can be stored in a project "library" where they can be organized and referenced. This library system is a direct decedent of the stock libraries employed in limited cel animation to save production time, which featured standard walk cycles and facial expressions of primary characters. Ward and Anderson, the animators behind *Crusader Rabbit,* commented on the value of this approach: "Details, such as mouth movements, were standardised and limited... A stock image library was set up that included standard cycle movements, reaction shots and other artwork that could be used or copied quickly."[134] Symbols work in the same manner within Flash software. While saving time, the use of symbols discourages artistic experimentation and reduces the amount of variance in Flashimation.

These library symbols can also be placed on different layers and independently manipulated, providing limited but flexible animation. The ability to stack these symbols on various layers over a background image, similar to the placement of animated sprites on backgrounds, is a virtual representation of the technique of cel animation.[135] The use

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[132] Ulrich, *Macromedia Flash for Windows and Macintosh*, 247.

[133] Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 30-31.

[134] Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 144.

[135] Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 256.

of layers, which, like keyframes and loops, are programmed into the Flash interface, allows animators to easily repeat animations and manipulate individual elements without disturbing others.[136] All of this suggests that Flashimation has several characteristics in common with traditional, limited cel animation featured on television since the 1950s. Keyframes, tweens, symbols, and layers all resemble concepts and tools of cel animation meant to increase productivity while lowering production costs.[137] Just as with limited television animation, the limited animation of Flashimation often requires Flash cartoons to rely on the script's "verbal play and witticism (ambiguity, grammatical deviation and other devices)."[138] In short, while Flashimation may have a unique visual style, the software and its tools effectively encode the structure, forms, and motion of limited animation.

3.2.1 Examining the Flash Aesthetic

Since Flashimation actively remediates the aesthetics of limited cel animation, it can be difficult to identify what makes it a unique genre. There are several characteristics that make Flash animation distinctive, however. As mentioned above, these cartoons feature simple, geometric shapes and equally simple lines, colouring, and shading. Consider, for example, the *Strong Bad Email* #202 entitled "Imaginary" on the popular all-Flash website HomestarRunner.com.[139] The character designs are relatively simple, composed primarily of layered circles or ovals. This episode even makes reference to the simplicity of the character designs, with the character Strong Sad remarking that his

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[136] Crafton, *Before Mickey: The Animated Film 1898-1928*, 153.

[137] Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 174-75, Strukov, "*Video Anekdot*: Auteurs and Voyeurs of Russian Flash Animation," 131.

[138] Strukov, "*Video Anekdot*: Auteurs and Voyeurs of Russian Flash Animation," 138.

[139] See Matt Chapman and Mike Chapman, "Imaginary," Homestar Runner, http://www.homestarrunner.com/sbemail202.html.

brother, Strong Bad, looks like "a big circle with two smaller circles on top of another circle" from above. Characters and objects also feature mostly solid colours and only simple, minimal shading. The wall behind Strong Bad's computer, for instance, has a "shadow" represented by a simple, curved patch that is slightly darker than the rest of the wall and the roundness of Strong Bad's and Strong Sad's heads is indicated by lighter and darker arcs rather than a more complex gradient shading. Anna Munster suggests the style of shading in Flashimation owes more to the block shading and flattened visual aspect of Japanese *manga* and *anime* than American cel animation, attributing the remediation of both Western and Eastern design aesthetics to the global nature of the Internet.[140]

The abstract character designs and simple colouring are certainly reminiscent of that seen in television's limited animation, however. Differences are more noticeable in scene backgrounds, where sections of colour are sharper and more defined. The flexibility of hand-painting allowed hand animators to include details such as the textured stone walls and houses in *The Flintstones*, rather than relying upon less detailed elements such as the sharp, in-focus stripes and wall paper patterns in "Imaginary." Character and object outlines are sharp as well, featuring solid lines of consistent weight as opposed to the unevenness and flared edges of outlines in cel animation caused by variations in pressure as well as the use of brushes, pencils, and pens. Some Flash animators, such as *Salad Fingers* creator David Firth, seem to try to replicate the aesthetic of outlines in cel animation by using a digital brush tool with uneven edges or a series of wavy or crooked lines to indicate texture or shading. However, even when this technique is used, there is

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[140] Anna Munster, "Compression and the Intensification of Visual Information in Flash Aesthetics" (paper presented at the MelbourneDAC2003, Melbourne, Australia, 2003), 137.

still a sharpness and definition to the line that is difficult to recreate in hand-drawn animation.[141]

It may be that the sharpness of even the background images best defines the Flash aesthetic. Several authors have noted its illustration-like, flat nature.[142] Munster best describes the effect of this flatness: "It is as if images can no longer be located as distinct sets of co-ordinates upon a grid providing them with place and context in an overall system. They are now laid out on a plane, to be organized principally by directions and speeds in time: backwards, forwards, fast, and slow."[143] Time can be a practical concern, specifically download time, which is one of the reasons backgrounds tend to avoid the use of blur effects that would suggest depth; this omission heightens the flat aspect of Flashimation. Time concerns also affect the narrative of the cartoon. Flash animation tends to feature mostly horizontal and vertical movement, with only minimal movement along the theoretical z-axis. The movement of the characters in both Flashimation cartoons mentioned above, "Imaginary" and *Salad Fingers*, is almost exclusively linear, avoiding curves or more random movement, and usually only along the x-axis. For Munster, the Flash aesthetic removes the concept of image from "space" and instead introduces the concept of "image time."[144] In contrast to early animation and limited

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[141] Close-ups of characters and objects in the first episode of the Web series indicate this. For example, the doorbell in *Salad Fingers* is not constructed from a perfect circle inside a perfect rectangle with four straight sides and four 90-degree angle corners, and the outlines of these objects are not of even line thickness. Yet, the sharpness and detail of even these lines still contrasts greatly with outlines in *The Flintstones*, for example. See David Firth, "Salad Fingers," Newgrounds.com, http://www.newgrounds.com/portal/view/178546.

[142] See Dan L. Baldwin, Michael S. Daubs, and John B. Ludwick, "Flashimation: The Context and Culture of Web Animation," in *ACM SIGGRAPH 2006 Art gallery* (Boston, Massachusetts: ACM Press, 2006), 144, Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 186, Strukov, "*Video Anekdot*: Auteurs and Voyeurs of Russian Flash Animation," 147.

[143] Munster, "Compression and the Intensification of Visual Information in Flash Aesthetics", 140.

[144] Ibid., 136.

animation, in which the primary animation concern was the movement of objects through

a Cartesian field, Flash animation movement is used to ensure objects relate with each

other in time. This is partially due to its modular structure and partially due to its

interactive capabilities. As Munster explains:

> …the image becomes topological, underscoring the connections and intervals that
> produce the relations of images to each other within sequences. It is in this sense
> that the contours of the digital image have become deeply marked by temporality:
> that is to say, temporality as the rhythms of deformation, transformation and lag
> that provide the pace of unfolding (play) and reception (download) in Flash
> animations and interfaces[.][145]

The emphasis on time only strengthens the importance of immediacy inherent to digital

media. Manovich claims that, "Flash aesthetics are much more than the product of a

particular software/hardware configuration... They exemplify the cultural sensibility of a

new generation."[146] He explicitly elevates the Flash aesthetic above a simple design

choice, and instead ties it to culture. In the case of Flashimation, the cultural expectation

of immediacy drives the development of aesthetic elements.

3.2.2 Flashimation and Democratization

As with other new media, Flashimation is frequently positioned as a

democratizing media form, which allows those outside traditional media to produce

independent, personal, and potentially revolutionary media texts free from corporate

control. Furniss notes that the Flash software is relatively low cost and also highly

available.[147] It allows a single person to easily and affordably create a piece of animation

that would have once required a team or studio and expensive equipment to complete.

This one person or small team approach afforded by the software allows for more direct

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[145] Ibid., 136.

[146] Manovich, "Generation Flash," 66.

[147] Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 186.

control over an animation project in a way that has parallels with early experimental animation. Strukov, for example, explicitly states that Flash not only allows for increased production time for independent animators but also allows for immediate control over animated work.[148] Implicit in this language is the positioning of the creation of Flash and Flashimation as an essential step in defeating mass media's hegemonic control over content. Kricfalusi himself turned to Flash animation distributed via the Internet after feeling the constraints of corporate control.[149] Such a stance elevates Flashimation beyond a simple "next step" in media development. Referring to various forms of art in 1912, Wassily Kandinsky wrote, "The form is the outer expression of the inner content… Necessity creates the form."[150] Kricfalusi would concur; he believed that turning to the Web was the only way to produce cartoons with characters and content that would be considered too crude or too "adult" for television. Here we can see an application of Kandinsky's claim; if necessity does create form, and form is simply the outer expression of content, then Flashimation signifies a "cartoon not meant for television."

As Macromedia Flash became more popular, more and more amateur artists and animators began producing short cartoons for the Web. Like *The Goddamn George Liquor Program*, these Flash animations contained imagery, language, content and characters that challenged the social construction of animation for children and positioned Flashimation as more seditious than television animation. Whereas Kricfalusi turned to Flashimation as a rebellion against corporate control over his creation, the

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[148] Strukov, "*Video Anekdot*: Auteurs and Voyeurs of Russian Flash Animation," 131.

[149] It is important to note that Nickelodeon, the network that carried Kricafalusi's *Ren & Stimpy Show* was a channel directed towards children. However, it is equally important to note that Nickelodeon also relied heavily on animation to fill its schedule.

[150] Kandinsky, "On the Problem of Form," 157.

following wave of Web animators seemed to view Flashimation as an outlet for personal expression.[151] Internet sites such as Newgrounds.com, a popular automated Internet Flash portal launched in 2000, were established which featured Flash cartoons available for viewing and download.[152] The cartoons and games sites such as Newgrounds feature are often uploaded by amateur and independent Flash animators, many still in their teens and lacking any formal training. Taking advantage of a lack of censorship, these amateur Web cartoonists paired their crude animations with equally crude jokes, coarse language, violence, and highly sexual content. Just as with Web "reality" media such as webcams, low production quality becomes associated with immediacy. In short, bad quality now represents something more "real."

In this manner, the aesthetics of Flashimation has the potential to be associated with freedom from television's control. This is no small consideration especially in animation, since, with so many animation styles, the most important aesthetic consideration is how a particular technique will help create meaning in a work.[153] Consider the distribution of Flashimation via the Internet: the point of interaction—in this case, a Web browser or player accessing a Web-based cartoon—"acts as a code that carries cultural messages."[154] As Manovich explains, "In cultural communication, a code is rarely simply a neutral transport mechanism; usually it affects the messages transmitted with its help. For instance it may make some messages easy to conceive and render others unthinkable. A code may also provide its own model of the world, its own logical system,

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[151] See Strukov, "*Video Anekdot*: Auteurs and Voyeurs of Russian Flash Animation," 149. Strukov claims that Flash not only allowed for a convergence of artistic forms, but also decentralizes the art production process, allowing for more freedom of expression.

[152] See http://www.newgrounds.com/primer.html.

[153] Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 40.

[154] Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 64.

or ideology."[155] As previously discussed, Bolter and Grusin consider this politically,

stating that the Internet, which itself remediates television content and forms, moves the

locus of control away from television's hierarchical organization and toward the

individual.[156] The aesthetics of Flashimation have also come to represent a form that is

independent of the influences of television. Individuality and control over content and

avoidance of censorship are central to the identity of Flashimation.

3.2.2.1 Program tools and cultural filters. The assumption that Flashimation

is somehow independent of and separate from television animation (and the cultural

assumptions that come along with it) is flawed; in the limited discussions of Flash

animation that have taken place, how well-founded are these notions of independence and

democratization? Such claims ignore the complex—and in many ways, hegemonic—

relationships between the supposedly "liberated" Flashimation producers and television.

Before Bray's introduction of Taylorist production, animation methods were more

independent and experimental. The only real difference between early animators and

modern independent animators using Flash is the use of a computer and the Flash

software as animation tools. As Bolter and Grusin explain, "The digital artist draws or

paints with a set of programmed tools: the application itself, the various toolboxes from

which the application is composed, and the computer's operating system."[157] These tools

do a certain amount of work for the artist automatically. The use of any digital

technology, especially software such as Flash that employs menu-based navigational and

selection systems, in the creation of any cultural artefact inevitably will result in limited

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[155] Ibid., 64.

[156] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 60.

[157] Ibid., 139.

creativity.[158] Even if software is capable of more, only certain possibilities seem accessible and viable based on the presentation of menu choices and the precedent set by previously created products. Indeed, interfaces are "largely made up from elements of other, already familiar cultural forms."[159] As Manovich explains, "Just as early fifteenth-century Italian painters could only conceive of painting in a very particular way—quite different from, say, sixteenth-century Dutch painters—today's digital designers and artists use only a small set of action grammars and metaphors out of a much larger set of all possibilities."[160]

The comparison to Italian painters who could only paint in a certain way is a useful one. When considering Flash, this investigation needs to consider how the Flash software—including its built-in tools, interface, and menus—work to limit the way Flash animators "conceive" Flashimation. As noted above, Flash incorporates many elements of traditional cel animation in digital form, including layers and the use of a "library" to store often used movements and graphic elements. However, it is Flash's incorporation of automated animation between designated keyframes that most illustrates the cultural filters through which Flash animators work.

The deemphasised role of movement works to separate Flashimation from the experimental animation work of McCay, Cohl, and Richter and aligns it more with limited television animation. Indeed, the animation is so limited, it is more akin to mere moving illustrations, than it is to the limited animation of shows such as *The Flintstones*. Some Flashimation, such as the cartoons from online animation house JibJab.com,

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[158] Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 127.

[159] Ibid., 70-71.

[160] Ibid., 70-71.

literally animate still images. JibJab's popular "This Land" cartoon made during the 2004

U.S. Presidential election campaign features photographs of the heads of candidates

George W. Bush and John Kerry placed on various bodies made from graphics or cut

from other photographs.[161] The cartoon skewers both candidates in direct ways. Bush is

referred to as a "stupid dumbass" and portrayed as unable to do basic math or spell

Massachusetts (which he spells "MASS-UH-CHEW-SITS"), while Kerry is referred to as

a "U.N. pussy" obsessively reminding his audience of his military service and three

Purple Hearts. These types of cartoons strongly resemble social commentary print

cartoons of the early 20th century, which often feature "photographic heads on ink pen

bodies."[162] This last example in particular shows the unique nature of Flashimation. The

use of language considered inappropriate for television, the satirical representation of

electoral politics and campaigns reveals the potential of Flash to be a subversive medium,

reflecting the spirit of "utopian" discussions of the "democratizing" nature of the Internet.

In addition, the animation is often comically, if not purposefully, bad, demonstrating how

poor production values can lend Flashimation an air of immediacy; the low-quality

aesthetics equate to amateur, speedy, unfiltered media products untainted by corporate

influence.

Flashimation cartoons are an aesthetically distinct form of animation influenced

by the constraints of Web dissemination, but the tools built into the Flash software are

digital representations of those used in 2-D, limited television animation. As Furniss

points out, "[I]ndustrially and independently produced animation are not completely

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[161] See http://www.jibjab.com/originals/this_land

[162] For comments on these types of cartoons, see Crafton, *Before Mickey: The Animated Film 1898-1928*, 269.

separate modes of production, but are in fact interrelated in complex ways."[163]

Flashimation is not an independent and distinct cultural form; rather, it is technically and culturally related to television animation. This relationship is quite important to those who make Flashimation, whether it is acknowledged or not. Flash animation relies on the feeling of familiarity viewers have with limited animation series such as *The Simpsons* or *King of the Hill*.[164] A connection to the past is important for all new media, which are made "immediate and authentic by appealing to familiar and established genres that we experience as immediate."[165] This relationship means that, "digital media can never reach this state of transcendence, but will instead function in a constant dialectic with earlier media, precisely as each earlier medium functioned when it was introduced."[166]

Flashimation is not inherently revolutionary and empowering, because it is intrinsically tied to television. John Caldwell refers to Web animation as "TV-wannabes."[167] While he does not elaborate, this claim implies that many people producing Flash cartoons are replicating a television aesthetic far more than discussions about the medium's potential for democratization suggest. In other words, Flash is a direct descendent of, rather than separate from, television animation. If this supposition is true, then Flashimation should make an easy transition to television.

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[163] Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 29.

[164] Ibid., 146.

[165] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 148.

[166] Ibid., 50.

[167] Caldwell, "Second-Shift Media Aesthetics," 131.

3.2.3 Flashimation Moves to Television

The past few years have seen a rise of animation on television geared towards adults.[168] Flashimation has played a major role in this development, starting with the popular "Adult Swim" block of cartoons shown on Cartoon Network in the United States, many of which are also shown during a block of cartoons called "The Detour" on Canada's Teletoon network. The first examples of Flash-animated television cartoons on television include such programs *Harvey Birdman, Attorney at Law* (2000). The first season of this particular show was animated using traditional cel animation before the animators turned to Flash for the remainder of the show's four-season run. Since *Harvey Birdman* used both traditional cel and Flash animation, the show presents an excellent opportunity to examine the relationship between a cartoon's production methods and its aesthetic.

Episode 2.5 entitled "SPF" (9 May 2004) is the first episode to incorporate what the show's director, writers, and animators refer to as the "new process"—the use of Flash as a part of the production process.[169] At first glance, the character designs, settings, colouring, and animation appear similar to that of most previous episodes.[170] However, these same graphic elements feature a "crispness" that previous episodes lacked. Object and character outlines are cleaner, without any traces of the uneven pressure or edge a pencil or brush often leave behind in traditional cel animation. Other

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[168] Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 225.

[169] Richard Ferguson Hull, "SPF," in *Harvey Birdman, Attorney at Law*, Harvey Birdman, Attorney at Law (USA: Warner Brothers, 2004).

[170] The first episode of *Harvey Birdman*, episode 1.1 "Bannon Custody Battle" (30 December 2000) is visually distinct from the rest. The show was produced several months before the next episode and serves as a sort of pilot episode. Many of the visual elements, especially backgrounds and "sets" were redesigned for the following episodes. The hand-drawn nature of the show is even more readily apparent in this first episode. For example, the shape of Harvey Birdman's head appears especially malleable, as do many features of other characters, highlighting the "imperfection" of cel animation.

lines are simplified, exhibiting the mathematic precision of vector shapes. Harvey

Birdman's facial features, such as his cheek lines, jaw, and nose, appear similar to his

features in early episodes, but are now created from a series of perfectly straight lines and

even arcs difficult to reproduce by hand. Harvey's head is always perfectly symmetrical,

less prone to shifts in shape frequent in the first season. These lines remain crisp and

clear even when characters appear smaller on the screen. This maintenance of detail

stands in stark contrast to earlier episodes, where character detail was often lost when

characters became smaller.[171]

The show's crew also commented on the consistency using Flash provided. For

example, in the DVD commentary for the "SPF" episode, writer Michael Ouweleen notes

how Harvey Birdman's intercom would often change colour and feature an unwanted

black outline. After the introduction of Flash into the production process, the black

outline was easily corrected, and the intercom remained consistently yellow. This can be

attributed to the ability to reuse certain elements or symbols. Writer Erik Richter also

comments that the crew re-uses a particular perspective shot from this episode—the

entrance of the relatively small-in-stature character Ding-A-Ling—whenever a shorter

character enters Harvey's office in future episodes.[172] The modularity of Flash makes this

possible.

The use of computer animation provides the crew with other advantages. For

example, Ouweleen states that small, temporary changes to character designs called

"special posing costume changes" traditionally used sparingly could now be used

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[171] Consider, for example, the lack of detail seen in the members of the Japanese pop band when they are in the background of a scene compared to the detail and clarity of their facial features when they are in the foreground in Ep. 1.05 "Shoyu Weenie" (21 July 2002).

[172] Hull, "SPF."

frequently thanks to "the aid of computers."[173] He also discusses the way the use of Flash changes the animation aesthetic of the show: "Flash actually makes it punchier, makes the camera moves punchier and funnier….We were worried that we couldn't match the goodness of the episodes previous to this and I don't think it's been a problem at all."[174] His comments illustrate the ways in which Flash can mimic the results of limited cel animation, but also has other, sometimes unintended, aesthetic effects.

This show and others, such as *Aqua Teen Hunger Force* (2000), not only incorporate Flash in the production process, but also appropriate other characteristics of early, independently produced Web Flashimation, such as crude or sexually suggestive language and visuals. Due to the use of Flash during production, these shows feature the same aesthetic styles of Web Flashimation, such as the simple colourings and shapes of the forms (with the exception of some backgrounds, though even these are generally static) as well as simple and often repeated animations. These cartoons also often break with traditional television program lengths. For example, both *Harvey Birdman* and *Aqua Teen* are fifteen minutes in length rather than the customary half hour or hour-long serial television program.

The use of Flash and its subsequent aesthetic style, the altered program lengths, and the adult-oriented content all work to separate this new generation of animation from traditional television animation. There are a number of reasons that might explain the emergence of Flashimation, formerly a Web-specific form, on television. Furniss notes that the worldwide expansion of adult-oriented animation on television in the 1990s, including shows such as *Bob & Margaret* (1998) in the UK and *King of the Hill* (1997)

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[173] Ibid.

[174] Ibid.

and *The Ren & Stimpy Show* (1991), was inspired by the success of *The Simpsons*.[175] The renewed interest in cartoons triggered an increased demand and market for adult-oriented animation. Flashimation, already culturally established as a viable source of "not just for children" animation on the Internet, was seen as a practicable alternative.

As noted above, Cartoon Network in the U.S. and Teletoon in Canada established blocks of animation intended for an adult audience in their late night schedule, many of which adopt a limited animation aesthetic.[176] As John Lasseter notes, a key to the success of any emerging medium is "choosing the subject matter that lends itself to the medium well."[177] Many of the shows featured in these blocks produced either partially or completely in Flash, such as *Squidbillies* (2005), *Lil' Bush* (2007), feature "crude" language and imagery, which is enhanced by the limited animation and basic or crude character designs. In short, the form fits the content.[178] In addition, Flash, with its encoded relationship to limited animation, works well for adult-oriented animation, which emphasizes dialogue and verbal humour more often than visual gags.

Economics can certainly play a role in the use of Flashimation on television. Producing Flash animations is significantly cheaper than producing traditional cel animation. With a digital library of character symbols, backgrounds, and "props", a skilled Flash developer can animate an entire episode in a matter of hours. There is no longer any need for a team of illustrators and animators working several days to hand draw (or even computer illustrate) each frame of action; the Flash developer can tween

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[175] Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 225.

[176] Ibid., 148.

[177] Qtd. in ibid., 187.

[178] Baldwin, Daubs, and Ludwick, "Flashimation: The Context and Culture of Web Animation," 152.

motion and create movie clip symbols for repeated actions such as walking or talking. Both time and money are saved. Management of animation projects and studios becomes easier as well since fewer animators are needed to complete a given animation project. Ease of production brought about by software and hardware advances leads to a merging of the job responsibilities of several people. As Furniss notes, "[T]hroughout the history of the studio system, there has existed a relatively strong undercurrent that has worked against the control of individuals and toward more automated, mechanised and...less expensive production."[179] The move to Flashimation would keep in line with this trend, but, of course, would have other implications for the final product. For example, it can allow the directors and writers to have more involvement with the end product. In discussing the shift to Flash-based production in *Harvey Birdman,* writer Michael Ouweleen states, "There was a decision made that we couldn't do this traditionally animated and go to Korea and have things animated and we'd have to go to Flash and it would have to be based in Atlanta so we could see it more and drop down on the amount of miscommunications and production hassles."[180]

The use of Flash's automated features allows show crews to have a more direct influence on each episode, in contrast to past situations in which automated production tended to wrest control of products away from individuals. The use of automation tends to limit experimentation and creativity, however. The reuse of certain objects and perspectives in multiple episodes of *Harvey Birdman* illustrates this, as does the lack of embellishments that regularly appeared in the cel animated episodes of the show. For example, Harvey's eyes—or rather the eye holes in his cowl—are normally solid white,

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[179] Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 21-22.

[180] Hull, "SPF."

but sometimes animators would add in small circle "pupils" whenever they wanted the character to exhibit a high level of shock, surprise, or discomfort. This particular adornment is small but effective. It is featured in four of the first ten episodes of *Harvey Birdman*, including the Flash-utilizing "SPF", but does not appear again in the final 25 episodes.

The appropriation of the aesthetic of Flashimation by television might also be part of a response by television animation producers to combat the challenge posed to them by independent Web animation. Bolter and Grusin state, "Like film, television needs to remediate digital media in order to survive."[181] As an incredibly resilient medium, television can absorb digital media without losing or drastically altering its social and cultural identity. In fact, television's assimilation of the aesthetics of digital media can lead to greater claims of immediacy and authenticity. As Furniss states, the choice of animation technique reflects a particular ideological viewpoint: either a traditional, hegemonic viewpoint or an independent and subversive approach.[182] Flashimation on the Internet is presented as a subversive force, a challenge to the centralized control of television. The appropriation of a Web aesthetic can be an attempt by television producers to both benefit from that cultural association and control Flashimation's subversive element.

3.2.3.1 Animation and subversion. Cartoons have a history of being a source of subversion on television. In his discussion of the family in animated television, Michael Tueth invokes Bahktin's notion of the "carnivalesque" which occurs when alternative attitudes are inserted into conventional life, or oppositional culture is

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[181] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 185.

[182] Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 30.

presented in a fun way.[183] He claims that, while sitcoms have always been a source of

social criticism and a form of "emancipatory popular culture", the animation aesthetic

allows for an even more subversive view of family life presented within the nexus of

network and commercial demands.[184] Animated programs such as *The Simpsons*, *King of

the Hill*, or *Family Guy* (1999) are afforded more freedom than live-action sitcoms,

which tend to trend toward realism. Live-action sitcoms tend to focus mostly on

examinations of domestic life because there is a "hesitancy to challenge ideology in

corporate America." Animated sitcoms in the 1990s liberated the sitcom from the

"straightjacket" of naturalism and realism, and pursued a more subversive function.[185]

The Simpsons, for example, used the advantages of animation to explore the cultures of

minorities and openly mock representations of "perfect" nuclear families from 1950s

sitcoms.

However, while television animation does have some subversive capabilities, it

uses its subversive power only in small doses. Animated sitcoms seem to focus only on a

slightly "edgier" examination of family life than that shown in sitcoms or offer self-

reflexive representations of past media phenomena. Shows known for their subversive

attitude, such as *Beavis and Butthead* and *Ren & Stimpy*, tend to express limited personal

perspectives, but also criticize the conservative nature of previous television cartoons.[186]

Harvey Birdman literally recycles old Hanna-Barbera characters as Harvey Birdman's

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[183] Michael V. Tueth, "Back to the Drawing Board: The Family in Animated Television Comedy," in *Prime Time Animation: Television Animation and American Culture*, ed. Carol A. Stabile and Mark Harrison (New York: Routledge, 2003), 140-41.

[184] Ibid., 134-40.

[185] Ibid., 134-39.

[186] Wells, ""Smarter Than the Average Artform": Animation in the Television Era," 30.

accused clients. Harvey Birdman himself is a recycled character, the former star of the

Hanna-Barbera superhero cartoon *Birdman and the Galaxy Trio* (1967).

Some children's cartoons are also produced solely in Flash. The first such show,

Mucha Lucha, appeared on the now-defunct WB network in 2002[187], followed by

"Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends" (2004) on Cartoon Network. In fact, Flash is

"becoming more widely used in television production."[188] There are now dozens of

children's shows animated in Flash. The shift to Flash production has some similarities to

the increasing use of limited animation for children's shows starting in the 1960s. One of

the current effects of the shift to Flash, however, is the suppression of its subversive

potential. The use of Flash in television animation works to subsume it to more general

television animation, and this, as a result, creates or reinforces a cultural construction of

Flashimation that discounts its supposed revolutionary potential. Even the show *Lil'*

Bush, which features a child-like George W. Bush, does not directly address the U.S.

President the way the JibJab Web cartoons do. Rather, the show is structured more like

The Little Rascals; Bush is not approached as a world leader, but rather as a young scamp

whose innocence and naivety often get him into trouble.

3.3 Conclusion

As noted at the start of this chapter, there are some fundamental differences in the

history and development of reality-based media and animation. Producers of television

news, reality TV, citizen journalism, and vlogs point to the "realness" of their media

forms, or at least the ability for their chosen form to generate "moments of truth."

Western animation, however, is generally more fantastical, a representation of "make-

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[187] WB became a part of the new CW network in 2006.

[188] Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, 186.

believe" rather than "realness." As television seemingly expanded its reality offerings and increasingly incorporated "ordinary" people—whether that be through the use of citizen journalism or the casting of "average" people on reality TV shows—institutional pressures on and approaches to animation on television limited the cultural understanding of the form over time, eventually reducing it to cheaply produced and poorly written limited animation programming for children during television animation's "dark ages." This continued diminishment of codes and forms affected not only the aesthetic of television cartoons, but also their content, as seen in the case of Kricfalusi's *Ren & Stimpy*.

Despite their differences, user-produced forms of reality-based and animated media share a number of similarities. Flashimation, like other digital media genres, is often presented as an independent and democratizing form. Just as Ana Voog believed the webcam would allow everyone to have their own television show, the accessibility and availability of the Flash software ostensibly allows everyone to create and distribute their own cartoons over the Internet, free from corporate oversight, control and censorship. The features of the Flash software combined with technological considerations such as bandwidth and download times also led to a distinct Flashimation aesthetic which, just like user-produced reality media, projects immediacy and has come to signify the democratization of media production. However, the tools built into the Flash program interface suggest that Flashimation is created through several cultural filters which strongly align this Web-based form with television animation, the very institution Flashimation supposedly circumvents. Indeed, television's appropriation of a

user-produced animation aesthetic works to limit the subversive potential of Flashimation.

There are questions that remain, however, such as why the television industry has been so successful in its aesthetic remediation of user-produced forms and content, and what the sociocultural effects of this appropriation are. In other words, why has television remained a cultural dominant rather than succumbing to the challenges digital and user-produced media supposedly represent and how does this aesthetic remediation affect the democratizing potential of digital media? The next chapter explores these questions and argues that the answers lie in the differences in the historical development and cultural understandings of television and digital media.

4. TELEVISION, USER-PRODUCED MEDIA, AND CULTURAL AUTHORITY

The previous two chapters have examined the development, production, and use of two media forms, reality media and animation, on both television and the Internet. On the surface, reality and animated media seem only minimally related due to their vastly different histories and methods of production. The early technical limitations that forced simultaneous broadcast and reception of television programming imbued the medium with a sense of spontaneity, immediacy, and presence that other visual media such as cinema lacked. Even as recorded programming became common, the television industry exploited the cultural association of television with immediacy to bolster the medium's "realness." Animation, on the other hand, was an after-thought of television programming, cheap filler added to television schedules after the collapse of the Hollywood studio system in the 1950s made a large number of animated studio shorts— and suddenly unemployed animators—available to the burgeoning television industry. In addition, animation of that period tended to deal with the fantastic rather than the realistic: talking animals, suburban cavemen, or superheroes, for example, a stark contrast to the emphasis upon real people and situations common to reality-based media. The two previous case studies demonstrate, however, that these disparate forms in fact share a number of similarities. They both capitalize upon cultural associations of television with immediacy and truth to increase their sociocultural standing.

In addition, both case studies demonstrate the parallel development of these two forms on the Internet, in the form of user-produced content such as webcam videos, vlogs, citizen journalism on one hand, and Flashimation on the other. The emergence of these grassroots media forms is often cited as evidence of the democratizing, if not revolutionary, potential of digital media. Digital media advocates such as Henry Jenkins

and Lisa Parks suggest that the ability for "ordinary citizens" to generate and distribute content outside of established mass media structures will allow user/producers to become active participants in a Habermasian public sphere and siphon control away from corporate-controlled media. Under this theory, citizen journalism would rival broadcast news, webcam sites would present a more accurate unmediated reality, and user-produced content such as Flashimation would replace homogenized entertainment from Hollywood to the extent that centralized mass media would become irrelevant.

However, while it would be negligent to ignore the fact that the Internet and digital media production tools allow for independent production and distribution of content with a level of ease unmatched by previous forms, the case studies above also demonstrate television's resilience to such challenges. Rather than working to contain or wipe out online media, television broadcasters and producers actively invest in online media. User-produced media, as the discussion of citizen journalism demonstrates, have been incorporated into mass media news broadcasts since inexpensive home video cameras became available, but the use of the Internet to disseminate user-produced media

useful for understanding how television as an institution achieved and maintains its position of dominance. Put simply, the idea of television as a cultural authority, an idea industry leaders have carefully cultivated over time, has become so fixed in Western culture that has become accepted as an unquestionable fact.

4.1 Examining Television's Appropriation of User-Produced Content

Economic considerations certainly play a role in television's appropriation of online media. The use of user-produced content, for example, can provide television broadcasters with a nearly endless supply of content for little to no financial investment. Bourdieu, however, addresses the limitations of a purely economic focus in discussing the "invisible censorships" that influence television, stating:

> It is true that, in the final analysis, you can say that the pressure on television is economic. That said, it is not enough to say that what gets on television is determined by the owners, by the companies that pay for the ads, or by the government that gives the subsidies. These factors, which are so crude that they are obvious even to the most simple-minded critique, hide other things, all the anonymous and invisible mechanisms through which the many kinds of censorship operate to make television such a formidable instrument for maintaining the symbolic order.[1]

In other words, Bourdieu rightly argues that, while economic and financial factors certainly play a role in television production, there are broader sociocultural factors at work as well. Intentionally or unintentionally, the use of new media aesthetics in the television production process has a distinct cultural effect, and immediacy plays a significant part. Nick Couldry argues that the term liveness has developed into what Durkheim would call a *category*, or "a term whose use depends on its place within a wider system or structured pattern of values, which work to reproduce our belief in, and

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[1] Pierre Bourdieu, "Television," *Academica Europa* 9, no. 3 (2001): 246.

assent to, something wider than the description carried by the term itself."[2] In the case of liveness, that wider belief concerns a medium's role as central to the representation of social reality. Immediacy, which is related to liveness, also operates as a category that involves a medium's ability to represent reality, but also involves personalization in the form of (mediated) presence and contextualization through narrative construction. In an era when people have an "insatiable desire for immediacy"[3], aesthetic remediation between television and user-produced media indicates a greater ideological struggle: are user-produced media representative of a new wave of grassroots control over cultural creation and construction, or do centralized media such as television maintain that historical role? Indeed, aesthetic remediation illuminates what Tarleton Gillespie calls the "precarious relationship of allegiance, rivalry, dependence, and transcendence"[4] that digital media, including user-produced media, have with older media such as television. It is that relationship, from which an understanding of these media and their role in society extends, which can be easily overlooked in discussions that focus purely upon economics. An examination of aesthetic remediation illuminates this relationship, however, and can be used to scrutinize utopian claims that user-produced media represent a challenge to television's cultural dominance.

4.2 Aesthetic Remediation, Culture, and Ideology

The assumption that user-produced media are somehow inherently independent of television—and thus inherently democratizing—is flawed, ignoring the complex and, in many ways, hegemonic relationships between the supposedly "liberated" user/producers

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[2] Couldry, "Liveness, 'Reality,' and the Mediated Habitus from Television to the Mobile Phone," 354.

[3] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 5.

[4] Tarleton Gillespie, "The Stories Digital Tools Tell," in *New Media: Theories and Practices of Digitextuality*, ed. Anna Everett and John T. Caldwell (New York: Routledge, 2003), 117.

and the institution of television. Such discourse equates production with egalitarian participation, a view just as limiting as equating production with self-promotion. It is important to remember that the claims that scholars like Jenkins and Parks make are inherently part of a larger socio-cultural argument, which is reflected in the language of their statements. Henry Jenkins believes active user/producers challenge the "top-down" model of information delivery and cultural production from the "bottom-up."[5] Lisa Parks, evoking Marshall McLuhan's concept of "cross-pollenization," explicitly states the mixing of television and digital media could "generate possibilities for social transformation."[6] This last quote in particular demonstrates that discussions of new media are not simply about technology or even production, but rather involve a larger discussion about how the use of these technologies can alter a society and its culture.

There is no doubt that online media, whether user- or professionally produced, remediate "old" media, including television. This remediation, as Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin state, is often presumed to result in a "better" version of television.[7] Tara McPherson similarly observes that discourse surrounding the Internet and television even as early as the 1990s presented the Web as superior to television by stressing the personal empowerment possible online.[8] In the case of reality-based media, user-produced videos, vlogs, and webcam sites supposedly present a more genuine or "authentic" reality than television while simultaneously allowing formerly passive media consumers to become active producers. In essence, these user/producers are ostensibly working to present—and

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[5] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*.

[6] Parks, "Flexible Microcasting: Gender, Generation, and Television-Internet Convergence," 142.

[7] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 46-47.

[8] McPherson, "Reload: Liveness, Mobility, and the Web," 458.

therefore shape—a putatively less-mediated reality as opposed to television's imposed

and heavily constructed version of reality. Similarly, user-produced Web Flashimation

purportedly allows for more personal expression than television animation due to the

producer's direct, independent control over the final product. The lack of interference

from centralized, corporate mass media is thought to allow user/producers to create texts

that challenge the Western cultural understanding of cartoons as a children's genre.

As indicated in the introduction, these understandings of Internet media lead

many people to predict a radical transformation in, if not the total collapse of, centralized

mass media such as television at the hands of the Internet and user-produced media.

Recall Anna Everett's statement originally referenced in Chapter 1:

> The advent of the digital revolution in late-twentieth and early-twenty-first-
> century media culture apparently confirms both Jean-Luc Godard's belief in the
> 'end of cinema' and other media critics' claims that we have entered a post-
> television age.... Subtending all this is my contention that we are witnessing the
> rise of a new cultural dominant, one marked by the digital convergence of film,
> television, music, sound, and print media.[9]

Everett's statement both recognizes television's role as a cultural dominant in the

era before the introduction of digital media and, like Gilder, predicts its demise as the

result of the "digital revolution." It also reflects the emphasis upon technological

convergence that at times dominated discussions of digital media. Other scholars,

however, who emphasize cultural considerations over technological convergence,

position the user/producer as the pivotal figure in this supposed social revolution. Recall

Lev Manovich's assertion that the aesthetics of Flash media projects embody the

"cultural sensibility" of the current generation. Though this comment was made in

reference to Flash projects, the same statement could be applied to any user-produced

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[9] Everett, "Digitextuality and Click Theory," 3-7.

media form. Curiously, Manovich follows this comment with two seemingly contradictory statements. First he states: "Instead of sampling commercial media, they write software code in order to create their own cultural systems." [10] A few pages later, he suggests, "[M]edia artists not only use media technologies as tools; they also appropriate the content of commercial media."[11] The incongruity of these statements reflects the confusion remediation causes in the relationship between user- and mass-produced media. As the same time, Manovich probably overstates the amount of "writing of software code" undertaken by user/producers. While the creation of webcam sites, YouTube videos, and Flashimation often does require some limited technical coding skills, many—if not most—user/producers heavily rely upon provided tools, features, and code snippets that can easily be added into their projects.

That said, Manovich does correctly indicate that the aesthetics of user-produced media do indeed reflect an emergent user/producer culture, and the emphasis upon immediacy is a foundational part of its identity. The degraded and devalued aesthetics of user-produced media play a significant, if not primary, role in the generation of this immediacy. Peter Humm refers to the "low resolution" of amateur video as the "aesthetics of authenticity" and directly links poor production characteristics with veracity, immediacy, and truth.[12] Flash animation has a similarly devalued look that borrows heavily from the limited animation frequently seen on television, but is also further influenced by the simplification of shape, line, and movement afforded to Flashimation artists through the built in tools, features, and menu options in the Flash

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[10] Manovich, "Generation Flash," 67.

[11] Ibid., 70.

[12] Humm, "Real TV: Camcorders, Access and Authenticity," 230-31.

software. A devalued production aesthetic is so important to user-produced media that the use of "professional" techniques can open up user/producers to questions about framing and intent.[13] In short, the aesthetics of user-produced media convey or signify their immediacy, their "realness" which is positioned as superior to that of television. If we revisit Wassily Kandinsky's claim that "form is the outer expression of the inner content," however, then the aesthetics of user-produced media take on even more weight—they become representative of the subversion of television itself. As David Neuman, former head of Disney TV and the now-defunct online Digital Entertainment Network (DEN) states, "Television is where you can't get away with stuff—on the Internet you can."[14] Neuman's comment indirectly references the structures of control within the television industry. His comment might in part reference the censorship that is imposed upon television in the United States, such as regulations that limit language, nudity, and sexual content. Parks, however, argues that digital start-ups such as DEN are trying to directly challenge television's dominance. She details how DEN specifically targeted its programming at minority and marginalized teens and also "explored social issues that the Big Three networks [ABC, NBC, and CBS in the United States] tended to avoid, such as hate crime, depression, gang life, gambling, AIDS, transsexuality, eating disorders, and school violence."[15] Press releases emphasized DEN's difference from television by describing the online network as "a hip alternative and *replacement* to the passive, brainkilling experience of watching network and cable television."[16] Neuman

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[13] For example, see ibid., 231.

[14] Qtd. in Parks, "Flexible Microcasting: Gender, Generation, and Television-Internet Convergence," 148.

[15] Ibid., 149.

[16] Qtd. in ibid., 149. Emphasis added.

specifically underscores differences between television and Internet form, arguing that

"TV is about watering down what's really edgy and cool."[17] Taken in sum, these

comments and press releases construct the Internet and user-produced media as a counter-

cultural space that actively subverts television's authority. Here we can see an application

of Kandinsky's claim; if form is simply the outer expression of content, then the

aesthetics of user-produced media signify "content not meant for television" or even

"content that subverts television." Thus the aesthetics of these projects have come for

some readers to represent an emerging culture, one that directly challenges television's

social influence through active participation in media production.

4.2.1 Dominant and Emergent Cultures

This language that refers to an "emergent" user/producer culture recalls Raymond

Williams' discussion of the dominant, emergent, and residual within a society. Williams

describes the dominant as the hegemonic, primary understanding of a society while the

residual "has been effectively formed in the past, but…is still active in the cultural

process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element

of the present." He offers the example of organized religion as an entity that is

"predominantly residual" as it demonstrates how something can be external to the

dominant culture, but "nevertheless lived and practised on the basis of the residue—

cultural as well as social—of some previous social and cultural institution or

formation."[18] The emergent, in contrast, consists of the "new meanings and values, new

practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship" that are "constantly being

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[17] Qtd. in ibid., 149.

[18] Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 121-23.

created."[19] Williams notes that it is often difficult to differentiate between new elements of the dominant and elements that represent something "substantially alternative or oppositional to it: emergent in the strict sense, rather than merely novel."[20]

As a Marxist, Williams originally conceived of the relationship between the dominant, emergent, and residual primarily as a class struggle between a dominant ruling class and an oppressed bourgeoisie—citing the emergence of the working class and its associated values and institutions in England as an example of this dynamic—but also noted that a new class is always a source of "emergent cultural practice."[21] Media can and certainly do play a key role in the maintenance of a dominant perspective and the emergence of new practices since, as James Carey argues, communication "is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed."[22] Television and its particular representation of society, for example, effectively reinforce a hierarchical social structure that leaves cultural development in the hands of supposedly superior, trustworthy elites. Societal and cultural norms, important issues and events, and even experience itself are all the product of centralized, top-down control. Television plays a dual role as both a representative and enforcer of the current dominant, hierarchical societal structure that allows a relatively small number of people access to ideological control.

If television is representative of a dominant which maintains centralized control over the development of society and culture, then it is reasonable to posit user-produced

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[19] Ibid., 123.

[20] Ibid., 123.

[21] Ibid., 124.

[22] James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 23.

digital media are representative of a new, emergent culture, one in which citizens as user/producers have gained greater influence through active participation in the public sphere. In fact, utopian views of new media often position user-produced media specifically as a counterpoint to television and the dominance it represents, and the case studies in the previous two chapters demonstrate that the aesthetics of immediacy are the hallmark of user-produced media in that they both result from and are representative of the belief that anyone, even those outside traditional institutions such as mass media, can contribute freely and equally to a society and its culture. Animators such as John Kricfalusi (and amateurs that followed his lead) and webcam performers such as Jennifer Ringley and Anna Voog view the Internet as a space free from discursive control, while citizen journalists and vloggers post videos to sites such as YouTube, Current.com, and iReport.com in hopes of bringing attention to issues and events ignored by mass media. Digital media advocates view these forms as examples of the ability for "average" citizens to circumvent television's gatekeeping authority and participate freely in the development of society. These media forms have distinct aesthetic markers--influenced by the combination of technological limitations (i.e., bandwidth and equipment), available software tools, and personal skill level—that often results in a less polished, "degraded" image quality such as the "flat colour and simple shapes" common to Flashimation, the unsteady image often seen in participatory journalism, and the unmoving camera and poor lighting and sound quality regularly featured in vlogs. In short, user-produced media do not feature the polished visuals of television media because they are made by "real people." This user-produced aesthetic has thus come to

signify not only media that are less mediated and more immediate than television, but also the democratization of production itself.

While it might be tempting and even accurate to attribute television's aesthetic remediation of user-produced media to its producers' desire to appear cutting-edge and modern, reducing their motivations to that desire both ignores larger cultural issues and suggests a defensive, even desperate, attitude that the television industry simply has not adopted. Television has instead proactively engaged with and incorporated elements of digital, Internet, and user-produced media. As Amanda Lotz suggests, television as a technology and institution has indeed experienced significant change since the introduction of digital media. For example, she describes how digital technologies have led to the expansion of channel offerings and delivery technologies, shifting television away from a "flow" model to what Bernard Miege describes as a "publishing" model. Under this model, television channels attempt to appeal to smaller, niche market segments rather than a heterogeneous mass audience common during the network television era.[23]

The assumption that this change has somehow destabilized television's dominant position as a cultural authority in favour of a new egalitarian, bottom-up, user/producer culture, however, is premature. Indeed, the expansion of distribution options has actually increased, rather than decreased, television's reach even as television content is tailored to ever-more specialized markets. Online distribution of televisual texts is just one demonstration of the way digital technologies have allowed the television industry to colonize the Web and pursue the niche audiences that were previously considered the

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[23] Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, 34.

province of the Web; in addition, online distribution of corporate TV has naturalised the

Internet as supplementing rather than supplanting television.[24] This colonization leads

Lotz to suggest that although television distribution patterns may have changed,

television content "remains a particular category of programming that retains the social

importance attributed to television's earlier operation as a cultural forum despite the

changes of the post-network era."[25] The previous case studies of aesthetic remediation

illustrate this hegemonic relationship between television and new media, in which the

assimilation of the aesthetic elements of user-produced media provides the television

industry with several cultural benefits and perpetuates television's dominant cultural

significance.

Williams predicted and described the relatively harmonious, rather than

contentious, nature of the relationship between the dominant and emergent. He begins by

stating that "new practice is not, of course, an isolated process. To the degree that it

emerges, and especially to the degree that it is oppositional rather than alternative, the

process of attempted incorporation significantly begins."[26] Through his use of the word

"incorporation", Williams is claiming that a society's dominant culture attempts to

assimilate—rather than dominate—the emergent, and the aggressiveness of that

incorporation is directly related to the perceived level of difference from (and, therefore,

possible threat to) the dominant culture. Assimilation of an emergent culture, however, is

rarely perceived as a threat by members of that culture. Rather, Williams correctly

suggests that "incorporation looks like recognition, acknowledgement, and thus a form of

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[24] McPherson, "Reload: Liveness, Mobility, and the Web," 4677, Sconce, "What If?: Charting Television's New Textual Boundaries," 110.

[25] Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, 34-40.

[26] Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 124.

acceptance."[27] Thus, the emergent, oppositional culture willingly and perhaps subconsciously submits to the dominant culture—the classic Gramscian understanding of hegemony. The notion of publicity shifts from active participation and debate to "publicness" in the form of acknowledgement, a shortcoming Andrejevic discusses when he states: "Far from reintroducing political participation into the mediated public sphere, interactivity offers the potential to democratize publicity as celebrity."[28] Andrejevic's statement echoes Jürgen Habermas' discussion of the changing nature of publicity in the public sphere, in which he states that "public relations do not ultimately refer to public opinion, but rather opinion in the sense of reputation. The public sphere becomes the court *before* whose public prestige can be displayed—instead of *in* which public critique takes place."[29] This observation reveals the limit of utopian approaches that equate production to democratization and significantly challenges the notion of user-produced media production leading to increased political participation or ideological control by users. Those within the emergent culture feel a sense of validation rather than repression and, in the process, the subversive or potential of the emergent is contained and negated. It is for this reason that aesthetic remediation has a distinctly socio-ideological effect. On the surface, the use of user-produced aesthetics and material makes it appear as if "ordinary citizens" have gained a previously unattained level of access. However, if structures and aesthetics are part of a counter-culture and its social practices, their appropriation then weakens that emerging culture's potential. Television's appropriation

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[27] Ibid., 125.

[28] Andrejevic, "The Webcam Subculture and the Digital Enclosure," 196.

[29] Habermas, *Strukturwandel Der Öffentlichkeit*, 299. Translated by the author. Emphasis in the original. Original quote reads: "Public relations beziehen sich nicht eigentlich auf public opinion, sondern auf opinion in jenem Verstande der reputation. Öffentlichkeit wird zum Hof, vor dessen Publikum sich Prestige entfalten läßt – statt in ihm Kritik."

of the aesthetics of user-produced media, or even its wholesale inclusion of user-produced texts, effectively undercuts their ability to democratize media production.

This process can plainly be seen in the case of CNN's *iReport* or the similarly structured CurrentTV network. The ability for user/producers to submit videos affords a sense of participation in mass media. However, as Andrejevic notes, participation does not "necessarily contest the media's social power to frame the issues."[30] CNN's *iReport* website states the news organisation showcases only what it decides are the "most newsworthy" videos during televised newscasts.[31] In this arrangement, participation only gains significance when recognised by those with power. It is this dynamic that leads Jean Burgess and Jonathan Green to say that the "excitement and energy around participatory culture was motivated by the possibility that those of us who have been limited to the role of the 'passive' audience could become producers, and therefore more 'active' participants in the media."[32] However, while the user/producers submitting videos to CNN are ostensibly participating in a democratising activity, their participation instead works to reinforce the hegemonic relationship with television it supposedly destabilises. These user/producers are recognising CNN's authority, and CNN's use of their videos leads to a sense of validation.

How the use of new media aesthetics in entertainment media, such as reality TV and animation, challenges the independence of user-produced media is not as readily apparent. The complication, however, partially arises from the software used to create these Web media. Flashimation's encoding of television animation in its own menu

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[30] Andrejevic, *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*, 121.

[31] "iReport - Your News Stories Selected and Voted on for Cnn.Com," CNN, http://www.cnn.com/ireport/.

[32] Burgess and Green, *YouTube*, 82.

system problematizes the notion that it is inherently an independent and distinct cultural form, and suggests that animators, voluntarily or involuntarily, approach their work with an internalised television perspective. John Caldwell even refers to Web animation as "TV-wannabes."[33] While he does not elaborate, I suggest this claim implies that many more people producing these Flash cartoons are simply replicating a television aesthetic than discussions of the medium's potential for democratization and independence suggest. Seeing Flash cartoons on television can even lead to a sense of validation by user/producers working with Flash, even if their own animation is never broadcast. In addition, the use of user-produced aesthetics on television can actually counteract one of the primary reasons cited for the move of animators to the Internet, namely avoiding censorship and control by television networks. Anna Munster notes that the animated US television series *South Park* has been able to avoid censorship concerns primarily because its flat aesthetic results in a disassociation from realism which makes the show's "complete irreverence for any form of morality" more acceptable.[34] User-produced Web Flashimation tends to feature that same flat aesthetic and also frequently breaches socially accepted guidelines of "good taste." This combination has led to a cultural association of Flashimation with subversive content. Television's remediation of this aesthetic allows television content to capitalize upon this association, making possible the development of adult-oriented programming that allows television to target and attract that market segment while simultaneously crippling the anti-mass media credentials of user-produced media.

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[33] Caldwell, "Second-Shift Media Aesthetics," 131.

[34] Munster, "Compression and the Intensification of Visual Information in Flash Aesthetics", 137.

Television's aesthetic remediation of new media is a manifestation of Williams' theory, in which the act of aesthetic remediation actually strengthens television's ideological position as a cultural dominant. Television further benefits by capitalizing on the cultural association of a user/producer aesthetic with egalitarianism and democratization, which conceals its hegemonic nature. This relationship resembles Jenkins' definition of "interactivity"—in which possible actions are pre-structured[35]—rather than true, open-ended, independent participation within a Habermasian public sphere. Essentially, the terms of production, even for user-produced media such as Flashimation, webcam videos, vlogs, and YouTube uploads, are instead dictated by television rather than leading to the oft-predicted revolutionary new cultural forms, which leads Andrejevic to claim that "[f]ar from democratizing the production process, participation has the potential to vastly enhance its rationalization."[36] This observation could and should be extended to include production as well as participation. Immediacy—and the aesthetics of immediacy—becomes a social category carefully constructed and deployed for ideological gain.

4.3 Habitus

The hegemonic relationship between user-produced media and television demonstrated in the aesthetic remediation or wholesale appropriation of the cultural production of user/producers is another manifestation of Bourdieu's invisible censorships, one developed in response to the subversive potential of digital media. Interestingly, the social order this particular invisible censorship maintains is the positioning of television itself as the culturally dominant medium, a process which relies

[35] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, 133.

[36] Andrejevic, "The Webcam Subculture and the Digital Enclosure," 197.

upon television's history as a social institution and cultural authority. The concept of

habitus discussed by Durkheim and Bourdieu helps to explain how this positioning came

about and is maintained. Bourdieu's approach to habitus explains how it can replicate a

particular ideological viewpoint even while it constantly evolves. Habitus, according to

Bourdieu, is both "the product of history" and "produces individual and collective

practices, and hence history, in accordance with the schemes engendered by history."[37]

Habitus is thus both structure and, at the same time, structuring, constantly rebuilding and

reinforcing its role as a structure to the point that it becomes an accepted, even

unconscious part of a society and its culture. Bourdieu refers to this incorporation into

culture as "the forgetting of history which history itself produces."[38] He further

elaborates:

> The *habitus*—embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history—is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product. As such, it is what gives practices their relative autonomy with respect to external determinations of the immediate present. This autonomy is that of the past, enacted and acting, which, functioning as accumulated capital, produces history on the basis of history and so ensures the permanence in charge that makes the individual agency a world within the world.[39]

Bourdieu's interpretation of habitus is, therefore, both adaptive and assertive. It allows

for spontaneous and creative acts which can further inform the habitus, but these acts are

also simultaneously guided by the embodied and unconscious history that *is* the habitus.

Thus, habitus is influenced by, and representative of, the history that helped shape it as

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[37] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, ed. Ernest Gellner, et al., trans. Richard Nice, Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 82.

[38] Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 56.

[39] Ibid., 56.

much as it influences the future development of a society, demonstrating how "past moments of the shaping of the habitus are retained in the present."[40]

Most often, habitus is tied to Bourdieu's notorious claim that class taste is "embodied" and established through "the unconscious dispositions, the classificatory schemes, the taken-for-granted preferences which are evident in the individual's sense of the appropriateness and validity of his taste for cultural goods and practices[.]"[41] This interpretation might seemingly position habitus as determinist, but the inclusion of the word "dispositions" indicates a level of agency is still present. Bourdieu addresses this idea, stating:

> The habitus is the universalizing mediation which causes an individual agent's practices, without either explicit reason or signifying intent, to be none the less 'sensible' and 'reasonable'. That part of practices which remains obscure in the eyes of their own producers is the aspect by which they are objectively adjusted to other practices and to the structures of which the principle of their production is itself the product.[42]

Habitus is essentially Bourdieu's attempt to explain how behaviour, thoughts, and practices can be regulated without necessarily being predetermined. Class and social status, education, and history itself generate certain dispositions—practices or decisions that seem likelier than others—and the behaviours we exhibit in the present (along with in the past) will further shape the habitus and influence our future dispositions and practices.

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[40] Tony Bennett, "Habitus Clivé: Aesthetics and Politics in the Work of Pierre Bourdieu," *New Literary History* 38, no. 1 (2007): 205.

[41] Mike Featherstone, "Lifestyle and Consumer Culture," in *The Consumer Society Reader*, ed. Martyn J. Lee (Malden, Massachuetts: Blackwell, 2000), 99.

[42] Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 79.

Lois McNay argues that habitus is a "generative structure which establishes an active and *creative* relation…between the subject and the world."[43] Indeed, Bourdieu was insistent upon habitus not being deterministic, stating: "Through the habitus, the structure which has produced it governs practice, not by the process of a mechanical determinism, but through the mediation of the orientations and limits it assigns to the habitus's operations of invention."[44] Couldry, borrowing from McNay, thus suggests that the concept of habitus need not be tied to discussion of social class and taste, and can instead be used "for investigating how media might have changed the fundamental conditions under which dispositions of all kinds are generated."[45] Jonathan Sterne, for example, suggests that habitus-guided dispositions guide our use of and interactions with media. He demonstrates this belief by examining radio "through the Bourdieuean lens":

> The simple fact that the radios in our homes, cars, and on our heads are reception-only devices is the realization and perpetuation of a whole set of social facts of radio: the commercial dominance of broadcasting by large networks and narrowly defined formats for decades (though soon satellite, cable and Internet providers will join them); a federal policy apparatus designed to reinforce that dominance; historically changing practices of radio use that have—since the mid 1920s—emphasized radio as something one *listens to*, not something one *creates*—either individually or collectively.[46]

These "social facts" are the habitus—accepted, even subconscious, common knowledge about the "proper" use of radio. Radio, both the technology and the institution, constantly reinforces these social facts through the design of radio receivers, the format of radio stations, and the discourse of on-air professionals. Sterne's example clearly demonstrates how habitus can be seen in our relationship with media forms. A person's understanding

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[43] Lois McNay, "Gender, Habitus, and the Field: Pierre Bourdieu and the Limits of Reflexivity," *Theory, Culture & Society* 16, no. 1 (1999): 100. Emphasis added.

[44] Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 95.

[45] Couldry, "Liveness, 'Reality,' and the Mediated Habitus from Television to the Mobile Phone," 358.

[46] Sterne, "Bourdieu, Technique, and Technology," 382.

of how to use radio has itself become one of those structuring structures which is both informed and re-formed through the very act of using. In other words, how we use a medium, which is informed by the habitus, helps inform that technology's future use, thus explaining how the accepted interactions with and uses of a technology can evolve over time.

4.3.1 Habitus and Television

Habitus, however, does not simply inform the use of a particular medium or technology but, I would argue, also informs understandings of a medium's social purpose or role. This can clearly be seen in the case of television. Much like radio, the development of television into a centralized mass medium was constructed rather than inevitable. While many prognosticators such as nineteenth century science-fiction author Albert Robida coupled "seeing by electricity" with broadcast-style uses such as the presentation of battlefield reports and theatre productions[47], Williams notes that many early experiments with television as a technology were nearly inseparable with the idea of "photo-telegraphy."[48] That association implies the television was originally seen as a potential one-to-one, personal communication device. A cartoon in *Punch's Almanack* from 1879, for example, depicts two people communicating through "Edison's Telephonoscope"—a fictional device that transmits sound while simultaneously projecting a remote image onto a screen.[49] The cartoon depicts a man and woman sitting

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[47] Robida's visions of a future television-like technology were particularly prescient, including both broadcast- and videophone-style uses. See Albert Robida, *The Twentieth Century*, trans. Philippe Willems (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2004).

[48] Raymond Williams, *Television, Technology and the Cultural Form* (London: Fontana, 1974), 10.

[49] R. W. Burns, *Television: An International History of the Formative Years*, vol. 22, The History of Technology (London: Institution of Electrical Engineers, 1998), 39-40, Albert Abramson, "The Invention of Television," in *Television: An International History*, ed. Anthony Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 14-15.

in their living room, talking and listening through flared tubes to a woman on the wide screen above their fireplace, who is using her own communication tube. The idea of television as a replacement for the telephone persisted into the 1930s, when amateur radio enthusiasts began tinkering with rudimentary television transmitter/receiver kits which could be purchased for under $300.

Despite originally being imagined nearly half a century before the technology to achieve this would be made feasible, however, the use of television technology for personal communication never took hold. Television was instead groomed into a broadcast medium. Williams attributes this development to "mobile privatisation"—the somewhat contradictory notion of an "at once mobile and home-centred way of living" made possible by technological advances and increasingly self-sufficient family households.[50] The combination of increased mobility—both figurative and literal—and more self-sufficient "private" households increasingly separated individuals and families from each other and destabilized communities. Broadcast media were seen as a possible solution to this tension. The production of in-home receivers for radio and, later, television allowed people to stay home while simultaneously enjoying a mediatized form of mobility that allowed access to distant sights and sounds, and to "news from 'outside', from otherwise inaccessible sources."[51] Centralized broadcast organizations were required to organize this information and, as previously discussed, the original technical limitation of live transmission became television's definitive characteristic, one which provided the medium with a sense of immediacy and realness that cinema lacked. The development of centralized broadcasting was also seen as a potential antidote to the

[50] Williams, *Television, Technology and the Cultural Form*, 19.

[51] Ibid., 21.

increasing social isolation brought about by mobile privatisation, as it was "both an answer to the need felt by central power to reach all citizens with important information efficiently and a highly useful instrument in the production of the harmonizing, stabilizing 'imagined community' of the nation state."[52]

Richard Dyer has argued that entertainment, especially on mass media such as cinema and television, not only responds to "real needs *created by society*" but also defines those issues which "constitute the legitimate needs of people in this society."[53] While issues such as scarcity, exhaustion, and dreariness are often featured in entertainment, other issues such as class, race, and patriarchy are excluded and thus not approached as "genuine" societal concerns. As a result, difficult issues are often simplified, with consumption positioned as the solution to perceived and constructed societal needs. This particular representation promoted an image of an American (in this case) public dependent upon capitalism. Lynn Spigel similarly discusses how television has been a catalyst for social organization. Like Dyer, she notes that television, like radio before it, was praised for its ability to "join the nation together into a homogenous community where class divisions were blurred by a unifying voice."[54] This "social sanitation" would bring high culture to the masses, it was assumed, by effectively marginalizing society's less desirable elements. As such, television would not simply provide information and entertainment, but would also act as the origin of a new imagined community that was "purified of social unrest and human misunderstanding."[55]

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[52] Gripsrud, "Television, Broadcasting, Flow: Key Metaphors in TV Theory," 23.

[53] Richard Dyer, *Only Entertainment*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 26. Emphasis in original.

[54] Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*, 111.

[55] Ibid., 112.

Television as a cultural form was ideally suited to a population that was experiencing

increased suburbanization and birth rates after the Second World War. Magazine articles

and advertisements for televisions regularly pushed the idea of the television as a "new

family hearth"[56] that could promote family unity and naturalized its presence in the

home:

> As the magazines continued to depict the set in the center of family activity,
> television seemed to become a natural part of domestic space. By the early 1950s,
> floor plans included a space for television in the home's structural layout, and
> television sets were increasingly depicted as everyday, commonplace objects that
> any family might hope to own. Indeed, the magazines included television as a
> staple home fixture before most Americans could even receive a television signal,
> much less consider purchasing the expensive item. The media discourses did not
> so much reflect social reality; instead, they preceded it.[57]

In short, the television was constructed as a necessity to strengthen familial bonds.

With this in mind, it is not terribly surprising that many families also looked to television

programming as an authoritative source which demonstrated how a "perfect" suburban

family should look and act. Early television sitcoms such as *Leave it to Beaver* (1957) or

Father Knows Best (1954) provided a template for ideal suburban living and domestic

bliss, built upon both sexist and racist principles, which encouraged a purification of

cultural difference and homogenization of experience.[58] As some started to recognize

television as a challenge to parental authority, television networks began to alter their

programming options and in order to construct television content as "a cultural product

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[56] Ibid., 37-38.

[57] Ibid., 39.

[58] Lynn Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (Durhan, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2001), 31-55.

that could be a helpful accompaniment to parenting rather than a detriment."[59]

Furthermore, children, just like their parents, were using television to learn about the contemporary society and its organization. Magazine ads constructed the television as an essential household appliance, which made the purchase of a television a "natural" choice, particularly for suburban home owners. In addition, due to the efforts of television producers and writers, watching television reinforced the centrality of television in the home and cemented the medium's social role as an informational source and cultural authority. Couldry correctly describes this dynamic, stating "no one can ignore media's role in structuring contemporary domestic space, embedded in the walls of today's living spaces as our 'window' onto the distant social world."[60]

These social practices that accompanied the emergence of television in post-war America both naturalized and legitimized media power, leading to what Nick Couldry refers to as the "myth of the mediated centre."[61] This myth asserts the idea that media— particularly mass media—offer what Andreas Hepp describes as a "privileged access point to the centre of a society."[62] In other words, because of a belief in their centrality, we look to mass media in order to understand the world and our place in it. Couldry believes that this myth is perpetuated because "through all sorts of arrangements of speech, thought and action, it is made to seem natural."[63] The belief in the centrality of television is reflected in its quick uptake in society. Even as early as 1960, over 85% of

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[59] Sarah Banet-Weiser, "Home Is Where the Brand Is: Children's Telveision in a Post-Network Era," in *Beyond Prime Time: Television Programming the Post-Network Era*, ed. Amanda D. Lotz (New York: Routledge, 2009), 78.

[60] Couldry, "Liveness, 'Reality,' and the Mediated Habitus from Television to the Mobile Phone," 359.

[61] Couldry, *Media Rituals: A Critical Approach*, 47.

[62] Hepp, "Researching 'Mediatised Worlds': Non-Mediacentric Media and Communication Research as a Challenge," 42.

[63] Couldry, *Media Rituals: A Critical Approach*, 47.

households had a television and its use in public spaces such as pubs and hospitals was on the rise; television required little more than a decade to become "a—if not the—central communicative and cultural force within society."[64] This naturalization—that is, the construction of media as central to society—is an example of habitus in action. Television was constructed as household necessity necessary for the proper development of family, community, and nation, a construction which became a naturalized and accepted social reality. The societal belief in the centrality of television to society led to a particular set of dispositions and practices (purchasing a television receiver and watching television) which in turn further cemented television's "central" role until the practice of turning to television and treating it as a cultural and information source became, to revisit Bourdieu's words, "internalized as second nature." Naturalization also obscured television's historical construction which, as Lisa Gitelman notes, makes it possible for it to "become authoritative as the social processes of [its] definition and dissemination are separated out or forgotten, and as the social processes of protocol formation and acceptance get ignored."[65] Bourdieu's assertion that habitus, as "the forgetting of history which history itself produces", can produce certain dispositions and beliefs is seemingly reflected here. Indeed, one of the advantages of approaching television through a "Bourdieuean lens" in the inclusion of historical elements that Couldry's "myth of the mediated centre" concept obscures or ignores.

Indeed, even the act of watching television reinforces television as a cultural authority. Televisual content that, in part due to the dynamics and limited choices on the network era of television, became the primary source of cultural commonality, validating

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[64] Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, 31.

[65] Gitelman, *Always Already New*, 6-7.

Lotz's claim that television was both "forum and ideological enforcer."[66] During the era of live broadcasts, television was firmly established as an authoritative cultural source and, politically and ideologically, represented the "domination of centralized power over culture."[67] Televisual liveness or immediacy is thus important, as it "marks the media's constructed role as the access point to what is supposed to be 'central' to the 'group,' that is, the whole society."[68] Once television had been established as depicting an "objective" reality or, more specifically, portraying the most important parts of culture and society with an immediacy (i.e., truth) other media could not match, this cultural understanding, though public and mediated discourse, became accepted common knowledge, allowing television's immediacy to avoid being called into question even as television switched to less immediate taped formats. Television producers' recognition of the importance of concepts such as liveness, immediacy, and authenticity to the medium, conscious or otherwise, led to the application of techniques that served to constantly reassert the understanding of television as central. Even now, television is connected to immediacy (even "staged" immediacy), spontaneity and surprise, and "acceleration of perception."[69]

Even more telling, the practice of looking to television as a cultural authority has been maintained even as television audiences and content become increasingly fragmented. The expansion of channel offerings on cable and satellite systems has effectively transformed the former "mass" television audience into an aggregate of smaller, niche audiences. Lotz suggests that "[m]any assumptions of the 'mass' nature of

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[66] Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, 32.

[67] Vianello, "The Power Politics of 'Live' Television," 39.

[68] Couldry, "Liveness, 'Reality,' and the Mediated Habitus from Television to the Mobile Phone," 359.

[69] Monika Elsner, Thomas Müller, and Peter M. Spangenberg, "The Early History of German Television: The Slow Development of a Fast Medium," in *Materialities of Communication*, ed. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and K. Ludwig Pfeiffer (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994), 109.

media undergird theories postulating the emancipatory potential of media. Even as the new norm of niche audiences eliminates some of these imagined possibilities, it may create others."[70] Indeed, the fragmentation of the audience leads many to suggest that television's ideological grip is slipping. Television producers have proven quite savvy, however, at developing content for niche audiences to exert a strong, continuing sociocultural influence. Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn note this in relation to Reality TV in particular, suggesting the genre "speaks to the ways in which television is harnessing its aesthetic and cultural power and, as an increasingly multimedia experience, the ways in which it resonates so extensively in the cultural sphere."[71] Televisual content now is not only accessible via broadcast over the air, cable, or satellite to television sets, but also on mobile phones, websites, DVDs, and myriad other digital devices. Despite claims that these new digital technologies offer liberation from the "constraints" of centralized media, television's adaption to these devices ultimately allows increased accessibility to televisual content, effectively reasserting its significance rather than destabilizing it. Relatedly, Burgess and Greene suggest that the aesthetic similarities between online, user-produced content and televisual content "points to the way digital delivery options such as YouTube and the increasing move of material online are destabilizing medium-dependent definitions of media forms."[72]However, the reliance upon the television's representational codes and structures against suggests that, rather

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[70] Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, 247.

[71] Holmes and Jermyn, "Introduction: Understanding Reality TV," 1.

[72] Burgess and Green, *YouTube*, 56.

than contesting the authoritative and dominant position of television, digital media seem to be, in the words of Jeffrey Sconce, merely a "supplement to television."[73]

4.3.2 Habitus and the Internet

Utopian discourse concerning the Internet, the World Wide Web, and the various user-produced media disseminated online positions these media forms as distinct from television. Even the use of the phrase "new media" rather than simply digital or online media serves to separate these forms from "old" media such as television. Despite the divergence of its content across several, often portable media, Elana Levine notes a continuing trend describing television as old-fashioned, static, and unidirectional, while the Web is diametrically positioned as interactive, cutting-edge, and a product of individual "artistic expressiveness."[74] This separation also invariably positions the Internet and television as competitors in a crowded media environment. Competition certainly has economic considerations, as evidenced by the number of media professionals and scholars that regularly predict the demise of television, but it has several social and ideological ramifications as well. Jeffrey Wimmer comments upon the centrality of media to democratic debate and basic education, and suggests that a special democratizing potential has always been attributed to new media, in part due to the belief that the Internet will, in some way, force a chance in a medially created public.[75]

Constructions of online media using "old/new" binaries, however, limit the culturally authoritative potential of the Internet, focusing instead on the potential for personalization and individualization. Part of this is predicated upon the hypermediated

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[73] Sconce, "What If?: Charting Television's New Textual Boundaries," 110.

[74] Levine, "Distinguishing Television: The Changing Meanings of Television Liveness," 405.

[75] Wimmer, *(Gegen-)Öffentlichkeit in Der Mediengesellschaft: Analyse Eines Medialen Spannungsverhältnisses*, 139.

structure of the Web. McPherson, for example, notes that the "scan-and-search" approach used as people browse the Web "structures a spatilized and mobile *subjectivity* which feels less orchestrated than the subject hailed by television flow…. With the web, we feel we create the sequences rather than being programmed into them."[76] The Internet is thus treated not as an authoritative source, but a source one can turn to for exploration of subjective personal interests. She further suggests that the Internet holds the promise of "remaking of information into a better reflection of the self."[77] In short, television dictates to the masses; the Internet obeys the individual. This cultural understanding of the Internet has been further cemented with the development of so-called "Web 2.0" services—websites and other online tools that prominently feature customization, personalization, self-expression, and collaborative production as prominent characteristics. In this environment, it becomes increasingly difficult to find new informative content, and a lot of information and entertainment is repeatedly copied on multiple websites, further problematizing exposure to new information.[78] The "digitextuality" the Internet provides, to borrow Everett's[79] term—which allows Internet producers to either reference or subsume the entirety of one text within another— obscures authorship and increases the likelihood of repeated exposure to personally or subjectively "important" information. Cass Sunstein references Nicholas Negroponte's prediction of the emergence of the "Daily Me" or a "communications package that is

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[76] McPherson, "Reload: Liveness, Mobility, and the Web," 465. Emphasis added.

[77] Ibid., 465.

[78] Richard van der Wurff, "The Impact of the Internet on Media Content," in *The Internet and the Mass Media*, ed. Lucy Küng, Robert G. Picard, and Ruth Towse (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008), 77.

[79] See Everett, "Digitextuality and Click Theory."

personally designed, with each component carefully chosen in advance."[80] Sunstein

suggests that Negroponte underestimated the capabilities that digital media would

provide. Not only do digital media allow users to design a specific, personalised

communication package, but they also provide "the growing power of consumers to

'filter' what they see."[81] Through filtering, Web vlogs become mere "personalized

documentaries" rather than educational texts that could develop knowledge and

understanding.[82]

This filtering ability is disconcerting to Sunstein, as he considers both a range of

shared experiences as well as exposure to information and perspectives that would not

necessarily be selected in advance to be important to the development and maintenance

of a democratic system of exchange.[83] These preconditions suggest that the fragmentation

of groups through the pursuit of personal interests—the default mode of Internet

interaction in part because of the quantity of information and media available—is a

detriment to the establishment of a communication system that resembles a Habermassian

public sphere. Despite the fragmentation in television audiences over the last two to three

decades, television still has the capacity to operate as an electronic public sphere when it

reaches a large enough mass audience to offer a shared experience.[84] The societal belief

in the central role television has played in the past enhances its ability to act as an

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[80] Cass Sunstein, *Republic.Com 2.0* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007), 4.

[81] Ibid., 5.

[82] Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn, *Reality TV: Realism and Revelation* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2004), 70.

[83] Sunstein, *Republic.Com 2.0*, 5-6.

[84] Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, 42.

electronic public sphere, but fragmentation on the Internet has been naturalized, in part due to its construction as a repository of information to be discovered.

This construction can even be seen in historic—even theoretical—precedents to the Internet. H. G. Wells, for example, described his "World Brain" concept, which he developed in the 1930s as a world-wide, networked, user-generated, continuously updated encyclopaedia, or in his words, "a sort of mental clearing house for the mind, a depot where knowledge and ideas are received, sorted, summarized, digested, clarified, and compared…a perpetual digest and conference on the one hand and a system of publication and distribution on the other."[85] Though Wells never truly explained how this networked system would function, the similarity of his description to the structure of the modern Internet is undeniable. American scientist Vannevar Bush would resurrect this idea in the years after the Second World War in the form of the memex, a "personal information machine" designed to assist the individual in filtering the mass amount of information available as a result of better storage techniques. The machine would consist of a couple of screens onto which information, stored on microfilm, could be projected, as well as a series of buttons and levers that would allow the user to call up and scan through that information. Bush, even more so than Wells, described his (theoretical) invention as an exploratory device designed for browsing, complete with a sort of mnemonic bookmarking system:

> If the user wishes to consult a certain book, he taps its code on the keyboard, and the title page of the book promptly appears before him, projected onto one of his viewing positions. Frequently-used codes are mnemonic, so that he seldom consults his code book; but when he does, a single tap of a key projects it for his use. Moreover, he has supplemental levers. On deflecting one of these levers to the right, he runs through the book before him, each page in turn being projected

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[85] H. G. Wells, *World Brain* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc., 1938), 69-71.

at a speed which just allows a recognizing glance at each. If he deflects it further to the right, he steps through the book 10 pages at a time; still further at 100 pages at a dime. Deflection to the left gives him the same control backwards….He can add marginal notes and comments…just as though he had the physical page before him.[86]

Bush's ideas would influence the development of the ARPANET, the first true computer-based network, developed by the US Military sponsored Advanced Research Project Agency (ARPA), which would eventually evolve into the Internet. Although the stated goal of the ARPANET was to share the computing and processing resources of multiple networked locations, the idea of an ever-accessible repository of information was never far off.

It is useful here to reference Mark Williams' discussions of the similarities between televisual liveness and Internet real time and Michael Warner's observation that the Internet is constructed as a source of continuous "24/7 access" available to be called upon as a moment's notice.[87] Both concepts effectively identify the Internet as a source through which personal interests can be explored. The emergence of "Web 2.0" sites—social networking sites, blogs, wikis, and other related websites that offer personalization and the opportunity for public self-expression—further establish the World Wide Web as a subjective media form. Personalization has been firmly established to the point that the ability to tailor content and participate in self-expression has become a guiding principle of the use of Internet. Here again, the nature of habitus as a structuring structure is visible. The hypermediated structure of the Internet, popularly and scholarly discourse concerning Web 2.0, and our past use of using the Internet (i.e., our previous "practices") generate certain disposition that lead us to treat the Internet not as an authoritative force,

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[86] Vannevar Bush, "As We May Think," *The Atlantic Monthly*, July 1945, 106.

[87] Michael Warner, qtd. in Gitelman, *Always Already New*, 136.

but as an always-available resource for personal exploration because it is "reasonable" to do so.

Sunstein's analysis, which discourages the development of "echo chambers" through filtering and reasserts the importance of shared mediated experiences such as those provided by mass media in the 20th century, focuses mainly on the *reception* of media texts—that is, how users access, interact with, and interpret information. However, cultural understandings and use of the Internet primarily as a filtering medium through which personal interests are explored also affects user/producer's production practices as well. This can be seen in the structure and aesthetics of reality-based user-produced material. The most obvious difference between television news and reality TV programming and Internet vlogs and videos of events in the vein of citizen journalism is the general lack of contextualization in the form of narrative construction which fails to suggest the importance or significance of what is being viewed; user/producers are not disposed to that particular practice. The user is instead expected to *subjectively* determine that significance. A webcam video of the aftermath of the London tube bombing may show the chaos that ensued, but a news report will report the number of casualties, detail government response, and link the event to an international war on terror. A vlog discussing a family disagreement offers one perspective on the event, but a reality show will contextualize an on-screen confrontation as a part of a larger narrative. There is a reciprocating reinforcement at play, in which the tendency to threat the Internet as an exploratory (as opposed to authoritative) source makes contextualization less necessary, and the lack of narrative construction in turn reinforces the cultural belief in the Internet as subjective. Thus, when Jennicam operator Jennifer Ringley critiqued the MTV reality

show *The Real World* by stating that seven handpicked strangers living in a house paid for by MTV is not "real life"[88], she was exactly right. However, the statement also reflects a naïve understanding of television's authoritative position over the representation of realness. The literal representation of reality that the Internet can offer is less culturally significant than the contextualized, often simplified rendering of reality that television offers because we are not inclined as a society to treat it as such. User-produced content for the Web lacks the authoritative emphasis and sociocultural impact of televisual content, even as televisual content itself is produced for ever-smaller fragmented market segments. That audience fragmentation, however, makes it easier for television to appropriate user-produced content while providing the contextualization to make it culturally significant.

4.4 Television, User-Produced Content, and Cultural "Legitimacy"

Burgess and Greene state that mainstream media such as television have the tendency to underestimate the potential impact of user-produced media such as YouTube videos, stating they filter "the uses and meanings of YouTube through their own news values as well as through an ideological approach to emerging and popular media that refuses to admit that the vernacular uses of YouTube might have their own forms of legitimacy."[89] This interpretation is rather limited and seems particularly counter-intuitive considering the amount of money and time television broadcasters have invested in the development of online presences and their efforts to encourage submissions from user/producers. Television news entities such as CNN and CurrentTV certainly do "filter"

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[88] Qtd. in White, "Television and Internet Differences by Design: Rendering Liveness, Presence, and Lived Space," 347.

[89] Burgess and Green, *YouTube*, 36.

the uses and meaning of user-produced materials through their own ideologies, but not because of a lack of recognition of their legitimacy, but rather because of a keen and well-developed understand of the legitimacy—in the form of immediacy—that these videos have. The inclusion of user-produced videos in television news production provides television with the advantage of offering the immediacy, realness, and even the perceived personalization of an Internet experience while also taking advantage of the cultural belief in its role as a "natural" authority to contextualize the information shown in user-produced videos. This use allows television to capitalize upon the Internet's version of "real time" immediacy while also re-emphasizing its role as a cultural authority not only in relation to what information is newsworthy, but also over Internet material as well.

Richard van der Wurff notes that the "organisation and selection of information is a key activity of media organisations, and one that adds considerable value to content. So far, however, research indicates that media organisations are reluctant to take up this organising and selecting role on the Internet."[90] This is certainly true in the case of participatory journalism on the Internet. The selection of particular clips by established mass media institutions such as CNN does indeed add "considerable value", in part because of television's history of informing citizens of "important" events; through the habitus, television's selection and broadcast of a particular user-produced video or text imbues it with what Bourdieu would call cultural capital. In other words, the selection process legitimates some voices while constraining others.

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[90] Wurff, "The Impact of the Internet on Media Content," 78.

The historical development, cultural understanding, and uses of the Internet have led a dearth of similar organizational efforts there. Even as some online presences such as YouTube and Google attempt to fill a selecting role, the goal is to personalize content (recommendations, suggestions) rather than inform. Burgess and Green argue that access to voice is "no guarantee of engaged audience."[91] This is especially true on the Internet, on which both an active and engaged audience is necessary. Anyone may post content on the web, but users must have an established interest in the topic your content addresses, then actively search for and select that content. Though not unheard of, mass audiences that include otherwise dispassionate members are relatively rare for online media. Television's selection and use of a user-produced text, however, provides it with the cultural capital necessary to engage what would otherwise be disinterested audiences.

Similarly, reality television appropriates the aesthetics of user-produced videos in order to benefit from the cultural association of a devalued aesthetic and truth. As with citizen journalism, this appropriation by television is not indicative of a lack of recognition of the legitimacy of user-produced forms, but rather savvy acknowledgement of it. Television's appropriation of the aesthetics of Web-based animation such as Flashimation demonstrates the same recognition while Flashimation's aesthetic remediation of television animation works to reinforce rather than challenge television's position as a cultural dominant by structuring television as a foundational cultural source for user/producers. In all of these cases, television producers are remediating user-produced texts—both through aesthetic appropriation or wholesale inclusion—in order to benefit from their association with immediacy while simultaneously capitalizing upon

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[91] Burgess and Green, *YouTube*, 82.

and reemphasizing television's historical role as a dominant, authoritative cultural and

informational source. Even Burgess and Greene note that television maintains a position

of dominance, stating that the success and impact of user-produced forms remains

"measured not only by their popularity but by their subsequent ability to pass through the

gate-keeping mechanisms of old media[.]"[92] Here we can see a validation of Bolter and

Grusin's claim that the process of remediation combined both "rivalry and respect"[93]—in

this case, respect for the Internet's capabilities of projecting immediacy and realness, and

appropriating that for an advantage. The consideration of production costs might indeed

have a role in the aesthetic remediation of user-produced material, and it indeed

important to remember that television's primary goal is economic success, there are also

various other, influential forces at play—the history of television as a mass medium, its

constructed role as a cultural authority, and its history as a dominant medium, for

example—which guided and continue to guide both the actions of television producers

and the practices, actions, and responses of audiences and user/producers. Television

producers' incorporation of user-produced material, furthermore, does not require any

new initiatives, as it is seen as natural or sensible, just as the user/producer's act of

submitting their material for selection (i.e., approval and recognition) by mass media

institutions is seen as sensible or reasonable. Bourdieu in fact argues:

> [D]omination no longer needs to be exerted in a direct, personal way when it is
> entailed in possession of the means (economic or cultural capital) of appropriating
> the mechanisms of the field of production and the field of cultural production,
> which tend to assure their own reproduction by their very functioning,
> independently of any deliberate intervention by the agents.[94]

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[92] Ibid., 24.

[93] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 199.

[94] Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 183-84.

This is how television remains a cultural dominant despite experiencing significant technological challenges and changes, and how television remains in the position of "gate-keeper" to cultural significance, even for user-produced media.

On the surface, this discussion might reflect a dystopian view, one that suggests user/producers will never become active contributors to culture and society. However, just as it is important not to attribute a level of agency to a medium or text itself— television or the Internet, television news or user-produced vlogs—it is also important to remember that habitus itself does not operate with agency. In other words, habitus represents no specific goal. Rather, it is the result and determinant of social and cultural process that develop over a number of years that make certain actions seem more practical than others. And habitus can—in fact, must—change over time. Indeed, Bourdieu himself conceded that between cultures, classes, or generations, there are "different definitions of the impossible, the possible, and the probable" which causes "one group to experience as natural or reasonable practices or aspirations which another group finds unthinkable or scandalous, and vice versa."[95] Thus, this discussion is meant to encourage user/producers and scholars to dissociate the idea of mere production from revolution, as well as publicity from success, and instead actively consider the actual sociocultural potential of user-produced media. Indeed, as Andrejevic states, "Certainly, the potential exists…for the Internet to create a society of public intellectuals. To assume that it will do so, however, is to fail to appreciate the pressures of history and existing social relations."[96] Gitelman correctly argues that while "the social, economic, and material relationships" new media will eventually develop are being formed,

[95] Ibid., 78.

[96] Andrejevic, "The Webcam Subculture and the Digital Enclosure," 206.

"consumption and production can be notably indistinct…. In short, the definition of new media depends intricately on the whole social context within which production and consumption get defined."[97] Much of the definition of user-produced media has been in relation and opposition to mass media, which places severe limitations on their development, potential and use. Just as television producers are able to successfully capitalize upon cultural understandings of the medium to operate as a Habermassian public sphere despite increased audience fragmentation, user/producers must learn how to capitalize upon cultural understandings if the Internet is to achieve the level of social and cultural impact and subversion of mass media that, to this point, has simply been assumed. In the process, user/producers must also recognize the ways their productions reify television even as they claim to subvert it.

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[97] Gitelman, *Always Already New*, 15.

5. USER-PRODUCED MEDIA AND COUNTER-PUBLICS

In a discussion of approaches to what he calls "convergence culture", media scholar Henry Jenkins attempts to divide debates on the merits of digital technologies into two opposing positions: "critical utopianism" centred on empowerment and "critical pessimism" focused solely on domination and victimization. The difference, he states, is that the former "focuses on what we are doing with media, and the other on what media is doing to us."[1] Jenkins firmly establishes himself as a member of the "utopianism" camp by stating that the "emergence of new media technologies supports a democratic urge to allow more people to create and circulate media."[2] Digital media such as the Internet and the personal computer do indeed make the processes of producing and disseminating media easier and more accessible. However, the examples discussed in the previous chapters demonstrate the relationship between mass media such as television, grassroots user/producers, and societal change is not as simplistic as Jenkins would suggest. Tara McPherson notes this issue when she suggests that there is often a "utopian yearning for change" after the introduction of a new medium, but the existence of new forms of communication hardly *guarantees* change, or that any change will necessarily have the desired revolutionary impact upon power relations.[3] Lisa Gitelman takes a similar position, arguing that the "introduction of new media…is never entirely revolutionary: new media are less points of epistemic rupture than they are socially embedded sites for the ongoing negotiation of meaning as such."[4] This leads to two distinct questions. If new media are merely "sites for the ongoing negotiation of media" then why are the products

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[1] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, 248.

[2] Ibid., 258.

[3] McPherson, "Reload: Liveness, Mobility, and the Web," 466.

[4] Gitelman, *Always Already New*, 6.

of digital media—namely user-produced media—often heralded as revolutionary? Relatedly, if the relationship between old and new media is as complex as Gitelman and the case studies here suggest, is it even possible for user/producers to have a significant impact upon the public sphere, or are user/producers always at the mercy of mass media producers? This final section will address these questions by suggesting that grassroots media can indeed have a meaningful impact, not through a wholesale overthrow of the public sphere currently defined by mass media, but by aiding the development of "counter-public spheres" that take advantage of the relationship between mass and user-produced media to encourage both online and offline sociocultural action and changes. To achieve this, however, user/producers (and media studies scholars alike) must adopt what David Morley calls a "non-mediacentric" approach to user-produced media in which Nick Couldry's "myth of the mediated centre" is identified and challenged. Only by breaking down the idea that media offer some special access to the centre of society can user/producers also resist the equally false myth that any media production is tantamount to egalitarian participation in society.

5.1 Counter-Public Spheres

In contrast to a mass media dominated (or generated) public sphere, counter-public spheres are spaces for discourse and communication created by groups excluded from or discriminated against in the public sphere. As such, these groups tend to be centred upon a single social issue rather than attempting to generate an inclusive, all-encompassing public sphere to rival the dominant public sphere. The basic idea of counter-publics is not new. Although Habermas suggests that counter-publics did not evolve until the late 19th century, Nancy Fraser notes that, "[v]irtually from the beginning, counterpublics contested the exclusionary norms of the bourgeois public,

elaborating alternative styles of political behavior and alternative norms of public speech."[5] These early counter-publics included groups as diverse as "nationalist publics, popular peasant publics, elite women's publics, and working class publics."[6] Writing in part as a critique of Jürgen Habermas' originally dismissive attitude toward "proletariat" movements, Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge argue that counter-public spheres could be forces of political and social transformation. They suggest that the formation of counter-public spheres can be a source of solidarity for burgeoning social movements and be further reinforced by forming alliances with other counter-publics to take advantage of instability in the dominant, mass-mediated (bourgeois) public sphere in order to enact social change.[7] Jeffrey Wimmer elaborates:

> Basically, the term "counter-public spheres" refers to two dimensions. On the one hand, it refers to critical partial publics aiming to bring their positions – which they feel are being marginalised and which are also often named "counter-public" – to mass media by means of alternative media and actions and therewith gain public attention ("alternative public spheres"). On the other hand, the term counter-public spheres also describes a collective and above all political process of learning and experiencing within alternative forms of organisation as for example NSMs [new social movements], NGOs [non-governmental organizations] etc. ("participatory counter-public spheres").[8]

He further suggests it is probably more important to discuss multiple public spheres, the boundaries between which are "fluid and contingent."[9] In other words, while the public sphere is supposed to be representative of a society and its culture, counter-public spheres

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[5] Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," 61.

[6] Ibid., 61.

[7] Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, trans. Peter Labanyi, Jamie Daniel, and Assenka Oksiloff (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 160-86.

[8] Wimmer, "Counter-Public Spheres and the Revival of the European Public Sphere," 95-96.

[9] Wimmer, *(Gegen-)Öffentlichleit in Der Mediengesellschaft: Analyse Eines Medialen Spannungsverhältnisses*, 237. Original text reads "*fließend und contingent*". Translated by the author.

represent smaller, niche segments of a population that embody a culture or ideology that is significantly different from that indicated in the public sphere. Fraser refers to these groups as "subaltern counterpublics in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs."[10] In addition, citizens can be members of multiple counter-public spheres at the same time. The fluidity of which Wimmer speaks not only refers to that variability in membership, but also to the exchange of ideas, tactics, and information *between* the various counter-public spheres.

The counter-public sphere model seemingly has similarities to Williams' concept of the "emergent." Both emergent cultures and counter-public spheres certainly represent a marginalized segment of a society. There are some significant differences, however. For example, a counter-public sphere does not *necessarily* represent something new and emergent; rather, it can represent a long-repressed element of a society, as Fraser demonstrates. The emergent, however, as the name suggests, represents a new challenge to the dominant that has yet to be addressed. This is why counter-public spheres are often safely marginalized, while the emergent is often sought to be incorporated in a way that reduces its subversive potential.

To be effective, a counter-public must not be content with reaching those that agree, but rather must force influence upon the mass media generated public sphere in a way that changes the dialogue and removes mass media's opportunity to decide what is socially and culturally important and drive the narrative surrounding sociocultural issues.

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[10] Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," 67.

Participation and the ability to break through the dominant public sphere are necessary

for counter-public spheres to foment democratic potential, which can take the form of

"civic self-help, citizen's solidarity and socialisation, and the amplification of public

communication by representing marginalised positions in an advocatory way."[11]

Habermas himself has refined the position he set forth in *Strukturwandel der*

Offentlichkeit to address changes in the relationship between society and the public

sphere. As Fraser notes, Habermas originally believed a "single, overarching public

sphere is a positive and desirable state of affairs, whereas the proliferation of a

multiplicity of publics represents a departure from, rather than an advance toward,

democracy."[12] He has since eschewed his own somewhat negative interpretation of the

public and its relationship to mass media and instead sees the potential for a "pluralistic,

internally much differentiated mass public" to challenge and subvert mass media's

hegemonic influence over society.[13] Specifically, Habermas points to political

mobilizations that seek to generate a counter-public sphere and asks whether these groups

are actually capable of initiating new communicative processes.[14] He observes that "in

periods of mobilisation, the structures that actually support the authority of a critically

engaged public begin to vibrate."[15] Grassroots or counter-public access to the general

public is only granted in what Habermas refers to as moments of "crisis" or periods in

which there is political, economic, or ideological uncertainty. During these moments, the

[11] Wimmer, "Counter-Public Spheres and the Revival of the European Public Sphere," 101.

[12] Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," 66.

[13] Jürgen Habermas, "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1992), 438.

[14] Ibid., 427.

[15] Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), 379.

idea of mass media as an authority and enforcer gives way to a "normative self-understanding" of media as a servant of the people, which provides the opportunity for increased representation of counter-public content and ideas and enables a shift of media (and therefore political) power to civic groups.[16]

Habermas' phrasing echoes Jay David Bolter's and Richard Grusin's statement that the Internet itself shifts power away from mass media and to user/producers.[17] The difference is that Habermas puts the impetus for change and democratization in the crafting of a message and its carefully controlled and orchestrated presentation, as "only through their controversial presentation in the media do such topics reach the larger public and subsequently gain a place on the 'public agenda.'"[18] Habermas achieves three things with this statement: he (1) avoids the issue of technological determinism that seemingly plagues many utopian approaches to digital and user-produced media and instead recognizes media as a tool for the dissemination of ideas, information, and culture; (2) demonstrates a nuanced understanding of the relationship between grassroots and mass media that is not necessarily always hegemonic or always competitive, but rather constantly in flux; and (3) emphasizes the relationship between form and content. Wimmer makes a similar connection between media influence, form, and content, stating:

> Counter-public spheres basically consist of (1) alternative media content and (2) alternative media practice (ways of production, layout, etc.), which can be part of a (political) movement since the days of NSMs. The production of an internal public as a collective identity, as well as an external public as e.g. public resonance are determined by these elements.[19]

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[16] Ibid., 379-81.

[17] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 60.

[18] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, 381.

[19] Wimmer, "Counter-Public Spheres and the Revival of the European Public Sphere," 97.

While mass media such as television, a system "enveloped in its own professional ideologies about what is and what is not newsworthy, about who is a credible source of opinion and information and who is not"[20], remain dominant, this is an exceedingly difficult task. Indeed, the attempt here has been to demonstrate how the emergence of a counter-public can be easily contained through aesthetic appropriation, especially when media production itself is positioned as democratizing or revolutionary. If form—the ways of production and layout Wimmer mentions—is integral to the identity of a counter-public sphere or culturally representative of it, its appropriation by mass media in a way that is interpreted as validation then weakens the potential for that counter-public to affect change. This result would be more representative of the hegemonic relationship between dominant and emergent cultures rather than an example of a true, counter-public realizing its democratic potential. Once a counter-public sphere achieves a level of recognition, however, it cannot simply be content with that recognition, but must continue to work both within and outside of that counter-public sphere to ensure goals are met. Fraser suggests that "the relations between bourgeois publics and other publics were always conflictual" and indeed must be conflictual in order for counter-publics to be effective.[21] Fenton and Downey similarly emphasize what they call a "competitive relationship between dominant and counter public spheres" that not only calls the legitimacy of that public sphere into question, but also contributes to the development of an alternative societal structure.[22] A counter-public sphere is therefore not simply strategy

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[20] Natalie Fenton and John Downey, "Counter Public Spheres and Global Modernity," *The Public* 10, no. 1 (2003): 18.

[21] Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," 61.

[22] Fenton and Downey, "Counter Public Spheres and Global Modernity," 19.

that strives to achieve democratic potential, but also represents social practice. Media recognition is a step to success, but validation through mass media recognition is only part of a much larger process.

5.2 Decentring Media

In many ways, the remediation made possible by new, digital media such as the Internet demonstrate how, as Frankfurt School members suggest, technology has become an obstacle to, rather than enabler of, democratization and social justice.[23] Indeed, the process of aesthetic remediation exacerbates this tendency, as the result is a superficial blurring of lines between user-produced and mass media in a way that effectively masks the television industry's ability to limit the subversive potential of grassroots media production often directly attributed to the specificities of digital media. Advocates of digital media such as Jenkins see interactivity, participation and production as equivalent to democratization, a belief rooted in the idea, as Walter Benjamin astutely observed, of ties between new media and the *Urvergangenheit* or mythic past. However, Habermas explains:

> In the public sphere, utterances are sorted according to issue and contribution, whereas the contributions are weighted by the affirmative versus negative responses they receive. Information and arguments are thus worked into focused opinions. What makes such 'bundled' opinions into *public opinion* is both the controversial way it comes about and the amount of approval that 'carries' it. Public opinion is not representative in the statistical sense. It is not an aggregate of individually gathered, privately expressed opinions held by isolated persons.[24]

The ability to express personal ideas and opinions for dissemination to a (potentially) large national or international audience does not automatically lead to social influence. In

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[23] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 78.

[24] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, 362. Emphasis in original.

a recent interview, Habermas directly addresses the idea participation on the Internet and

questions the idea that it can develop into a new public sphere:

> The internet generates a centrifugal force….It releases an anarchic wave of highly fragmented circuits of communication that infrequently overlap…. But the web itself does not produce any public spheres. Its structure is not suited to focusing the attention of a dispersed public of citizens who form opinions simultaneously on the same topics and contributions which have been scrutinised and filtered by experts.[25]

The blind belief in the power of technology and of production itself, without considering

actual sociocultural and ideological effects, leads Jenkins and other "digital evangelists"

to overlook the myriad ways in which television as an institution has successfully adapted

to appeal to increasingly fragmented audiences of the digital era in order to remain in a

position as gatekeeper to and authority over "important" events and cultural content.

Certainly there have been changes in media production and distribution. Amanda Lotz,

for example, argues that the Internet provides "revolutionary access to viewers in a way

that potentially threatens the future of many previous distribution entities such as affiliate

stations and even networks and cable channels."[26] To call these changes democratizing,

however, is problematic when applied generally—especially in that the production of

content is ignored—and results in a situation predicted by Susan Willis in which

"everything transforms but nothing changes."[27]

This "transformation without change" is one of the reasons Jeffrey Sconce is

correct to critique the "more vapory wing of new media studies" by stating it "does not so

much map theory onto 'real' people as cite digital art as evidence of significant

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[25] Qtd. in Stuart Jeffries, "A Rare Interview with Jürgen Habermas," *Financial Times*(2010), http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/eda3bcd8-5327-11df-813e-00144feab49a.html.

[26] Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, 135.

[27] Qtd. In McPherson, "Reload: Liveness, Mobility, and the Web," 465.

transformations in culture and society."[28] Here Sconce is suggesting that those who are

quick to "showcase an esoteric and isolated example of digital practice [and] universalize

it as if it has some larger importance"[29] ultimately overlook how people actually use

digital technologies as well as the impact of that use. Those who point to user/producers'

"everyday" uses of digital technologies and their production of media ostensibly address

Sconce's critique. However, many digital media advocates often make the same mistake

as their "vapory" colleagues: they overlook what people are actually doing, instead

choosing to conflate production with democratization while failing to see how that same

production—and the appropriation of user-produced media by mass media institutions—

often undermines its own democratic potential. This oversight demonstrates the strong

but misguided belief that media change leads directly to social change, again raising the

issue of technological determinism. Indeed, Raymond Williams suggests that

technological determinism has reduced all of history to effects of media.[30] Williams was

speaking of television, but the same can be said of digital media as well. In this case,

digital technologies and their use is assumed to be all that is necessary to initiate

significant change in the social order by removing distinctions and divisions between

privileged mass media producers and everyday citizens. This belief itself is rooted in

Couldry's myth of the mediated centre: if media are believed to provide some special

access to the centre of a society, then it is assumed that simply producing media will

somehow make it possible to construct or influence that same society.

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[28] Jeffrey Sconce, "Tulip Theory," in *New Media: Theories and Practices of Digitextuality*, ed. Anna Everett and John T. Caldwell (New York: Routledge, 2003), 191.

[29] Ibid., 191.

[30] Williams, *Television, Technology and the Cultural Form*, 130.

Instead, the case studies featured here demonstrate that media can and do in fact significantly shape our communicative practices—often in a way that further asserts the centrality of mass media to society rather than alter the balance of power. Pierre Bourdieu's work is influential here, which is probably why he "challenges critical technology scholars to let go of our own investments in technology as somehow ontologically special, as somehow a unique part of social practice or an object that by its very nature provides special insight into social life."[31] Morley has similarly advised media scholars to avoid overestimating media's role as central to society, instead arguing that we need to "'decentre' the media, in our analytical framework, so as to better understand the ways in which media processes and everyday life are interwoven with each other"[32] while Hepp asserts that "'communicative change' and 'media change' together form mediatisation as a qualitative change that cannot be reduced to each other by arguing that one would determine the other."[33] Indeed, it is the unchecked belief in the power of technology that propels a belief that mere production can affect social change without any consideration of the *actual* results of user/producer media production, and this lack of consideration makes the assumption that production equals democratization seem valid even as it instead reinforces mass media as a social dominant.

Those whose research focuses on the meta-process of mediatisation, including Friedrich Krotz, Morley, Hepp, and Couldry, are hoping to combat this assumption. Couldry, for example, recently suggested that, rather than developing separate from and

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[31] Sterne, "Bourdieu, Technique, and Technology," 385.

[32] Morley, *Media, Modernity and Technology. The Geography of the New.*, 200.

[33] Hepp, "Researching 'Mediatised Worlds': Non-Mediacentric Media and Communication Research as a Challenge," 41.

in opposition to centralized mass media, online media are in fact increasingly tied to

centrally produced media.[34] As Morley again elaborates:

> The problems we face will not be solved by contemporary proposals to 'modernise' media studies by reconceptualising it as 'web studies' or the like, for this would simply be to put the Internet at the centre of the equation, where television used to stand. Such a move would merely replicate a very old technologically determinist problematic in a new guise. The key issue here, to put it paradoxically, is how we can generate a non-mediacentric form of media studies, how to understand the variety of ways in which new and old media accommodate to each other and coexist in symbiotic forms and also how to better grasp how we live with them as parts of our personal or household 'media ensemble'.[35]

The idea that user-produced content is inherently revolutionary persists, however, mainly

because of the lack of an understanding or examination of the relationship between

"traditional" media such as television and digital, user-produced media. Utopianists such

as Jenkins and Negroponte separate digital technologies (and, by proxy, user-produced

media) from television, and that separation is what allows their faith in technology to

allow democratization and the elimination of sociocultural hierarchies to continue

unabated. Cass Sunstein suggests that the pursuit of any new communicative system

"should not be rooted in nostalgia for some supposedly idyllic past."[36] Yet Jenkins and

others actually do suggest that digital media will lead to the modern realization of Walter

Benjamin's *Urvergangenheit* or a Habermasian public sphere in which anyone has the

access and ability to not only express opinion but also *shape* public opinion. The

assumption that production made possible by digital technologies will lead to

egalitarianism lacks any consideration of how digital media and user-produced media

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[34] Nick Couldry, "Does "the Media" Have a Future?," *European Journal of Communication* 24, no. 4 (2009): 444.

[35] Morley, *Media, Modernity and Technology. The Geography of the New.*, 200.

[36] Sunstein, *Republic.Com 2.0*, 6.

operate as part of a larger media ensemble, an oversight which leads to an overestimation of the democratizing and revolutionary potential of digital media.

This document is an attempt to correct that issue. Some might suggest that the analysis and evaluation undertaken here reflect a "critical pessimistic" perspective that simply suggests that user/producers are helpless, powerless victims of mass media dominance. This would, however, be an oversimplification. It is much more accurate to say the intention of this text is an attempt to reintroduce the "critical" into an approach of "critical optimism" and to reject assumptions about the revolutionary and democratizing potential to media too often espoused (without critical examination) by user/producers and media scholars alike. Instead, it is important to understand that development is not *always* progress; production is not *always* representative of democratization; transformation, to return to Willis' comment, does not *necessarily* equal change. The potential for democratization is not absent, but can only be realized once assumptions about media production have been cast aside.

5.2.1 Decentring Media in Counter-Public Spheres

Naturally, media—including digital, grassroots, and user-produced media—can play a significant role in contemporary discussions of the development of these counter-public spheres. As Fenton and Downey explain, they "may provide vital sources of information and experience that are contrary to, or at least in addition to, the dominant public sphere thereby offering a vital impulse to democracy."[37] One of the primary motivations for the development of counter-publics is the sense that the ideas they consider important, the culture they celebrate, and the information, messages, and

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[37] Fenton and Downey, "Counter Public Spheres and Global Modernity," 22.

material they produce are not represented in mainstream media so they take on the task of spreading news, information, and cultural texts themselves.[38] At the same time, Fenton and Downey correctly caution that it is "important neither to romanticize the ability of alternative forms of communication to encourage progressive social change in the context of global, multi-media conglomerates nor to dismiss the growth of counter-publicity and the socio-economic context of its emergence."[39]

As noted above, despite his newfound optimism concerning the relationship between users and a mass-mediated public sphere, Habermas himself questions the idea that the Internet can actually achieve the level of democratization of the dominant public sphere so often attributed to it. The "centrifugal" nature of the Internet Habermas describes contributes to what W. Lance Bennett terms a "collective individualism" in which "ideology, party loyalties, and elections are replaced with issue networks that offer more personal and often activist solutions for problems."[40] The formation of personalized issue networks—which can be considered a form of counter-public sphere—resonates with the earlier contention that the Internet is used as a form of individual exploration and expression rather than seen as a unifying forum. Christopher Kelty refers to "social imaginaries" specific to the Internet as "recursive publics." He compares these social imaginaries to the public sphere as conceived by Habermas but, rather than being a discursive space accessible to everyone in which different ideas and positions are openly debated, a recursive public is "a particular form of social imaginary through which this

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[38] Wimmer, "Counter-Public Spheres and the Revival of the European Public Sphere," 96.

[39] Fenton and Downey, "Counter Public Spheres and Global Modernity," 18.

[40] W. Lance Bennett, "New Media Power: The Internet and Global Activism," in *Contesting Media Power: Alternative Media in a Networked World*, ed. Nick Couldry and James Curran (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 27.

group imagines in common the means of their own association, the material forms this imagination takes, and what place it has in the contemporary development of the Internet."[41] In other words, a recursive public is both issue- and technology-based, a conceptualization of a "social imaginary" completely different from Habermas' bourgeois public sphere. Personalized issue networks and recursive publics can be useful for internal organization and communication, but unless they manage to communicate with and influence people outside of these networks, their impact is limited and they risk becoming proverbial echo chambers. Even in cases when television incorporates elements of user-produced media from these networks, it takes advantage of its historical role—though contextualization and narrative construction—to focus attention, drive debate, and therefore maintain its role as a cultural centre to which people turn for information and understanding. In other words, neither producing media nor wide-spread exposure through mass media is a guarantee of ideological power.

This discussion highlights some of the weaknesses of utopian views that equate mere media production with democratization. Producing a video short, contributing a clip of citizen journalism, or creating a piece of animation does not necessarily change any dialogue or disrupt a habitus-informed hierarchy that positions mass media such as television as a sociocultural authority. Put simply, there is usually no "offline" result of user-produced media *specific* to digital media. This does not mean that user-produced material cannot be used as a tool to affect social change. A non-mediacentric approach demonstrates how the efforts of counter-public spheres—including user-produced media—operate in part of a larger media ensemble while simultaneously avoiding the

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[41] Christopher Kelty, "Geeks, Social Imaginaries, and Recursive Publics," *Cultural Anthropology* 20, no. 2 (2005): 186.

trappings of imbuing digital media with some sort of special influence or power. This is, in fact, the advantage of a non-mediacentric approach. It recognizes relationship between various forms of media while also demonstrating that counter-public spheres are not particular to digital media. Media is understood as a tool, a method for affecting change, rather than as change itself. Indeed, Jenkins' own writings note that textual poaching, a form of fan participation that often challenges hegemonic sociocultural ideologies propagated in various forms of popular culture, occurred long before the Internet and the World Wide Web were available for common use.[42] Fenton and Downey suggest Habermas' revision in his view on public and counter-public spheres is the result of political changes in the former Soviet Bloc in 1989 and the emergence of new, often anti-capitalist social movements such as the Green Party in Germany[43], both of which took place without the aid of Internet- or Web-based communications. Recent events, however, have demonstrated that user-produced media can be effective tools in attempts to foster social change.

5.3 User-Produced Media and Counter-Publics

Wimmer suggests there are four primary uses of the Internet for the "articulation" of counter-public spheres: (1) to mobilize collective action, (2) to represent "marginalized interests", (3) to "offer a forum for alternative media coverage", and (4) to act as "media watchdogs."[44] These uses are often overlapping, as previous research on the protests against the World Trade Organization (WTO) during their annual meeting in Seattle in

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[42] For example, see Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, Henry Jenkins, "*Star Trek* Rerun, Reread, Rewritten: Fan Writing as Textual Poaching," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 5, no. 2 (1988).

[43] Fenton and Downey, "Counter Public Spheres and Global Modernity," 18.

[44] Wimmer, "Counter-Public Spheres and the Revival of the European Public Sphere," 98.

1999 demonstrate. A number of scholars, journalists, and activists, for example, have

detailed the use of Internet-based communications to organize the mass anti-WTO

actions.[45] Dubbed the "Battle in Seattle", the protests attracted between forty and fifty

thousand protesters in Seattle and inspired simultaneous protest actions in cities around

the globe. The size and success of the protests demonstrate the "fluid and contingent"

nature of counter-public spheres since the protests were actually a cooperative

undertaking of activist groups that were otherwise often at odds with or even hostile

towards each other. However, they briefly coalesced into what Margaret Levi and Gillian

H. Murphy call an "event coalition" which is "short-lived, created for a particular protest

or lobbying event."[46] The protests garnered a significant amount of media attention from

news organizations in multiple countries, which brought a number of issues of concern to

the coalition groups into public consciousness. Though it is difficult to definitively

measure the social impact of the protest and the subsequent media coverage, it is not

unreasonable to suggest that, in combination, they encourage some to take a more critical

perspective towards the WTO's aims and actions. It should be noted, however, that user-

produced media only played a supporting role in this political action. In this example,

Internet-based communication was used to mobilize protest actions, and the resulting

media coverage did indeed lead to the representation of marginalized interests.

At the same time, however, those same groups also lost control over their

message once mass media news organizations took on the primary reporting role. Using

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[45] For examples, see Matthew Eagleton-Pierce, "The Internet and the Seattle WTO Protests," *Peace Review* 13, no. 3 (2001), Jackie Smith, "Globalizing Resistance: The Battle of Seattle and the Future of Social Movements," *Mobilization* 6, no. 1 (2006).

[46] Margaret Levi and Gillian H. Murphy, "Coalitions of Contention: The Case of the WTO Protests in Seattle," *Political Studies* 54, no. 4 (2006): 655.

what he calls an "episodic frame", Shanto Iyengar argues that mass media tend to focus on "concrete acts and breaking events" rather than devoting time to background exposition.[47] This type of framing results in a focus on "compelling" (i.e., violent or destructive) elements of protest actions rather than the reasons behind the protests, leading to a presentation of protestors as deviant and a greater likelihood that viewers will support the "status quo."[48]This was certainly the case with the anti-WTO protests, as stories in mass media such as newspapers and television, according to a study by Sonora Jha, "were focused overwhelmingly on reactions from official and authoritative sources (city officials, merchants, WTO delegates, international governments) with little or no perspectives from protesters."[49] Some activists involved in the anti-WTO protests, upset or mistrustful of mass media coverage, attempted to combat what they felt was unfair representation through the establishment of a grassroots reporting website called the Independent Media Center or IMC, commonly referred to as "Indymedia."[50]

The Seattle IMC was originally established in 1999 through the cooperative efforts of several activists groups which had, until that point, attempted to develop independent media functions within their individual organizations, and urged activists to "become the media" and post their own analysis, writings, and other information.[51]

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[47] Shanto Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 14.

[48] Douglas M. McLeod and Benjamin H. Detenber, "Framing Effects of Television News Coverage of Social Protest," *Journal of Communication* 49, no. 3 (1999).

[49] Sonora Jha, "Exploring Internet Influence on the Coverage of Social Protest: Content Analysis Comparing Protest Coverage in 1967 and 1999," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 84, no. 1 (2007): 49.

[50] http://www.indymedia.org

[51] Sara Platon and Mark Deuze, "Indymedia Journalism : A Radical Way of Making, Selecting and Sharing News?," *Journalism* 4, no. 3 (2003): 338-39.

Indeed, the first "news story" posted to the Seattle IMC suggested Indymedia represented

a direct challenge to corporate mass media:

> The resistance is global….The web dramatically alters the balance between
> multinational and activist media. With just a bit of coding and some cheap
> equipment, we can setup a live automated website that rivals the corporates'.
> Prepare to be swamped by the tide of activist media makers on the ground in
> Seattle and around the world, telling the real story behind the World Trade
> Agreement.[52]

Activists and independent journalists posted a number of articles, videos, and photos on

the site to document the events during the anti-WTO protests in an effort to provide

personal, "unbiased" coverage of the event or to correct what they felt were falsehoods

being disseminated in mass media coverage. In addition, a number of authors posted

editorial-style essays explaining their motivation for joining in the protests or to outline

their complaints against the WTO and its activities. The site received a large amount of

network traffic during the protests, averaging about 2.5 million views every two hours.[53]

Media posted to the Seattle IMC was accessed by other anti-WTO groups around the

world who staged simultaneous protests and demonstrations in solidarity with the

activists in Seattle in a way that "tied the activists together in a virtual political space."[54]

Since then, the network has expanded to a network of over 5,000 writers, media

producers, and activists operating over 150 IMCs in more than fifty countries worldwide

and, as Victor W. Pickard describes, function simultaneously as "interactive grassroots

news websites, nodes within a rapidly expanding global network, and activist institutions

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[52] Qtd. in Victor W. Pickard, "Assessing the Radical Democracy of Indymedia: Discursive, Technical, and Institutional Constructions," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 23, no. 1 (2006): 20.

[53] Platon and Deuze, "Indymedia Journalism : A Radical Way of Making, Selecting and Sharing News?," 339.

[54] Bennett, "New Media Power: The Internet and Global Activism," 31.

deeply rooted in the social movements for global justice and media democracy."[55] The

Indymedia website describes the IMC collective as "independent media organizations and

hundreds of journalists offering grassroots, non-corporate coverage. Indymedia is a

democratic media outlet for the creation of radical, accurate, and passionate tellings of

truth."[56] The standard trope that grassroots, user-produced media are somehow more

accurate and "real" than mass media is evident in this description.

In the case of the 1999 anti-WTO protests, the combination of local organizing

with online communication and coordination effectively established a global "event

coalition" counter-public that did indeed achieve a level of recognition in the dominant

public sphere. The unresolved question is whether or not Indymedia—as a user-produced

news site—itself represents a democratizing counter-public that has destabilized mass

media's hegemonic control. Indymedia does employ a true grassroots journalism model

called the "principle of open publishing (OP), an essential element of the Indymedia

project that allows independent journalists and publications to publish the news they

gather instantaneously on a globally accessible website[.]"[57] The emphasis on

instantaneousness recalls Mark Williams' concept of Internet "real time." Not only is

Indymedia positioned as more truthful than mass media, but it is also positioned as more

immediate. These are the characteristics that digital media proponents argue will

ultimately lead to the downfall of mass media and the rise of true, democratized or

revolutionary media environment. However, while there is ample evidence to suggest the

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[55] Pickard, "Assessing the Radical Democracy of Indymedia: Discursive, Technical, and Institutional Constructions," 19.

[56] Qtd. in ibid., 25.

[57] Platon and Deuze, "Indymedia Journalism : A Radical Way of Making, Selecting and Sharing News?," 338.

various IMCs operate quite well as organizing tools for grassroots social and political movements locally (and, in rare instances, globally), there is little evidence that Indymedia has regular and significant impact outside the various activist groups as a media institution. The open nature of Indymedia has resulted in an environment in which stories, issues, and opinions can (and often do) contradict each other, preventing the formation of a cohesive message that can lead to some sort of shared consensus. As with other online media, personal interests are sought out and explored without shaping a general public opinion. In cases where user-produced media from the site was incorporated into mass media coverage, Jha suggests it was in a limited fashion, demonstrating a "selection bias" in a way that highlights mass media's "patterns of gatekeeping."[58] Thus the representation of user-produced media in mass media has the potential to both hinder *and* further the aims and objectives of countercultural groups.

Jha cautions that her work tracks the "*early* impact and use of the Internet by journalists" and suggests further examination of the interaction between mass and user-produced media is necessary.[59] The analysis here indicates little has changed about television's gatekeeping role since 1999. Instead, the medium has increasingly incorporated user-produced materials and aesthetics in a discerning manner that effectively appropriates the immediacy of those texts while retaining the habitus-informed authority of mass media. Similar observations can be made concerning the role of social media sites such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter in citizen-organized protests, social movements, and revolutions (or attempted revolutions) such as the 2009

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[58] Jha, "Exploring Internet Influence on the Coverage of Social Protest: Content Analysis Comparing Protest Coverage in 1967 and 1999," 52. Emphasis in original.

[59] Ibid., 51.

"Green Wave" movement in Iran centred on the 2009 presidential election in that country, or the "Jasmine Revolution" which started in late 2010 in North African and Middle Eastern countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Syria, and Yemen. As Habermas notes, "Of course, the spontaneous and egalitarian nature of unlimited communication can have subversive effects under authoritarian regimes."[60] The protests in Iran demonstrate this quite well. Writing for *TIME* magazine in 2009, Lev Grossman called Twitter the "medium of the movement", stating:

> Twitter is promiscuous by nature: tweets go out over two networks, the Internet and SMS, the network that cell phones use for text messages, and they can be received and read on practically anything with a screen and a network connection....This makes Twitter practically ideal for a mass protest movement, both very easy for the average citizen to use and very hard for any central authority to control. The same might be true of e-mail and Facebook, but those media aren't public. They don't broadcast, as Twitter does.[61]

A number of scholars and activists have rightly noted the role played by Twitter and other social media in the organizing of protests against the Iranian election results, and for their potential to aid in the mobilization of activist groups in the future.[62] The subversive potential of Internet media is further highlighted by the Egyptian government's shutdown of Internet access during protests and demonstrations in that country in 2010. Grossman's use of the word "broadcast", however, is significant, as it expressly positions Twitter as *alternative* mass medium that provides individual users a level of discursive control previously reserved for those in mass media institutions such as television. While user-produced social media are a formidable support and organizing

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[60] Jeffries, "A Rare Interview with Jürgen Habermas."

[61] Lev Grossman, "Iran Protests: Twitter, the Medium of the Movement," *TIME*(2009), http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1905125,00.html.

[62] For examples, see Afshari, "A Historic Moment in Iran.", Ali Afshari and H. Graham Underwood, "The Green Wave," *Journal of Democracy* 20, no. 4 (2009).

tool for the development of counter-publics, their ability to be inherently democratizing or revolutionary remains in doubt. Grossman himself noted that "[a]s is so often the case in the media world, Twitter's strengths are also its weaknesses", citing unverifiable sources, chaotic and conflicting messages, and the Iranian government's potential use of Twitter to spread misinformation as just some of the reasons not to consider the medium as a "magic bullet against dictators."[63] Kalliopi Kyriakopoulou also reminds us that the public nature of Twitter and other online media can just as easily be used as systems of surveillance and control.[64]

5.4 Revisiting User-Produced Media and Democratization

This discussion of user-produced media in the organization of counter-cultural movements might appear tangential, but it is included here for two reasons: (1) to highlight how decentering media can reveal the true strengths and advantages of user-produced media in the development of democratizing movements and (2) to again highlight the intensely interwoven relationships of media in a media ensemble. User-produced media can be useful as a tool in democratizing movements when approached properly. However, the brief discussion of the social movements here demonstrates how difficult it is for user-produced media alone to enact some sort of fundamental social change even in ideology and power, even when a large group of people are working simultaneously towards one particular social goal. User/producers hoping to change the culture of production itself —numbering in the millions but working independently—face a far more difficult task. Indeed, the very first task user/producers must undertake is a

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[63] Grossman, "Iran Protests: Twitter, the Medium of the Movement."

[64] Kalliopi Kyriakopoulou, "Authoritarian States and Internet Social Media: Instruments of Democratisation or Instruments of Control?," *Human Affairs* 21 (2011).

public destabilization of the myth of the mediated centre, generating the kind of

ideological crisis Habermas suggests would allow counter-publics access to the dominant

public sphere. With that in mind, it seems irresponsible to state that user-produced media

are inherently revolutionary or democratizing, or that the ability to produce and distribute

digital media moves the "locus of control" away from mass media institutions and

towards individuals. To assume that the ability to produce media is inherently tantamount

to a destabilization in mass media's hegemonic control over sociocultural production

ignores not only television's historical habitus-informed role as a cultural authority and

ideological enforcer, but also the social construction of the Internet as a site of

personalization and exploration of individual interests which limits its power to shape a

common understanding. Furthermore, the characteristics that supposedly make the

Internet superior to mass media—interactivity, immediacy, "realness"—which have been

incorporated into the myth of a new, emergent, user-produced culture have been easily

and effectively remediated by mass media in a way that undercuts the subversive

potential of user-produced media. This is not to say that user-produced media are inferior

to mass produced media or detrimental to our culture. Quite the contrary—user-produced

media are representative of a society's culture and often, as demonstrated here, work to

reproduce elements of society just as well as mass media.

     Similarly, one should not assume that user/producers are doomed to be dominated

by television or, in the words of Jenkins, act as if the "only true alternative [is] to opt out

of media altogether and live in the woods, eating acorns and lizards and reading only

books published on recycled paper by small alternative presses."[65] Instead, the primary

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[65] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, 248-49.

concern here is that the positivist assumption that digital media are inherently revolutionary is actually detrimental to the revolutionary potential of user-produced media. Ian Bremmer, in discussing the role of technology in the development of political movements, states, "If technology has helped citizens pressure authoritarian governments in several countries, it is not because the technology created a demand for change. That demand must come from public anger at authoritarianism itself."[66] Similarly, challenges to mass media must come from people and are not instigated by digital technologies. User/producers that *assume* that the media they produce represents equal participation in the shaping of culture and society will fail to see the various ways the remediation of their work—whether it be selective inclusion of user-produced texts or the mere appropriation of user-produced forms and aesthetics—effectively limits or regulates their participation while simultaneously robbing them of what makes their media unique and subversive. Thus their work represents what Williams calls a "deviation" in the dominant rather than developing into a true, challenging and emergent culture. This assumption allows user-produced media to enhance television's immediacy while reinforcing its "gatekeeping" and contextualizing role, and reduces Flashimation's potentially subversive form to just another kind of animation. Relatedly, media scholars who insist user-produced digital media are representative of a new social order on par with Benjamin's *Urvergangenheit* are not only ignoring the interplay between mass and user-produced media, but are also marginalizing the work of people by attributing the "work" of social change to technology rather than the user/producers who created it.

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[66] Ian Bremmer, "Democracy in Cyberspace. What Information Technology Can and Cannot Do," *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 6 (2010): 89.

It is hoped that this discussion will inspire those in new media production to re-examine the nature of their work, and challenge those who promote the democratizing potential of digital media to reconsider the assumptions they have about the inherent independence of user-produced media. Indeed, the any attempt at initiating social change through grassroots media production must start with a full understanding of the "precarious relationship of allegiance, rivalry, dependence, and transcendence"—to revisit Tarleton Gillespie's phrase—between digital and mass media, as well as the "myth" of television's central ideological role juxtaposed against the fragmented nature of the modern television audience. By removing the assumption that media provide access to the centre of a society (and that media production therefore creates that centre), one can better understand how all media work together as part of a larger media ensemble or, more specifically, operate as just one of many tools for social change. The potential for democratic, social participation through user-produced media does exist, but user/producers must resist the temptation of assuming they are independent of a centralized media culture simply because they are producing media from outside traditional mass media structures. An awareness of the complex and often incestuous relationship between television and new media is only the first step to the realization of that potential.

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