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Traditional Amateur Video Producers' Use of the Internet: Making Connections in a Complex and Contested Environment

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Abstract

The Internet has been adopted as a video distribution technology by different categories of amateur video producers who were using other distribution methods prior to its advent. I conducted a one-year ethnographic study of amateur producers from three such categories (public access television producers, video activists, and film and television fans) to understand their reasons for this adoption, how they used this technology, and the interactions with their audiences that followed from its use, analysing my findings within a new materialist framework. I found that the producers had a diverse set of reasons for going online and that these largely depended on their specific circumstances, and on how they saw the online environment in relation to their overall objectives as video makers. These circumstances and objectives also meant that some producers resisted going online at all, or used the technology in a restricted way, and that traditional distribution methods continued to exist in some form alongside the Internet-based ones. The producers assembled together different people and technologies to distribute their videos, which was often a complex and contested process, typically resulting in distribution assemblages that were precarious and that required on-going maintenance. These assemblages used a wide variety of technological components, selected for a broad range of reasons, which also largely reflected the specific circumstances and objectives of the producers. I also found that the producers varied considerably in their attitude towards audience engagement, as well as in the methods they used to achieve it, and in the success of those methods.

Some were in fact indifferent to it, while others considered it a critical part of their activities. While some were successful in producing sustained interactions with their audiences, others failed to do so. These findings enrich and problematize our current understanding of this emergent phenomenon.

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Declaration

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

Chapter 1. Introduction

My interest in the relationship between the Internet and video began in 1997 when I first saw WebTV in operation. This was a television set top box that contained a dial-up modem to access the Internet, which it would display on a television screen, and also a tuner for receiving broadcast television programmes. What particularly fascinated me about this technology was how it integrated in various ways Internet interactivity with the television programmes being broadcast. I had just begun working in the then nascent digital media industry, and my early experience with this new technology inspired me to focus my career in this new integrated domain. Over the next decade I worked on various projects in this area, and in that time the industry focus shifted away from WebTV-type technologies to ones like YouTube that concerned distributing video via the Internet. My fascination with this marriage of the Internet and video remained however, and in fact intensified as Internet video technologies became more widespread. At this time, my interest in the technology moved beyond the purely technical and economic as I began to wonder about its social dimensions. I decided to investigate these social dimensions in 2008 by doing a master's degree in visual anthropology where I examined how YouTube users relate to each other through the use of video, and explored the forms television programmes take online, amongst other things. After completing that degree I felt I had gained more questions than answers, and so I decided to embark upon this project. In particular, I wanted to understand why video producers

were adopting the Internet as a video distribution technology, how they were specifically using it, and what kinds of interactions with their audiences were following from this use.

While YouTube appeared to be the primary focus for social scientists looking at Internet video at the time I began formulating this project, I decided to take a different approach. In particular, I felt that taking YouTube or even the Internet in general as my point of departure would foreclose some potentially interesting lines of enquiry. I decided therefore to centre my research instead on categories of producers who were using other distribution methods prior to the advent of the Internet, but who now had adopted it as a distribution technology. One consequence of this approach was that it framed Internet video distribution technologies within the wider historical context of video distribution technologies, rather than treating them as something unprecedented (see Jenkins, 2009:109 for a related approach). Secondly, I hypothesized that at least some producers who belonged to categories that used other distribution methods prior to the Internet may have had some experience with these traditional methods, or were at least aware of them and had an opinion about them relative to Internet distribution. I believed that this focus would therefore allow me to some extent to compare and contrast Internet distribution with traditional distribution methods while answering my research questions, and thereby provide a different perspective on this technology from ones that began with YouTube or the Internet as their point of departure.

I therefore begin my investigation in Chapter 2 by reviewing the literature on categories of video producers who were active before the advent of the Internet as a distribution technology, focusing on the amateur genres of community video, alternative video, and film and television fan videos. The primary purpose of this initial discussion in Chapter 2 is to provide the context for the ethnographies that follow, and therefore is not an exhaustive survey of the literature on pre-Internet video. In particular, it is focussed on the US and the UK, and excludes professional video producers and amateur home moviemakers, as they did not form part of my ethnographic research (the reasons for these particular geographic and genre choices with regard to selecting my ethnographic informants is covered in Section 4 of the methodology chapter).[1] The remainder of Chapter 2 extends the discussion of the selected genres into the Internet era, and also looks at the cross-genre issue of social interactions around online video, as this is a prominent theme within the literature.

In Chapter 3 I introduce the theoretical framework I use to analyse the empirical data provided in later chapters. This framework centres on the concept of assemblages, which I use in a specialised sense here to include both Manuel DeLanda's elaboration of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of assemblages, and also actor-networks, from Actor-Network Theory. Chapter 4 provides a detailed methodological discussion of ethnography, including a justification for its use as the framework I employ to collect the empirical data

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[1] However, because the focus of my research is on amateur video, and given the importance of home video in the pre-Internet amateur video literature, I include a discussion of this literature in the appendix.

required to answer my research questions. This chapter also introduces my research informants, my process for selecting them, my initial entry into the field and the methods I employed. This chapter also discusses my motivation for including a hypermedia visual ethnography (provided on DVD as an insert on the inside back cover of this document) as part of my representation of the informant groups I researched. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 are, respectively, ethnographies of my three informant groups: The California Community Media Exchange, an association of US public access television stations; visionOntv, the Internet video project of the UK activist group Undercurrents; and a group of television fans centred on the VividCon convention and the LiveJournal website. These ethnographies are each analysed at the end of their respective chapters using the assemblage theory framework developed in Chapter 3. I conclude this investigation in Chapter 8 where I compare and contrast each of the ethnographies with respect to the different aspects of my research question, synthesising my findings and discussing the key themes that emerged from my work.

While this thesis is broadly located within the field of media studies, it shares some of its concerns and analytical framework with those of science and technology studies. As I discuss in Chapter 3, I did not deliberately set out in this direction but rather it emerged after my initial phase in the field as I felt assemblage theory was an analytical perspective that rendered best the concerns of my informants. While issues to do with power, agency, participation, and community - common themes in media studies analyses of the Internet - were present to some degree in my encounters in the field, I felt

subsuming them under an assemblage theory approach, rather than

foregrounding them as some other studies of Internet technologies have done

(for example, Carpentier, 2011:Ch. 1, Section 3.3.3, Baym, 2010:73-90), best

conveyed my experiences in the field. In addition, using an assemblage theory

approach offers an alternative perspective on Internet distribution technologies

to these more common approaches.

One example of these more common approaches is how some scholars look at

the activities of film and television fan video makers through the lens of power.

Buckingham's critique of Jenkins is a specific illustration of this:

> [Jenkins] argues that digital technology has overcome many of the
> obstacles that led to the marginalisation of previous amateur video-
> making, partly because of the accessibility and quality of digital editing
> and also because of the ease with which such material can be distributed
> online. The fan productions he describes are no longer 'home movies'
> but 'public movies', both in the sense that they can be circulated to wider
> audiences and in that they rework popular mythologies and engage in a
> public dialogue with mainstream commercial cinema … The crucial
> question here, however, is the extent to which any of this amounts to a
> form of 'empowerment'. (2009:42-43)

Buckingham goes on to warn that "there is a distinct danger here of

overestimating, and indeed merely celebrating, the power of media fans", that

their "*activity* should not be confused with *agency*", and that in many ways these

fans are "consumers *par excellence*" given their "intense commitment and

loyalty" to film and television brands (2009:43).

While this is an interesting and important debate, it is not one I enter into here.

Issues of power and agency did indeed arise in connection with my fan

informants' use of the Internet, but they constellated around the struggles they

had with the different distribution platforms they used and concerned such matters as copyright, terms of service and functionality, and not the type Buckingham considers here. They also had a variety of other important issues and concerns relating to their distribution platforms quite apart from those of power and agency, or indeed participation and community. Assemblage theory allowed me to represent all their primary issues and concerns in a relatively coherent and faithful way, whereas presenting them instead through one or more of the lenses of power, agency, participation and community would have been forced and provided a partial and distorted account of my informants and their concerns. This is not to say that using these more common media studies lenses would not have provided us with additional useful insights into these areas beyond those presented in this thesis, as they most likely would have. The point instead is that I believe an assemblage theory approach provides a more holistic account of what I experienced in the field, making this thesis a more coherent representation of this experience, while at the same time making it more faithful to my and my informants' experiences.

Finally, it is important to clarify what I mean by some of the more problematic terminology used in the following chapters. The term "audience" is used throughout in its conventional sense and refers to people who watch online videos, or use the different technologies I discuss below to access those videos or otherwise engage with the producers of those videos or other audience members. The term "user" is employed as a general term to include both the audience and the producer of the video in relationship to their use of Internet technologies, although sometimes it is used to refer to one or other of these

sub-categories, which will be clear from the context. The term "video producer" or simply "producer", or alternative terms I use such as "video maker", are again used in their conventional sense when considered within the amateur domain. Terms like "prod-user" and "pro-sumer" have been avoided as the conventional terms work well enough for the discussion here. The term "video" is used in a general sense throughout for simplicity's sake to refer to any relevant moving image capture or display medium, such as celluloid film, video tape, solid state storage, and LCD displays.

What is precisely meant by the term "amateur" is a complex question (Stebbins, 1992:10). Even before the "extraordinary … proliferation of amateur media content made possible by the internet" (Hunter et al., 2013:xiii), Stebbins was arguing in 1992 that conventional understandings of the term had been problematized by various developments in modern times (1992:8-11). He provides two detailed sociological frameworks to define amateurs, one macrosociological which considers them part of a professional-amateur-public system of relationships, and the other social psychological where their attitudes differentiate them from professionals (1992:10). Garber also problematizes the term "amateur" by considering hybrid cases such as "professional amateurs" and "amateur professionals" (2000:Ch.1). The situation within Internet video is further complicated by recent initiatives like the one begun by YouTube to professionalise amateurs (Burgess, 2013:56). In this thesis however, I use the term in a loose sense only, and to simply differentiate the kinds of video makers I consider here from those that are employed and paid by the institutions of professional video making, such as those in the film and television industry. A

more precise definition, which would no doubt involve some fuzziness in the way it distinguished between amateurs and professionals, is not needed here as my research and findings ultimately concern three specific groups of video makers only and their specific genres, and are not generalised to the category of amateur video makers as a whole.

Chapter 2. Amateur video offline and online

In this chapter I will review key elements from the literature on amateur video to provide the context for my fieldwork. Since my research focuses on types of amateur video makers active before the advent of the Internet as a video distribution technology, my review covers the activities of amateurs both before and after its advent to put its adoption in a broader, historical context.[2]

Amateur video in fact has a long history, dating back to just before the beginning of the twentieth century (Zimmermann, 1995a:17), although the period before the Internet has been largely neglected or dismissed by academic researchers (Zimmermann, 1995a:x, Moran, 2002:xiv, Buckingham and Willett, 2009:24, Buckingham et al., 2011:1,8). The main genres that are covered in what literature there is on this period are home movies, community video, alternative video, and film and television fan videos. I therefore decided to focus my fieldwork on these main genres to situate it and this overall project within the mainstream of academic discussion in this area, although my fieldwork excluded home movies and was specifically concerned with producers

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[2] I will refer to the period before the advent in the public domain of the Internet as a video distribution technology hereafter as "the period before the Internet" for simplicity's sake. It should be noted that this advent did not occur at some specific point in time, nor is the technology one specific thing. Instead, it can be seen as something unfolding over a number of years from the late 1990s (1999 was the earliest date any of my informants reported making their videos available online) to the mid 2000s as different technological changes occurred and were adopted, such as, for example, increased modem transfer rates and the launch of YouTube.

in the US and the UK, for reasons I discuss in the methodology chapter.[3] The

focus of this chapter therefore reflects this scope, as its primary purpose is to

provide a context for the fieldwork. Section 1 on amateur video before the

Internet is therefore restricted to a survey of the literature on community video,

alternative video, and film and television fan videos. In Section 2 I extend the

discussion of these genres into the Internet era to provide further context for my

fieldwork, surveying the literature on online community and alternative video in

Section 2.a, and online film and television fan videos in Section 2.b. In Section

2.c I move away from the genre-based approach I have used so far in this

chapter and focus on the literature on the social interactions around online

video, which is a prominent theme in the literature and one that helps frame the

part of my research question concerned with producer-audience interaction.

Before beginning the review I should note two general aspects of the literature.

Firstly, while my thesis is concerned only with amateur video in the US and the

UK, geographic boundaries in the online environment are often difficult if not

impossible to detect. Of course some literature is clearly geographically

specific, but discussions of YouTube, for example, may well include examples

of videos from all over the world even though the service originates in the US,

has its primary operations there, and the researcher may well have accessed

YouTube only from the US or the UK while conducting their research.

Therefore, while I will restrict my literature review as much as reasonably

possible to discussions of producers that are primarily based in those two

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[3] As mentioned in Chapter 1, because of the prominence of home movies as a topic within the literature on amateur video before the Internet, I have included a discussion of it in the appendix for readers who would like an even broader context than the one provided in Section 1.

countries, the anonymity afforded by the Internet, and its inherently transnational nature, make a strict enforcement of geographical boundaries not only nearly impossible, but of dubious value in any case.

It is also worth noting how recently online video has emerged as an area of academic interest. For instance, Chris Atton's book "An Alternative Internet: Radical Media, Politics and Creativity" published in 2004 only refers to online video four times, and just in passing, in a book of 160 pages dedicated to the Internet (2004:31,34,54,81). Also, the first social science books about YouTube were only published in 2008 and 2009 (Lovink and Niederer, 2008, Burgess and Green, 2009a, Snickars and Vonderau, 2009). The academic debates about what really is at stake in this new medium are therefore only just beginning.

1. Amateur video before the Internet

In the first part of this chapter I focus on community video, alternative video, and film and television fan videos. While these three topics, along with home movies, allow for a wide-ranging survey of the key literature on amateur video before the Internet, they do not cover every area as amateur video is a very broad, heterogeneous and vaguely defined domain which has changed over time. For instance, during the 1920s and 1930s it could have been said to include "[industrial films], educational films, science films, travelogues, home movies, religious films, ethnographic and documentary film, time-motion studies, and avant-guard film" (Zimmermann, 1995b:140). Surveying the relatively scant and fragmented literature concerning these additional areas is

beyond the scope of this chapter however, as the literature that is covered

provides a broad enough context for my fieldwork.

1.a. Community and alternative video before the Internet

While the literature on amateur video before the Internet indicates that, after an

initial period of diversity, home movies came to dominate from the 1950s (see

appendix), it also indicates that this dominance was not complete. There is

relatively recent literature discussing the rise of community and alternative video

from the 1960s onwards, and many of the videos discussed there could be

classed as being amateur. While this has also been a neglected area of

academic study (Howley, 2010:2, Casey and Calvert, 2008:52, Rennie,

2006:16), it is a disparate one, and therefore I will only provide a brief overview

of its main elements here.

A number of authors trace the roots of this kind of video in the US and the UK to

the countercultural movements of 1960s (Fountain, 2007:31, Fuller, 1994:4,

Casey and Calvert, 2008:50, Woodman, 2010:268). While the literature

sometimes treats the themes of community and alternative video separately,

there is in fact a great deal of overlap between how they are framed within it,

which to some degree portrays their common countercultural roots. For

instance:

> The phrase "community media" encompasses a range of community-
> based activities intended to supplement, challenge, or change the
> operating principle, structures, financing, and cultural forms and practices
> associated with dominant media … (Howley, 2010:2)

Casey and Calvert also stress the social change element of community media (2008:50). Public access television, which is typically treated as a subgenre of community media in the literature, is often framed in similar language, stressing its differences with the dominant culture and dominant media representations:

> The basic philosophy underpinning access production is that there should be equality of access to television wherein anybody (and indeed, everybody) should have the chance to express their views. Advocates of access programming see it as a way of correcting imbalances … in mainstream television's output, especially where minority groups (ethnic or gay and lesbian, for example) are concerned. Quite often, it is the case that marginalised groups are either under-represented (e.g. elderly and the disabled) or misrepresented … in mainstream programming. (Casey and Calvert, 2008:3)

The framing of alternative media most obviously reveals these countercultural roots. For instance, Atton sees alternative media as:

> Representing challenges to hegemony, whether on an explicitly political platform, or employing the kinds of indirect challenges through experimentation and the transformation of existing roles, routines, emblems and signs that Hebdige (1979) locates at the heart of counter-hegemonic subculture styles. (Atton, 2002:19)

Couldry and Curran similarly frame alternative media in political terms as "media production that challenges, at least implicitly, actual concentrations of media power" (2003:7).

With common roots and similar framing, it is unsurprising that there is a lot of overlap between the genres of community and alternative video in the literature. However, the literature typically divides this area up into community video on the one hand, and alternative video on the other, and I will follow that convention here.

Community Video. The literature in this section typically concerns video made by and concerning communities, where "communities" is interpreted widely and includes "neighbourhood communities, cultural and ethnic communities and communities of interest" (Casey and Calvert, 2008:52). Its genesis in the US is traced to two events occurring at the beginning of the 1970s. The first was in 1970 when:

> Two cable franchises were awarded for the borough of Manhattan, with two public access channels … written into the contract at the last minute. One company provided the community with a studio with a camera, a playback deck, and a director free of charge. (Rennie, 2006:50)

A year later the Federal Communications Commission held hearings into cable television (Fuller, 1994:4ff). Provisions coming out of those hearings required cable television network operators to make facilities available for free to local communities to produce and broadcast their own programming. Writing 25 years after this Fuller indicates that community television had grown to the point where "2,000 community groups provide some 15,000 hours of original programming per week – more than the annual output of ABC, CBS and NBC combined …" (1994:2). Fuller points out that this programming is extremely diverse and that "there is no such thing as 'typical' community television programming … [and] even content categories are difficult to pin down", varying depending on the stations circumstances (1994:68-70).

Given its scale, it is unsurprising that Higgins considers public access television in the US a "unique achievement for community-based media around the world" (2007:185). However, Rennie argues that the original ideal of public access - radical democratic programming - has not been realised, although some

examples of it do exist amongst the "hotchpotch" of programming largely dominated by religious groups (2006:50). While Fuller prefers to focus on the successes of public access television (1994:147ff), she also admits that it has problems, and argues that its promise "to promote localism by providing media access" has not been completely fulfilled (1994:1-2,188).

Rennie goes on to argue that alternative media has "carved out its own identity separate from public access television and has moved beyond the local to become a masterful promoter of itself and its global community" (2006:52). While Rennie suggests this split between alternative media and the local emerged over time, Boyle dates it from the very beginnings of public access television (1997:50). I will discuss the development of alternative media in the following section.

Although the Annan Committee in 1977 pledged support for community television in the UK, it did not get regulatory backing as in the US, and therefore has struggled to come into being and survive (Casey and Calvert, 2008:51, Lewis, 1978:71). Perhaps as a result of this, very little literature exists on it. Some examples of the literature that does exist include Lewis (1978), who outlines some early experiments in community cable television in the 1970s, but bemoans the lack of governmental support for it, citing this as a reason for the failure of some channels. While community television did not become established in the UK in the 1970s as it did in the US, Fountain (2007:34-35) discusses examples of community video groups that were operating in the UK at this time, pioneered by John Hopkins and his TVX group, and others such as

the West London Media Workshop and Albany Video. There is also some discussion (Rose, 2007, Henderson, 2009, Carpentier, 2003) of the BBC's Community Programmes Unit, which produced programmes like *Open Door*, *Open Space*, *Video Diaries* and *Video Nation* from the mid-1970s until 2000 through collaboration with members of the UK public, although as an access model it was less open than the US one. Also, McKay discusses the Community Channel, which is currently carried by all the major UK television network operators, but worries that its cooperativist stance with regard to mainstream media and capital may ultimately undermine its more radical stance on "alternative models of development that seek to reclaim civil society for democracy" (McKay, 2010:50-51).

Casey and Calvert express concerns for the future of community television in general, and wonder whether such a marginal medium will be able to survive in an increasingly competitive and commercial media environment, although they acknowledge success stories do exist, at least in the US (2008:52-53).

Alternative video. As we have seen, alternative media is typically framed in terms of power relationships with the dominant culture and its media, but there is considerable disagreement in the literature concerning its exact definition. When asking "What exactly are 'alternative media'?", Dowmunt points out:

> There are almost as many answers to this as there are people thinking and writing about it, coming up with competing labels and definitions. 'Alternative media' is probably the most common label, but some prefer 'radical' or 'independent media', and others 'citizens', 'tactical', 'activist' or 'autonomous' media. (2007:3)

Also addressing this question, Waltz states that answering it has been contentious for media theorists, with some scholars arguing that the different definitions offered are incompatible with each other, rest on problematic assumptions, or that the term is undefinable (Waltz, 2005:2). Kenix also sees the many different definitions on offer as often contradictory (2011:7). Bailey *et al.* (2008:30) in developing their "multi-theoretical approach" to alternative media state that "alternative media research has a long tradition … that has tried to capture their identity. Due to the complexity and elusiveness of this identify, this project has proven to be a very difficult task". Rather than entering into this definitional debate here, I will give a sense of what different scholars consider alternative video media to be by discussing some concrete examples of the wide variety of productions, groups and distribution methods that they believe to be part of this genre of amateur video. Fountain, as one example, numbers a variety of different left wing and radical organisations active in the UK in the 1960s and 70s in the ranks of alternative film- and video-makers:

> The London Film Makers' Co-op, quite directly inspired by North American experimental filmmakers … began in 1966 and became the focal point for formal and occasionally political experimentation for the next decade and beyond (Rees 1999). The Amber Film Collective was founded in Newcastle in 1968 and dedicated its work to an exploration and expression of working-class life and culture in that region (Rowbotham and Benyon 2001:159-72). Cinema Action, a left collective which worked closely with radical elements of the trades union movement (Dickinson 1999:263-88); the Berwick Street Collective, a left group concerned with allying formal difference with militant content (Rowbotham and Benyon 2001:147-58); and Liberation Films (Nigg and Wade 1980:133-63), a production and distribution group closely associated with the anti-Vietnam War movement and the women's liberation movement. (Fountain, 2007:31)[4]

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[4] All references in this quote are cited in the original and were not consulted by me.

Woodman, as another example, discusses Iris Video, a feminist video-making

collective emerging out of the violence against women movement active in

Minneapolis and St Paul in the USA in the late 1970s. Its purpose was to allow

women greater self-expression, representing their lives from their own point of

view, by giving them access to video production tools in a "supportive, sexism-

free environment" (Woodman, 2010:269,272,276). Boyle discusses "guerrilla

television", which she says was:

> Part of the larger alternative media tide that swept across the [US] during
> the '60s, affecting radio, newspapers, magazines, and publishing … and
> just as the development of offset printing launched the alternative press
> movement in the '60s, video's advent launched an alternative television
> movement in the '70s. (Boyle, 1997:xiii)

Guerrilla television was a form of alternative video that sought distribution on

the then-nascent cable television networks and via the stations of the small

terrestrial broadcast networks to provide an alternative to the programming

shown on the large, national broadcasting networks like CBS and NBC. One

example Boyle discusses is a documentary produced by the San Francisco

video collective Top Value TV covering the Democratic Party's presidential

nominating convention in 1972. It was partly funded by four cable television

networks in exchange for distribution rights, with the remainder of the funding

coming from charitable organisations and from members of the collective

themselves. Top Value TV focussed on filming what the large networks

neglected, aided by their smaller more portable "portapak" equipment, satirising

the political absurdities of the convention (Boyle, 1997:36-43).

Another example of alternative video discussed by scholars is Deep Dish TV,

which was a venture of the New York City-based alternative media collective

Paper Tiger TV to distribute programming via satellite to public access cable television channels throughout the US. Founded in 1986, Boyle describes it as "the first national public-access series of community-made programs on issues such as labor, housing, the farming crisis and racism". For Boyle, this was part of the next version of guerrilla television, and built on the lessons learnt by the "portapak generation" (Boyle, 1997:207-8). Fountain describes its operation as follows:

> This has been an impressive informal movement of radical media activists who, typically, decide on a particular series subject or issue and put out a call to [video makers] around the country who then contribute work back to the centre in New York. The programmes are edited and distributed via [a network of over 2,000 local cable systems]. (Fountain, 2007:45)

Specific programmes produced for the series have reflected alternative views on, for example, Aids, the Gulf wars and the US prison system (Halleck, 2002:105-6, 137, Fountain, 2007:45, Drew, 2005:215).

While there are many more examples of alternative video given by different scholars, rather than adding to the list above, I will conclude this section with some highlights from Waltz's discussion of Undercurrents, the parent organisation of my informant group visionOntv. Undercurrents was set up as an alternative news service, with its first video concerning the UK Criminal Justice Bill of 1993. This video was "sold hand-to-hand as well as being given to mainstream press organisations". By the time of their fifth video, they had also begun "setting up nationally coordinated screenings of each new video".[5] Waltz quotes Paul O'Connor, one of the founding members of Undercurrents (and

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[5] Harding (1998:85), a co-founder of Undercurrents, indicates that their videos were also distributed on cassettes via post through mail-order and subscriptions.

also one of my informants), reflecting on the notion of "alternative media":

"'Undercurrents in an alternative to a media owned by large corporations …

[but] rather than alternative, perhaps we are traditional media - aiming to build

understanding and communication rather than cause conflict'" (Waltz, 2005:52-

3).

1.b. Film and television fan videos before the Internet

Prior to the Internet, fan-produced media gained relatively little academic

attention, as David Gauntlett points out:

> Since the early 1990s, Jenkins had been enthusing about people making
> and adapting their own media … he gets excited about fans of Star Trek,
> and other TV series, making their own stories and video montages … .
> At the time, this seemed like an interesting phenomenon, but was such a
> minority hobby for a small number of super-fans … that it did not seem
> very crucial as a contribution to the general field of audience studies.
> Some of us [media audience theorists] thought that a study of fans
> creating and sharing their own photocopied stories, re-edited videos, or
> audio plays on cassette tape - material based on, and sometimes
> subverting, the creations of mainstream media - was a little bit backward
> … But we had got it wrong: Henry Jenkins was almost a decade ahead
> of his time. (Gauntlett, 2008:22-23)

Given Henry Jenkins's dominance in this area before the advent of the Internet,

this section will focus primarily upon his work. Jenkins's theoretical point of

departure is the idea of textual poaching as expounded by Michel de Certeau,

who sees readers of popular fiction as "nomads poaching their way across

fields they did not write …" (1988:174). From the different elements poached

from a text they produce meanings which are other than the meanings these

texts are given by their authors, professional critics or academics (Jenkins,

1992:26). For Jenkins, de Certeau's term "poaching":

> Forcefully reminds us of the potentially conflicting interests of producers and consumers, writers and readers. It recognizes the power differential between the "land-owners" and the "poachers"; yet it also acknowledges ways fans resist legal constraints on their pleasure and challenge attempts to regulate the production and circulation of popular meanings … Fans must actively struggle with and against the meanings imposed upon them by their borrowed materials (1992:32)

However, while de Certeau draws a sharp separation between writers and readers, Jenkins does not believe this applies to film and television fandom:

> Fans do not simply consume preproduced stories; they manufacture their own fanzine stories and novels, art prints, songs, videos, performances etc. ... [Fandom] blurs the boundaries between producers and consumers, spectators and participants, the commercial and the homecrafted … [it] becomes a participatory culture which transforms the experience of media consumption into the production of new texts, indeed of a new culture and a new community. (1992:46)

Jenkins sees fan art not only as a way of commenting on commercial programmes, but also as an activity that solidifies and maintains fan communities. With particular reference to fan videos, he states:

> The creation, exhibition, and exchange of videos creates the conditions for a communal artform, one contrasting with the commercial culture from which it is derived in its refusal to make a profit and its desire to share its products with others who will value them … What the videos articulate is what the fans have in common: their shared understandings, their mutual interests, their collective fantasies. (1992:248-9)

Fan videos exploring the relationship between different characters in the same television series are typical of the type Jenkins discusses. These videos are often a montage of scenes from different episodes which are decontextualized from the specific episodic narrative (by both scene selection and the elimination of the original soundtrack), rearranged and recontextualized by an added soft rock or pop music soundtrack to give a different interpretation of the relationship to the one typically ascribed to those characters by mainstream audiences or even the programme's producers. One video, for example, explores the relationship between Tasha Yar and Data in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. It

montages scenes showing their interaction over different episodes with Carole

King's song "Tapestry" as the soundtrack, suggesting a much more significant

romantic relationship between the two than is actually explicit in the series.

While the producers of the series deny that such a relationship exists, fans

assert it nonetheless (1992:235-6). Videos of this type suggesting repressed

homoerotic relationships between male characters (often referred to as "slash"

videos) are also common, e.g. between the male leads in *Starsky and Hutch*

(1992:225).

Jenkins discusses a variety of other themes, examples of which include those

that foreground secondary characters (Villa in *Blake's 7*), compare television

characters to their real world counterparts or fictional characters from other

media (the Enterprise crew from *Star Trek* compared to the crew of Jacques

Cousteau's ship Calypso), or rework the original into another genre (*Star Wars*

science fiction genre reworked into crime and romance) (1992:226-7,230).

Jenkins states the added music soundtrack is crucial to achieving the desired

recontexualisation:

> Most frequently, the song lyrics amplify, critique, or parody aspects of the
> original series, while the images become meaningful in relation both to
> the song's contents and to the fan community's collective understanding
> of the aired episodes. (1992:227)

Camille Bacon-Smith's account of fan videos is consistent with the account of

Jenkins I have given above and essentially covers the same ground (Bacon-

Smith, 1992:175ff). Both authors also describe in some detail the production

and distribution process of the video makers (Bacon-Smith, 1992:175-176,179,

Jenkins, 1992:225,244,247). The production process typically involved multiple

analogue video tape players cabled together, continual pausing and rewinding

to find the right frame, a detailed knowledge of the video players peculiarities (e.g. how many seconds one's particular model rolls back on pause), personal access to a library of source material, and degradation of quality through multiple-generation copies of both the source material and fan video. Distribution was typically done by the video maker themselves at conventions and sometimes by post. The video maker did not charge for this, but often asked the person desiring a copy to provide a blank video tape.

Jenkins summarises the motivations of these video makers and their audiences as follows:

> Though made of materials derived from network television, these videos can satisfy fan desires in ways their commercial counterparts all too often fail to do, because they focus on those aspects of the narrative that the community wants to explore. (1992:249)

2. Amateur video and the Internet.

While the majority of the literature on amateur video before the Internet can be grouped into the genres of home video, community and alternative video, and fan videos, the literature on Internet video is far more fragmented. In addition to those genres, relevant works also range widely over other, diverse genres and conceptual issues. These include pornography (Paasonen, 2010, Jacobs, 2007), education (Agazio, 2009, Young, 2008), politics (Cunningham, 2008, Heldman, 2006, Halpern and Gibbs, 2013), war reporting (Andeacuten-Papadopoulos, 2009, Christensen, 2008), and art (Cook, 2008, Richard, 2008), to name just a few. As Strangelove comments, "almost everything" is represented through online amateur video (2010:158). However, as discussed

in the introduction to this chapter, my concern in this section is to extend the discussion of the literature relevant to my fieldwork, and therefore I will focus on community and alternative video, film and television fan video, and the literature on social interactions occurring around videos on the Internet.

2.a. Community and alternative video online.

The limited literature on alternative video online is primarily occupied with short discussions of examples of this phenomenon, although some longer case studies do exist. There are no detailed discussions of the theoretical issues of online alternative video, however there are theoretical considerations in the literature concerning online alternative media in general. For instance, Tony Dowmunt argues that the distinction between alternative and mainstream media is problematized by the online environment where many "readers" are also "writers", and niche content is available and used in great quantities (2007:5). Kenix also believes this distinction is being problematized, and for her this is driven by a "converging media spectrum" where mainstream media is increasingly demonstrating attributes normally associated with alternative media (2011:19). She believes this convergence provides a moment to rethink definitions, which is something Sandoval and Fuchs do by arguing that alternative media should be more tightly defined as media about alternative visions of society (2010).

Atton discusses the Internet's power relationships and their relevance to alternative media, including how inequalities in access limit the

representativeness of the medium, and how capitalist ideology can frustrate

online resistance (2004:10-11), while Sasha Costanza-Chock worries about the

suitability for alternative media of mainstream Web 2.0 spaces in the light of

corporate exploitation of social networking labour, state surveillance, and

corporate and state censorship (2008). Finally, Lievrouw (2011:3-5) sees

alternative media projects as providing strong empirical support for the

"mediation perspective" of communication theory, which challenges that field's

traditional distinction between technologically mediated mass communication

and interpersonal interaction.

The wide variety of examples covered by scholars include Indymedia, the

network of alternative media collectives, and its online videos of the Seattle

World Trade Organisation protests in 1999 and the G8 summit protests in 2005

(Sam and Annie, 2007:78, Downing, 2003:251); the Scottish-based collective

Camcorder Guerrillas who use video as a tool for activism and campaigning,

and who distribute over the activist peer-to-peer network KEIN.org (Hadzi,

2007:198-200); and the co-opting of alternative media reportorial practices by

corporate entities such as CNN through their iReport video website (Kperogi,

2011, Kperogi, 2013:57)[6].

Aaron Hess's analysis of the responses to videos posted on YouTube by the

Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) in the US promoting prohibition

of recreational drug use is an example of one of the longer case studies (2009).

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[6] Fish (2013) contextualises his discussion of Current TV using Kperogi's analysis of
CNN's iReport website, but does not explicitly use the term "alternative media" in
connection with it.

Hess argues that while there were in fact some video responses that were produced as resistance to the ONDCP's message and to encourage democratic deliberation, they were lost "in a mix of jokes, pseudonyms, and user flaming". He concludes that:

> YouTube does not offer a concrete and fully deliberative environment largely due to its overwhelming structure and use for entertainment … users' corresponding belief in YouTube as an ideal place for democratic practice becomes a dangerous substitute for more traditional forms of deliberation … digital activism is limited in the sea of responses, replies, and [the] often dismissive and overly playful atmosphere … scholarship regarding digital activism should rethink the nature of this medium … in regard to [its] ability to affect change. (2009:412)

Fenton and Barassi's (2011) study of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign (CSC; formerly known as the British Cuba Research Centre), comes to some similar conclusions with regard to YouTube and social media in general. They stated that people within the CSC "felt frustrated with the individualistic logic of social media", where "individual messages are often given the same importance as the messages that have arisen out of the tensions and negotiations of a collective of people" meaning the messages produced by such groups get lost in the "information overload of the online space". The CSC had therefore rejected the use of interactivity in their social media practices, including their use of YouTube:

> When the CSC opened its YouTube account, [they] chose not to allow others to post comments beneath their videos. As Tasha - the communication officer of the campaign - explained, the choice of not allowing people to post comments on their YouTube account was not motivated by a will to be undemocratic, but by the fact that they 'simply couldn't afford interactivity'. This is because, according to Tasha, CSC did not have the resources to reply to individual messages that appeared beneath their videos. This was considered to be a real problem for the campaign because often individual messages would constitute a challenge to the one of the organization but the lack of time and resources prevented organizers from engaging with such discussions. (Fenton and Barassi, 2011:187)

While there are discussions in Carpentier (2003), Rose (2007) and Henderson (2009) about how BBC's Video Nation project moved online after it was decommissioned as a broadcast programme, there appears to be very little discussion in the literature concerning how the types of community video addressed in Section 1.a have adapted to the Internet as a distribution technology. This is in spite of the fact that some, such as the UK's Community Channel and many of the US public access stations, have an online video presence.[7] However, there is literature on communities of interest using online video. One example from Light et al. (2012) discusses a network of young graffiti artists on YouTube called Wildstyle. This network provided novice graffiti artists with a sense of belonging and assistance from more established artists, and was characterised by "a genuine ethos of a desire to share information, provide support and engage in critique" (2012:249). Another example from Carroll (2008) discusses swing dancers' use of YouTube. While dancing itself is the most important form of social interaction for them, YouTube is used to share footage of each other dancing, and also to share archival footage of different dance steps. These videos are then discussed on YouTube and via other Internet technologies.

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[7] http://communitychannel.mediatrust.org/. See also the discussion in chapter 5 for examples of public access television's online presence.

2.b. Film and television fan videos online.

As we saw in Section 1.b, fan video producers and users were typically part of small, dedicated fan communities, and the very limited affordance of analogue home video technology with regard to video production, along with the relatively costly and time-intensive distribution methods available, meant this was a very marginal activity. Many scholars argue that fan video culture underwent a major transformation in its move from offline to online, becoming far more widespread, when measured by the number of producers, the number of videos produced, and their audiences' size and diversity. The improved production and distribution affordances of home digital technology compared to analogue are cited as the primary enabler of this increase (Lamerichs, 2008:53, Strangelove, 2010:114,118, Jenkins, 2009:117, Russo, 2009:125, Jenkins, 2006a:135,137).

Some researchers comment on the consequences of the widening of the audience for fan videos from a relatively private group of committed and informed fans to one that is much more public and diverse. For instance, Russo (2009) and Ng (2008:118-9) both discuss the reception of queer fan videos by wider audiences. Russo considers the example of the fan video "Closer", a *Star Trek* "slash" video featuring the characters Kirk and Spock that began to circulate on the Internet in 2006 without the maker's permission. She states (following Jenkins, 2006b) that while this video was read within the relevant fan community as a disturbing story about rape, the wider Internet audience saw a camp humour in it:

> Concern over the decontextualization of fan vids such as "Closer" might
> appear hypocritical because the form itself relies on the possibility of

> multiple readings and on the selective repurposing of footage. However, what is at issue is not the prerogative of an intended meaning, but the ideological implications of the mutations such meanings can undergo when deracinated. (Russo, 2009:128-9)

Her concern is that videos like "Closer" are being interpreted by the wider audience as being part of a milieu that is dominated by parody videos, such as those concerning the movie *Brokeback Mountain*, which she says often embody homophobic responses to queerness: "A fan vid thrust into this milieu is likely to be read according to these prevailing conventions, falling into step with values hostile to those of its indigenous community" (2009:129). However, she sees a dilemma here for queer fan video makers:

> Without some degree of mainstreaming, vidders' rich ecology of queer viewing practices would be relegated to obscurity, ceding YouTube to gay caricatures. However, we must also ask what dimensions of this queering are available to be popularized or commercialized, and, by contrast, what dimensions might be lost or sidelined … (2009:129)

This question of pre-Internet fan video makers being relegated to obscurity and "written out of the history of mashup culture" is also picked up by Jenkins, but the other horn of the dilemma for his video makers is the fear of legal action against them from copyright holders if they increase their visibility (2009:118)[8]. While these fan video makers may be avoiding the attention of professional producers and distributors, other types of fan video makers court it. These video makers exploit the publicness of the Internet to get the attention of professionals with a view to breaking into the industry. Videos like "Troops" and "George Lucas in Love" appropriate themes, aesthetics, characters and even props from professional film and television in their own video creations, rather

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[8] A fear also expressed by the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* fan video makers in Hill's study (2009:174).

than mashing up existing footage, to create their own industry "calling cards" (Jenkins, 2006a:136,147) .

Another consequence of the transformation of fan video culture from something shared in private by small, isolated groups to a larger and more public phenomenon is that these groups are now coming into regular contact with each other on the virtual public spaces they share, such as YouTube. This is resulting in the creation of fan videos that borrow from, parody and in other ways reflect the fan videos of other fandoms. For example, Michael Strangelove discusses how Chris Crocker's "Leave Britney Alone" video on YouTube, where a fan of Britney Spears pleads for people to stop criticising her, has been remade by fans of Dora the Explorer, SpongeBob SquarePants and Star Wars (2010:114-6).

2.c. The social dimensions of YouTube

The literature on the social interactions around online video is very broad, ranging over a variety of only loosely related subjects and issues, and we have already discussed some examples of it in this chapter from the perspective of the different genres reviewed. Moving away from the genre-based approach I have followed so far in this chapter, this section will focus on the literature that addresses social interaction from the platform perspective. Since the vast majority of academic literature on social interactions around online video concerns YouTube, I will focus on it here.

YouTube and Community. The notion of community often appears in discussions concerning the social behaviour of YouTube users. While it will not advance my thesis here to enter into the debates concerning whether YouTube is a community or not in relation to some definition of community or another, what is of interest here are the different behaviours that are examined as part of those debates. For instance, Lange, in her ethnographic study of prominent YouTube amateur producers and their fans, states:

> The YouTube participants that I interviewed often moved beyond watery notions of 'feel good togetherness' [when asked if YouTube was a community] and would actually cite specific examples of social linkages and related attributes. These included: intensity of shared interests; a willingness to engage in reciprocal acts of kindness both emotionally and financially; and even the inevitable friction and drama that results from community participation. Acts of kindness include assistance that may relate directly to video making as well as activities that focus on helping ill people or people who need financial assistance to attend meet-ups. (2008:93)

Lange's ethnographic studies often take into account interactions between users that occur outside the online environment. For example, in an earlier study she looked at how weak social ties that existed between children belonging to a (real world) support group for the home-schooled were enhanced by their joint production of videos for YouTube and their participation together on it, and how latent ties between three dormitory neighbours were activated by their chance involvement in a YouTube video as subjects on the one hand, and film maker on the other (Lange, 2007).

Other scholars have looked to behaviours emerging during specific controversies on YouTube when assessing it as a community. For instance, Burgess and Green (2008, 2009a:91ff), Strangelove (2010:111ff) and Brouwers

(2008) all discuss the controversy concerning the launch of Oprah Winfrey's YouTube channel. According to Burgess and Green the channel was given special privileges during its early existence, including the ability to edit the featured video list on YouTube's home page to promote itself, and it also prevented comments from being made on its videos. They go on to say that:

> There was an intense and immediate flurry of protest videos, spawning discussion about the implications of this event. One point made by several commentators was that Oprah was importing the convergence of celebrity and control associated with "big media" into the social media space … and therefore ignoring the cultural norms … of the network. (2009a:91-92)

The cultural norms being referred to here are that all YouTube users should be treated as equal within its attention economy, and that YouTube participation is an inherently two-way affair. Strangelove examines some of the videos made during this controversy, both pro-Oprah, such as "Oprah We Love You", and against, such as "The Church of Oprah Exposed", and the comments that were made on them. He concludes that the controversy was a contest over the identity of YouTube, and whether it is a place only for amateur producers (2010:112-113).

From the literature, it appears that video blog ("vlog") entries, such as "Noprah", were one important way YouTube users expressed their dissent during the Oprah controversy (e.g. Burgess and Green, 2009a:92). In fact Burgess and Green state that vlogging is "fundamental to YouTube's sense of community" and that "it is an emblematic form of YouTube participation" (2009b:94). As a result, some researchers have investigated the features of YouTube vlogs and vloggers. Strangelove (2010:77) and Burgess and Green (2009b:105) emphasise the co-creative and reciprocal features of many YouTube vlogs.

That is, they represent a dialogue over time with other YouTube users, and other vloggers in particular, and different entries incorporate or reflect the comments, reactions and criticisms previous entries have garnered. Molyneaux (2008) has further found that female YouTube vloggers are more likely to engage in this kind of dialogue, although they tend to post less frequently than males.

Strangelove situates vlogging in a number of different cultural contexts and trends. From one aspect he sees vlogging as part of the wider confessional culture that he states exists in western societies, following Foucault, and which has precedents in confessional television programming and elsewhere. He argues that "the YouTube audience acts as a virtual partner, an imagined friend, which generates a powerful impulse to confess" (2010:72). He also argues, relatedly, that "YouTubers experience their video practices as transformative and perhaps represent a new mode of self-construction, multiple selfhood, and identity maintenance" (2010:82). Finally, he sees vlogs as the "punk version of television", where authenticity is highly valued, and represents an "expression of a desire for something other than the highly produced, glossy reality of commercial media" (2010:83).

The topology of YouTube. The media scholars' research on YouTube reviewed above typically employ methodologies and samples that are limited to case studies and ethnographies of small numbers of users or content analyses of up to a few thousand videos at most. However YouTube as a network is

immense.[9] Computer scientists investigating the social dimension of YouTube

have utilised a variety of software research tools, such as crawlers, to generate

sample sizes to include millions of users and videos. These analyses typically

rely on the "social networking" functionality within YouTube. For instance,

Santos's study (2008) looked at the relationships between different users by

taking into account more than 12 million users and videos through an analysis

of YouTube's friendship, subscription and favouring mechanisms.

One particular concern of computer scientists conducting this kind of large-scale

research is to understand the topology of YouTube, that is, the shape of the

network created by the users of this video distribution software. Santos (2008),

Cheng (2007) and Mislove's (2007) analyses all point to YouTube having a

"Small World" topography[10]. That is, the different users of the network and their

videos are clustered together in groups or cliques where each member of a

given group is connected with the other members of that group, and where

groups are interlinked with each other such that any two randomly selected

users of the network are only separated by a few "hops". An analogy of this is

the "hub and spoke" system used in international air travel where regional

airports are clustered around interconnected, international hubs (e.g. London,

Atlanta), enabling airports not directly connected to each other to connect via

only a small number of hops via the hubs.

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[9] According to their website, each month YouTube has over 800 million unique users visit it, watching over 4 billion hours of video. (YouTube LLC, n.d.)

[10] Rotman's (2009) analysis suggests that YouTube does not conform to the Small World network model, but the discrepancy between this finding and the other findings does not appear to be addressed in the literature. Comparing and analysing the quantitative methods employed by the various researchers to understand this discrepancy is beyond the scope of this thesis.

3. Conclusion

The discussions in this chapter serve a number of purposes. By situating online amateur video in its historical context we can see that it is the latest phase of a practice that goes back over a century, rather than something totally novel. This echoes Henry Jenkins's position with regard to YouTube:

> Much written about YouTube assumes that it is unprecedented …
> Seemingly much of the press (and a fair number of academics) can't
> seem to remember what happened before YouTube … There is much
> that *is* new about YouTube but there is also much that is old. (Jenkins,
> 2009:109)

But my purpose in discussing amateur video before the Internet was not just to make this general point, but also to identify the significant genres of that period to focus my fieldwork, and to gain an understanding of their specific historical contexts. This helped me decide which groups I would research, and it also contributed to the framework I used for my initial approach to them. In addition, it allowed me specific insights into the behaviours of some of my informants: Each of the groups I researched had some active members who were involved with amateur video before the Internet, and therefore the historical understanding gained in this chapter enabled me to discuss with them their current practices on the Internet in comparison to their older ones.

The literature on the Internet era for community, alternative and fan video explored here allowed me to complete the framework I used initially to enter the field by extending the historical context for each of these genres into the present day, and by highlighting the key issues scholars currently consider of interest.

For example, film and television fans, while previously distributing their videos within relatively small and knowledgeable circles at conventions or via post, now face the dilemma of engaging with a larger, less informed online audience, and risk being misunderstood, ridiculed, or even prosecuted, or run the alternative risk of being written out of history. In addition to genre-specific issues like this one, we also saw that scholars have a keen interest in the cross-genre issue of the social aspects of online video, and their insights regarding this therefore featured prominently in my initial engagement with the field. However, as we shall see in the next chapter, the literature on amateur video did not prepare me completely for what I encountered in the field, and that additional conceptual tools were required.

Chapter 3. Assemblage Theory

The theoretical framework for my research was developed inductively. I began with an interest in a phenomenon, amateur Internet video, and my initial exploration of it was framed by the literature pertaining to it directly, which was discussed in Chapter 2. However, after around three months in the field, I began to realise that the social and technological dimensions of my informants' activities were more complex and problematic than what I had expected based on the literature. What I found was that my informants were enlisting a wide variety of people and technologies to achieve different goals related to distributing their videos, and that sometimes this enlistment was resisted. In addition, while the different arrangements of people and technologies achieved the desired goals in some cases, in other cases they failed to achieve them. What's more, these arrangements were often unstable, with different elements sometimes becoming detached, new ones becoming attached, and sometimes the whole arrangement simply came apart. Finally, while the literature focussed primarily on the human actors in online video distribution and the relationships between them, it seemed to me that the different technologies were also important actants, not simply passive tools, and that giving a proper account of them, and the relationships between them and the human actors, was critical if I was to understanding what I was encountering in the field.

I decided therefore, after this first stage of fieldwork, to look for a conceptual framework that would allow me to interrogate this complexity in more detail during the rest of my time in the field, and also serve as a framework for the later analysis of it. The concepts of assemblages, developed originally by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and elaborated into a theory of the social by Manuel DeLanda (Clough et al., 2007:388), and actor-networks, from Actor-Network Theory (ANT), captured for me the key aspects of the arrangements of people and technologies I encountered in the field. In Section 1 I will paint in broad strokes the key features of the concept of assemblages that I use for the analysis of the ethnographies in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. This will be based primarily on DeLanda's work, although I will clarify, extend and illustrate his exegesis of Deleuze and Guattari by drawing on their work directly, as well as on the work of other scholars.[11] Similarly, in Section 2 I will outline the elements of ANT that I will be applying to the ethnographies.

My purpose in using two conceptual "lenses" rather than one is to allow different perspectives on the rich, multifaceted and dynamic situations I encountered in the field, rather than having to force fit those encounters into a single theoretical framework. This approach will allow me to draw on a broader theoretical vocabulary, and also on a wider range of scholars than if I subscribed to only one concept or the other. However, these are convergent rather than divergent concepts, and so I will not be dealing with two radically different conceptions of

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[11] I will not be concerned here with whether DeLanda's reading represents a purist reading of Deleuze and Guattari's original work, or of Deleuze's later thoughts on the subject, as my focus is simply on developing a useable conceptual framework (c.f. DeLanda, 2006b:3-4).

what I encountered in the field, but rather simply drawing on two related

concepts to provide a richer understanding: Not only can both concepts be

considered part of the "material turn" but, as the ANT scholar John Law points

out:

> There is little difference between Deleuze's *agencement* (awkwardly translated as "assemblage" in English) and the term "actor network" … . Both refer to the provisional assembly of productive, heterogeneous, and (this is the crucial point) quite limited forms of ordering located in no larger overall order. (2009:146)

The philosopher Graham Harman also highlights their similarities:

> DeLanda's assemblage theory and Latour's actor-network theory both refer to large syndicates of objects that interact even while remaining separable from the assemblies in which they participate. Both are anti-Copernicans who deny any poignant gap between humans and the world, and both also try to avoid the pseudo-revolution that denies such a gap only by turning humans and the world into equal partners. (2007:3)

Finally, Karl Palmås draws out their similarities too:

> Both strands of theory using the assemblage as a key concept – the Deleuzian/DeLandian theory and ANT – construe social structures as dynamic, open-ended, heterogeneous and malleable. (2007:44) [12]

1. Assemblages

In outlining his interpretation of Deleuze and Guatarri's concept of

assemblages, DeLanda first describes what it is an alternative to:

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[12] This is the conclusion from Palmås's paper, and is sufficient for our purposes here. The paper concerns however where the "social ontology" of Deleuze's and DeLanda's on the one hand, and ANT on the other, diverge. The divergences argued for in that paper are not of concern here however as they are either derived from a characterisation of ANT largely based on the relatively recent work of Callon (e.g. Callon, 2005, Callon and Caliskan, 2005), and such a characterisation as we will see in Section 2 is not warranted, or they concern issues that are not relevant here (e.g. the metaphysical question of how the two approaches "reinvent realism" (Palmås, 2007:5)).

> [The] postulate that just as bodily organs work together for the organism as a whole, so the function of social institutions is to work in harmony for the benefit of society ... The basic concept in this theory is what we may call *relations of interiority*: the component parts are constituted by the very relations they have to other parts in the whole." (DeLanda, 2006b:8-9)

In further elaborating the relationship between a whole and its parts on this theory, DeLanda goes on to say that:

> A part detached from such a whole ceases to be what it is, since being this particular part is one of its constitutive properties. A whole in which the component parts are self-subsistent and their relations are external to each other does not possess an organic unity. (2006b:9)

DeLanda states further that some defenders of this view argue, following Hegel, "that without relations of interiority a whole cannot have emergent properties, becoming a mere aggregation of the properties of its components" (2006b:10).

As an alternative to this view DeLanda presents Deleuze's and Guatarri's concept of assemblages: "wholes characterized by *relations of exteriority*" (2006b:10). He states that relations of exteriority imply:

> A component part of an assemblage may be detached from it and plugged into a different assemblage in which its interactions are different … In other words, the exteriority of relations implies a certain autonomy for the terms they relate … (2006b:10)

The fact that assemblages are wholes that may be broken down into autonomous parts does not prevent them however from having synthetic properties, that is, properties not reducible to those of their component parts. This is guaranteed, according to DeLanda, by the fact that properties of an assemblage are:

> The result not of an aggregation of the components' own properties but of the actual exercise of their capacities. The capacities do depend on a component's properties but cannot be reduced to them since they involve reference to the properties of other interacting entities. (2006b:11)

In Deleuze's words, "the assemblage's only unity is that of co-functioning" component parts in "alliances" and "alloys", which creates a "symbiosis" (Deleuze and Parnet, 2006:52). DeLanda illustrates this aspect of an assemblage by contrasting the different types of biological examples used by the proponents of the two theories:

> While those favouring the interiority of relations tend to use organisms as their prime example, Deleuze gravitates towards other kinds of biological illustrations, such as the symbiosis of plants and pollinating insects. In this case we have relations of exteriority between self-subsistent components - such as the wasp and the orchid. (DeLanda, 2006b:11)

Elaborating this example, we can argue that the properties of wasps (e.g. having wings) and orchids (e.g. having certain colours, shapes and odours) give them certain capacities (e.g. transport pollen, attract wasps), or affordances[13], that only become apparent upon their interaction: As DeLanda states with regard to components, "We may have exhaustive knowledge about an individual's properties and yet, not having observed it in interaction with other individuals, know nothing about its capacities" (2005:72). The interaction of these capacities in turn gives the assemblage as a whole the synthetic property of being an orchid pollinator. This example illustrates a point made by Wise, "we do not know what an assemblage *is* until we can find out what it *can do* …, that is, how it functions" (Wise, 2005:78). Similarly, Jane Bennett's explanation of Deleuze and Guattari's concept also emphasises its synthetic and dynamic aspects:

> The effects generated by an assemblage are … emergent properties, emergent in that their ability to make something happen … is distinct from the sum of the vital force of each [material component] considered alone. Each member and proto-member of the assemblage has a

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[13] See DeLanda (2005:72).

certain vital force, but there is also an effectivity proper to the grouping as such: an agency *of* the assemblage. (Bennett, 2009:24)

DeLanda stresses that the emergent properties of an assemblage are

immanent:

> Because of [the] bottom-up causality [of the component parts] the emergent properties and capacities of a whole are immanent, that is, they are irreducible to its parts but do not transcend them, in the sense that if the parts stop interacting the whole itself ceases to exist, or becomes a mere aggregation of elements. (DeLanda, 2010:68)

Assemblages are typically composed of heterogeneous elements[14], and

relevant for our purposes here, some of these elements can be technological.

An example of an assemblage which illustrates both these features is the horse

archer of nomadic armies: The "man-horse-bow assemblage … [cuts] across

entirely different realms of reality: the personal, the biological, and the

technological" (DeLanda, 2010:67).

It is important to note at this point that while the word "assemblage" is

conventionally used to translate Deleuze's and Guattari's French term

agencement, the French word has both an active sense – "a way of assembling

or arranging" – and a passive sense – the resulting "ordering or arrangement"

(Deleuze and Parnet, 2006:x). John Law emphasises and elaborates on this

active sense of the word when he states that an assemblage is an "uncertain

and unfolding process … a tentative and hesitant unfolding …" (Law, 2004:41).

DeLanda similarly states:

> The identity of any assemblage … is always the product of a process (territorialization and, in some cases, coding) and it is always precarious,

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[14] The degree of heterogeneity within a given assemblage, and the implications this has for its identity, are discussed below.

since other processes (deterritorialization and decoding) can destabilize it.[15] (2006b:28)

Assemblages can also operate on different scales, such that a particular assemblage can be either partly or totally composed of a collection of other assemblages (DeLanda, 2006b:5-6). Returning to the nomadic horse archer example DeLanda states:

> An army … should be viewed as an *assemblage of assemblages*, that is, as an entity produced by the recursive application of the part-to-whole relation: a nomad army is composed of many interacting cavalry teams, themselves composed of human-horse-bow assemblages, in turn made out of human, animal and technical components. (DeLanda, 2010:68)

DeLanda following Deleuze uses the terms "molar" and "molecular" to help describe the operation at different scales or levels of these part-to-whole relations. "Molecular" refers to those things that go to make up the "molar", the "finished product" (2010:129-130). These terms are relative however: At one scale, the horse archers can be considered molecular, that is components that go into making the molar cavalry teams. But at another scale, as we have seen, they are molar: "Finished products" composed of person, horse and bow "molecules".

DeLanda also uses the nomad army example to explain the causal relationship between these wholes and parts:

> At any level of such a nested set of assemblages causality operates in two directions at once: the bottom-up effect of the parts on the whole, and the top-down effect of the whole on its parts. On one hand, the properties and capacities of a whole emerge from the causal interactions between its parts: many human-horse-bow assemblages, trained intensively to work together, form a whole with the emergent capacity to take advantage of spatial features of the battlefield, for ambush and

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[15] The notions of territorialisation and coding will be defined and discussed below.

surprise, and to exploit temporal features of the battle, such as the fleeting tactical opportunity presented by a temporary break in an enemy's formation. … On the other hand, once a whole emerges it can exercise its capacities … to affect its own parts constraining them and enabling them. Belonging to a team of warriors makes its members subject to mutual policing: any loss of nerve or display of weakness by one member will be noticed by the rest of the team and affect his or her reputation. But the team also creates resources for its members, as they compensate for each other's weaknesses and amplify each other's strengths. (DeLanda, 2010:68-69)

Material and expressive components. In addition to the features discussed

above, assemblages can also be defined along three dimensions:

Along the first dimension are specified the variable roles which component parts may play, from a purely material role to a purely expressive one, as well as mixtures of the two. (DeLanda, 2006b:18)

One example DeLanda gives to illustrate this is institutional organisations.

Component parts with a material role to play include human bodies, food,

physical labour, simple tools, complex machines, and the buildings and

neighbourhoods serving as their physical locales (2006b:12). Component parts

with an expressive role to play include not only language and symbols, but also

bodies through their posture, dress, facial expressions and behaviours, such as

a subordinate obeying a command in public expresses his acceptance of the

other's authority (2006b:12-13). Another example DeLanda give is of

interpersonal networks and communities, where the material components

include the labour required to maintain the links within these assemblages:

This labour goes beyond the task of staying in touch with others via frequent routine conversations. It may also involve listening to problems and giving advice in difficult situations as well as giving a variety of forms of physical help, such as taking care of other people's children. (DeLanda, 2006a:256)

The expressive components include:

The variety of expressions of solidarity and trust which emerge from, and then shape, interaction. These range from routine acts, such as having

dinner together or going to church, to the sharing of adversity, or the displayed willingness to make sacrifices for the community. Expressions of solidarity may, of course, involve language, but in this case (as in many others) actions speak louder than words. (DeLanda, 2006a:256-7)

Territorialisation. The second dimension of assemblages DeLanda outlines:

Defines variable processes in which these components become involved and that either stabilize the identity of an assemblage, by increasing its degree of internal homogeneity or the degree of sharpness of its boundaries, or destabilize it. The former are referred to as processes of territorialization and the latter as processes of deterritorialization. (2006b:12)

Elaborating further on the homogenising aspect of territorialisation, DeLanda says this aspect includes "the degree to which an assemblage's component parts are drawn from a homogenous repertoire, or the degree to which an assemblage homogenizes its own components" (2010:13).

Continuing with the example of institutional organisations above, DeLanda illustrates the territorialisation process by saying that on the one hand organisations are involved in providing spatial boundaries: They "usually operate in particular buildings, and the jurisdiction of their legitimate authority usually coincides with the physical boundaries of those buildings". He goes on to say that they are also involved in non-spatial territorialisation processes which increase the internal homogeneity of the organisation, "such as the sorting processes which exclude a certain category of people from membership of an organization" (2006b:13). In another example he discusses the processes whereby the identity of the US computer manufacturing industry is stabilised through a series of non-spatial territorialisation processes:

The integrating and regulating activities of organizations such as trade and industry associations are a key component of these processes.

>Industry associations are instrumental in leading their members towards consensus on many normative questions which affect them collectively, particularly the setting of industry-wide technological standards. Trade associations can serve as clearing-houses for information about an industry's sales, prices and costs, allowing their members to coordinate some of their activities. They also reduce interorganizational variation by sponsoring research (the results of which are shared among members) and promoting product-definition and product-quality guide-lines. The degree of organizational uniformity is also increased by the creation of behavioural norms by professional and worker associations: norms that may be informal and nonenforceable but which nevertheless help to standardize occupational behaviour, expectations and wages. (2006b:82)

The opposite process, deterritorialisation, is "any process which either destabilizes spatial boundaries or increases internal heterogeneity" (2006b:13). Continuing the computer industry example, "an important deterritorializing factor … is a turbulent environment, such as that created by a high rate of innovation in products or processes" whereby heterogeneity is introduced into the industry through the different rates the component organisations adapt to these innovations (2006b:82).

Another example DeLanda gives is of communication technologies, such as telephones or computers, "which blur the spatial boundaries of social entities by eliminating the need for co-presence" (2006b:13). But as Deleuze points out, "there is no deterritorialization without an effort for reterritorialization" (Boutang and Pamart, 1995 cited in Fortier 2000:13, see also Deleuze and Guattari, 2004:559-60), and DeLanda discusses a case that can be considered an example of this, where early Internet communities (as spatially deterritorialised interpersonal networks) organised physical meetings to help maintain solidarity and stabilise the identity of their assemblages (DeLanda, 2006a:257).

Coding. Finally, the third dimension describes another synthetic process that complements territorialisation and further helps to stabilise the identity of an assemblage: DeLanda refers to this process as "coding", and its counter-process as "decoding":

> Coding refers to the role played by language in fixing the identity of a social whole. In institutional organizations, for example, the legitimacy of an authority structure is in most cases related to linguistically coded rituals and regulations … in those governed by a rational-legal form of authority they will be written rules, standard procedures, and most importantly, a constitutional charter defining its rights and obligations. (DeLanda, 2010:13)

Another example DeLanda uses is conversations. These involve rules, such as turn-taking, and:

> The more formal and rigid the rules, the more these social encounters may be said to be coded. But in some circumstances these rules may be weakened giving rise to assemblages in which the participants have more room to express their convictions and their own personal styles. (2006b:16)

An illustration of such a decoded conversation according to DeLanda would be an informal one between friends. A further example DeLanda gives is of coded and decoded software applications, and while not about "social wholes", it helps to further elaborate the concepts at hand.[16] Applications written in old programming languages like Pascal relied on a master program that would stay in control of the computation process notwithstanding temporary surrender of control to subroutines. In contrast to these coded applications, modern "object-orientated" programming languages can write decoded applications, where in place of a master program are a population of autonomous and flexible software objects (DeLanda, 2011: Appendix).

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[16] The term "coding" here being used of course in the manner above, and not in the sense of writing a computer application.

Application to online environment. Various scholars have used Deleuze's and Guattari's concept of assemblages to think about how humans interact with technology, including digital technologies (e.g. Currier, 2003, Bennett, 2005, Bennett, 2009, Poster and Savat, 2009, Sampson, 2012, Savat, 2010, Wise, 2005, Wise, 2012) and others have applied DeLanda's specific interpretation of assemblages to the Internet (Sampson, 2007, Tan, 2013, Reid, 2010, Nielsen, 2009, De Paoli and Kerr, 2009). These latter studies have applied DeLanda quite generally however, and no one to my knowledge has conducted a close reading of a detailed online ethnography using his interpretation, as I do in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Because of this, how some of DeLanda's key concepts can be applied in detail in the context of the Internet has not yet been explored, and I will therefore need to undertake this as part of my discussion in chapters 5, 6, and 7 of the different ethnographies.

2. Actor-Networks

Actor-Network Theory (ANT) was developed in the 1980s by Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and John Law (Murdoch, 1997:733, Sismondo, 2010:81, Latour, 2005:10) although, as Latour states, "since then it has moved in many directions" (2005:10). John Law elaborates on this, stating that it is not a single theory but "… a disparate family of … tools, sensibilities, and methods of analysis … a diaspora that overlaps with other intellectual traditions" (2009:141-2), and one that has changed over time as it has been adopted and adapted by

different scholars (2003:4). In fact, John Law goes as far as to say it is not a theory at all:

> Theories usually try to explain why something happens, but actor network theory is descriptive rather than foundational in explanatory terms … it tells stories about "how" relations assemble or don't. As a form, one of several, of material semiotics[17], it is better understood as a toolkit for telling interesting stories about, and interfering in, those relations. More profoundly, it is a sensibility to the messy practices of relationality and materiality of the world. (2009:141-2)

For Law, therefore, ANT is about understanding relations, and it treats "everything in the social and natural worlds as a continuously generated effect of the webs of relations within which they are located … its studies explore and characterize [these] webs …" (2009:141). Similarly, as Latour puts it, ANT is about "tracing associations" and understanding the "assemblages", or networks, formed by them (2005:5,7). Also, these relations or associations are not just between humans, but can involve non-human actors too (see for example Callon, 1991, Latour, 1998, 2005:5-6, and Law, 2009:141). With this overview of ANT in mind, I will now describe actor-networks in more detail, focussing on their key concepts and some illustrative examples.[18]

Actors. ANT scholars claim that humans are not the only actors, and that in fact anything can be an actor. To understand how this seemingly absurd claim can make sense, we must first understand what they mean by an actor.

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[17] For a discussion of what ANT theorists mean by "semiotics" see, for example, Akrich and Latour (1992:259) and Law and Mol (2008:58).

[18] Recognising that ANT is not a single theory, and that it has changed over time, my description will concentrate on the key concepts and their conceptualisations that are most common within the "diaspora" literature.

In their discussion of Cumbrian sheep during the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in the UK in 2001, Law and Mol (2008) confront (somewhat playfully) their seemingly absurd claim that a sheep can be an actor. They argue that when we ask if a sheep is an actor, the response we expect is framed by the notion of mastery: The sheep is either a master of its situation or it is simply being mastered by humans, the latter alternative being the only sensible response. They argue however this division between mastery and being-mastered when thinking about actors is rejected in ANT:

> An entity counts as an actor if it makes a perceptible difference. Active entities are relationally linked with one another in webs. They make a difference to each other … they enact each other. In this way of thinking agency becomes ubiquitous, endlessly extended through webs of materialised relations … An actor does not act alone. It acts in relation to other actors, lined up with them. This means that it is also always being acted upon. Acting and being enacted go together. What is more, an enacted-actor is not in control. To act is not to master, for the results of what is being done are often unexpected … In order to make a difference, a sheep does not need to be a strategist. (2008:58)

Latour makes a similar point about strategies "… actors don't have a strategy; they get their battle plans, contradictory ones, from other actors" (1996:162). Elsewhere, in a similar vein to Law above, Latour tries to resolve some of the misunderstandings concerning how ANT scholars use the term "actor":

> The word actor has been open to … misunderstanding … 'Actor' in the Anglo-Saxon tradition is always a human intentional individual actor and is most often contrasted with mere 'behavior' … An 'actor' in ANT is a semiotic definition - an actant -, that is, something that acts or to which activity is granted by others. It implies no special motivation of human individual actors, nor of humans in general. An actant can literally be anything provided it is granted to be the source of an action.[19] (1998:Section 3)

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[19] Latour's use of the term "actant" derives from the semiotic theory of Algirdas Greimas (Blok and Jensen, 2011:17,48). Also, some of Latour's commentators use the terms "actor" and "actant" interchangeably when discussing his ideas, such as in Harman's analysis of Latour's metaphysics (2009).

While other creatures like insects (Akrich, 1993) and scallops (Callon, 1986) also feature as actors in other ANT studies, as Latour states, an actor can be any entity. For instance McMaster and Wastell (2005) argue that Enterprise Resource Planning computer systems are actors, and for Callon (1991:140,156) so are scientific papers and signed cheques.

Networks. Along with the word "actor", Latour also argues that what ANT scholars mean by the word "network" has been misunderstood. He explains that the usage of the word in the 1980s, when ANT was conceived, was different to how it is used now. He argues that now it means "transport *without* deformation" (Latour, 1999a:15) and is "a term used for sewage, telephones and the Internet" (Latour in Gane, 2004:83). However, in the older usage it "clearly meant a series of transformations - translations, transductions - which could not be captured by any of the traditional terms of social theory" (Latour, 1999a:15). In a later explanation of networks, Latour favours the word "translation" more than "transform"[20], and defines it as "a relation that … induces two [actors] into coexisting" (Latour, 2005:108). Latour stresses that "What is important in the word network is the word *work*. You need work in order to make the connection" (Latour in Gane, 2004:83). He goes as far as to say that at one point he toyed with the term "work-net" instead, to underscore the different between the two uses of the word (Latour, 2005:132).

Actors, then, work to make connections with each other, forming a (actor-) network. Latour cautions here that:

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[20] I use the terms interchangeably throughout this thesis however.

> A network is not made of nylon thread, words or any durable substance but is the trace left behind by some moving agent … it has to be traced anew by the passage of another vehicle, another circulating entity. (2005:132)

Sometimes networks can appear as actors themselves:

> If a network acts as a single block, then it disappears, to be replaced by the action itself and the seemingly simple author of that action … So it is that something much simpler - a working television, a well-managed bank or a healthy body - comes, for a time, to mask the networks that produce it. (Law, 1992:385)

ANT theorists refer to this effect as "punctualisation" or "blackboxing", and such networks can in turn be treated as single actors within other networks (Law, 1992:385, Latour, 1999b:304, Callon, 1991:153). We also saw in Section 1 that assemblages can be composed of other assemblages, and DeLanda also argues that sometimes these can be treated as single actors: The assemblages relevant to my research in this regard are modern organisations (DeLanda, 2006b:70). In both cases this reduction of arrangements to a single actor is precarious, given the precarious nature of the arrangements themselves, as we saw in Section 1 for assemblages, and as we will see below for networks.

Example ANT studies and the concept of enrolment. Law states that ANT is not an abstract approach, but one grounded in empirical case studies, and that it can only be understood in the context of those studies (2009:141, see also, 2003:1,8). Therefore, rather than continue my abstract account, for the rest of this section I will discuss some examples of ANT studies, illustrating the concept of actor-networks defined above and also using the examples to introduce the key concept of "enrolment".

One example is Madeline Akrich's account (1993) of the operation of a Swedish briquette making machine in Nicaragua, and I will very briefly outline some elements of it here using Law's (2003:2-4) English language account (Law describes this as "an exemplary actor-network study" (2003:4)). The machine takes by-products from the forest industry (e.g. sawdust, shavings, offcuts) and turns them into briquettes to be burned as fuel in the processes of other industries. The Swedes wondered if Nicaragua, which was short of fuel, could use the machine to convert tropical forest waste. However, because the forests in Nicaragua were remote from populated areas and held by the Contras at the time, forest waste could not be used. Experiments were tried with other waste products. Waste products from the rice industry did not work, but cotton stalks, which were waste from the cotton industry, did form durable briquettes. It was also plentiful, and farmers were required by law to dispose of it to keep pests under control. But the cotton stalks needed to be collected from the fields, and a machine from Sudan was used to collect and bale the stalks. It also turns out that while Swedish industry used the briquettes, Nicaraguan industry was not interested as their boilers could not burn the briquettes. The briquettes however were suitable for different markets: Domestic users and for bakeries.

Drawing upon and elaborating Law's analysis of this case study (2003:3) we can see a number of key ANT concepts in action here. Firstly, it is a story of two networks, one Swedish and one Nicaraguan. In the Swedish context the network is one of Swedish sawmills, their wood waste products, a machine to convert the waste to briquettes, and industrial buyers, just to list some of the main actors. In the Nicaraguan context the network consists of cotton farmers,

laws that make the farmers disposed to cooperate, cotton stalks, the Swedish

machine modified to handle cotton stalks, the machine's advocates, a

Sudanese bailing machine, domestic buyers and bakers. In both cases

heterogeneous networks of humans and non-humans are involved. These

networks also transform and define their actors by the different ways they act

upon each other, e.g. cotton stalks are transformed from useless and potentially

biologically harmful waste into useful raw material for the machine. The

machine is also transformed through its operation in the Nicaraguan

environment, and redefined in that new network.

We can also see that forming the Nicaraguan network was a process that

required work: For example, different raw materials were experimented with,

farmers were approached, and buyers were sought out and contracted with.

ANT scholars typically refer to this bringing in of different elements into a

network as "enrolment": That is, different actors are enrolled by other actors to

help the network achieve its aims, and this enrolment process is one that

transforms the new actor so that it is aligned with those aims (see for example

Callon and Law, 1982, Latour, 1999b:194, Callon, 1986:211) . Another

example of enrolment and transformation is from Law's study of the Portuguese

trading empire of the 15th and 16th Century. Here new types of ship rigging

transform and enrol certain previously adverse and dangerous winds into new

sources of propulsion for their ships (Law, 1986:240).

However, enrolment is precarious, and so therefore are the networks:

> Building and maintaining networks is an uphill battle - … enrolment is
> precarious … links and nodes in the network do not last all by

themselves but instead need constant maintenance work, the support of other links and nodes. (Law, 2003:3)

This idea that constant maintenance is required is prominent in the Portuguese study: The stability of that network, the trading empire, required the regular transit of ships from Lisbon to Goa or Calicut in India and back again so the centre could maintain the enrolment of the peripheries' actors within the network (Law, 2009:146, Law, 1986:240-1).

Sometimes, however, in spite of attempts to maintain the network's stability, actors can cease to perform their assigned roles, and the network comes apart: Callon's study of marine biologists who attempt to develop a conservation strategy for scallops in St Brieuc Bay in France illustrates this point (Callon, 1986). The biologists enrol the scallops through laying collectors in the bay for the scallop larvae to attach and grow protected from predators. They also enrol the local fishermen, negotiating with them to stay away from the collectors, convincing them that allowing the scallops to thrive in the collectors will lead to an increase over time in the bay's rapidly depleting scallop population. In the first year this network is stable, but in the second year it begins to come apart: The next generation of larvae fail to attach to the collectors. The scallop larvae no longer perform the role within the network for which they were enrolled. Similarly, the fisherman one day some time later decide to harvest the collectors for the mature scallops that have grown from the initial larvae, and destroy the collectors in the process: The translation by the marine biologists of the fishermen's interest in short-term gain into an interest in long-term sustainable fishing grounds fails.

3. Conclusion

Assemblages and actor-networks are arrangements of heterogeneous elements such as people, technologies and texts. The different elements interact with each other, defining each other in the process, and the arrangements of which they are a part, but they are also entirely separable from each other and their arrangements. There is nothing necessary about these arrangements: They are contingent and could have been arranged differently. Also, they are not static and settled once and for all, but dynamic, open-ended and precarious.

In discussing these arrangements, the two different groups of theorists emphasise different aspects of them, and use their own terminology in doing so, as we saw above. Assemblage theorists talk about how component parts can play material or expressive roles. They also talk about the different processes that stabilize arrangements and their identity through sharpening spatial boundaries, homogenising components and coding behaviour, and the corresponding destabilizing processes. ANT theorists are also concerned with processes that stabilize arrangements, and also how those processes can fail resulting in destabilization, although the processes they speak about are transformation (or translation) and enrolment, rather than territorialisation and coding.

We also saw that the application of the concept of assemblages to human-technology interactions has precedent, and indeed there is precedent too in applying the concept of actor-networks to think about media and media

technologies (e.g. Couldry, 2008, Gane and Beer, 2008, Rossi, 2010, Turner, 2005, Tatnall and Lepa, 2003, van Dijck, 2013).

For the remainder of my thesis I will use the word "assemblages" as a shorthand term to refer to both assemblages and actor-networks, and the term "assemblage theory" to refer to both schools of thought.[21] Also, when using the different theoretical concepts discussed above to describe and analyse the arrangements I examine in the fieldwork chapters below, I will draw upon whichever concepts offer the most explanatory power, without regard for their theoretical school.[22]

As mentioned in the opening to this chapter, my decision to use assemblage theory was taken after my initial encounter with the field because some key concepts from it allowed me to interrogate the unexpectedly complex and problematic situations I was encountering in a more detailed and systematic way during the rest of my time in the field, and because it provided a framework for the systematic description and analysis of those situations. We shall see in the fieldwork chapters that the notion of assemblage provides an elegant way of abstractly describing the complex arrangements of different people and technologies that my informants made to distribute their videos. The concepts

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[21] ANT theorists in fact sometimes use this term themselves when talking about networks (e.g. Latour, 2005:7, Callon and Caliskan, 2005:24, Callon, 2005, where Callon uses the untranslated French term "agencement" used by Deleuze and Guattari).

[22] It may also be the case that sometimes two terms, one from each school, offer an equally adequate description of the situation I am describing because of their similarity, such as "molar" and "punctualised". For the sake of brevity I will only refer to the one I believe best describes the situation, although in some cases there will be little to choose between them.

of enrolment, territorialisation and coding provide useful ways of describing and analysing the different, often laborious and sometimes contested processes discussed in the fieldwork chapters that my informants engaged in to create and maintain their assemblages of people and technology. These theoretical concepts also provide ways of accounting for the lack of stability that many of these video distribution assemblages experienced, a recurring them in the fieldwork chapters, by emphasising the dynamic nature of assemblages, and identifying the destabilisation processes they are subject to such as deterritorialisation, and highlighting the precariousness of even successful translations.

Before I embark upon these fieldwork chapters however, I will first discuss the methodology that framed them.

Chapter 4. Methodology

The method I chose to empirically investigate traditional amateur video makers' use of the Internet was ethnography, and in Section 1 I discuss the nature of ethnography in online environments, and why it is an appropriate method for this investigation. In Sections 2 and 3 I address some of the anxieties researchers still have about its use in online environments, which centre on issues arising from the differences between this kind of ethnographic field site and ones studied traditionally by ethnography. In particular, they concern complexities in defining the ethnographic field and what counts as being present for a researcher within it.

In Section 4 I introduce my research informants: VisionOntv, the California Community Media Exchange, and the fan video group centred on the VividCon convention and LiveJournal. I discuss my process for selecting them, and my initial entry into the ethnographic field. This then provides the context for discussing how the various considerations of the previous sections impacted upon my research. In Section 5 I discuss the specific methods I employed in the field. In Section 6 I discuss the nature of, and my motivation for, including a hypermedia visual ethnography as part of my representation of the different groups I studied. Finally, in Section 7, I reflect upon some of the ethical issues involved in this kind of study and how I addressed them.

1. The nature of ethnographies of online environments

Writing a little over a decade ago, Daniel Miller and Don Slater felt the need

to defend ethnography as their chosen methodology in the opening lines of

their self-consciously entitled book *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach*:

> Why should we do an ethnography of the Internet … ? Because - contrary to the first generation of Internet literature - the Internet is not a monolithic or placeless "cyberspace"; rather, it is numerous new technologies, used by diverse people, in diverse real-world locations. Hence, there is everything to be gained by an ethnographic approach, by investigating how Internet technologies are being understood and assimilated somewhere in particular … (2000:1)

Since then ethnographic approaches to Internet use have become

commonplace amongst researchers, and are advocated by many as well

suited to this domain. For instance, Andrea Press and Sonia Livingstone

argue for bringing across the ethnographic method from television audience

studies because it has a number of strengths that are suited to Internet

studies:

> The advantages of this work include its interdisciplinarity, the richness of its data and insights, its ability to integrate the study of text and viewer, and contextualization (2006:176)

They suggest this has led to the development of a critical tradition in media

studies, which will aid in the current challenge in Internet studies, as they see

it, of balancing "textual determinism, social determinism, and the agency of

the audience or user" (2006:195).

Christine Hine advocates ethnography from a different perspective. She

characterises it as:

> An approach that allows researchers to study social situations on their own terms. The key idea is that the researcher should become immersed in the social situation being studied and should use that

> experience to try to learn how life is lived there, rather than coming in with a particular pre-formed research question or assumptions about the issues that will be of interest. Ethnography is thought of as the most open of research approaches, which adapts itself to the social situations that it finds. (2009:6)

She then reviews approvingly a number of ethnographic studies of the

Internet, and concludes that they demonstrate:

> The strength of approaches that engage deeply with technologies and with the people designing and using them … The results are studies that illuminate the social dynamics at the heart of the technologies concerned. The key to this insight is immersion. (2009:12)

Beaulieu (2004:143) also points to others that "have argued that

ethnographic methods are actually quite well suited to study internet

sociality, given the recent theoretical debates in anthropology about multiple

identities and dynamism of communities".

I believe, for the reasons outlined above, that an ethnographic approach is

also well suited to the subject of my research. The use of the Internet for

amateur video distribution is only a few years old and has been in a rapid

state of flux since its inception until the present day. Also, there have been

very few empirical social studies of it (and the findings of these may already

be out of date), so currently there is little that can be reliably concluded about

the social dynamics of this technology. Therefore, a methodology that

respects our ignorance of this medium by approaching the people that use it

on their own terms - not with specific preconceived questions, but openly and

adaptably through immersion in their social life and relations (*qua* video

producers) - and that promises rich data and insights into their little-

understood social dynamics, seems one worth pursuing. Perhaps for these

reasons, some of the earliest empirical social studies of amateur Internet

video adopted an ethnographic approach (e.g. Mike Wesch (as described by Young, 2007) and Patricia Lange's (2009) studies of YouTube).

While ethnography is now a well-established research methodology for empirical social studies of Internet use, those that adopt it recognise its application to that domain is not without complexities or problematic elements. For instance, Annette Markham and Nancy Baym express some anxieties about the use of qualitative methods in general for studying the Internet:

> Novel research terrain brings with it novel difficulties. It is hard to know how well older theoretical and methodological frameworks can be applied to understand contemporary social formations. Can we still draw on theories that were developed in an earlier epoch to frame our inquiry and explain our findings? (2009:xiii)

In the next two sections I will address some of the methodological anxieties expressed in the literature in this regard.

2. Defining the ethnographic field

Hine highlights a key issue with defining field sites for contemporary ethnographies:

> The question of where to begin and end an ethnography, and where to go in between, has to be one of the main sources of anxiety for a contemporary ethnographer. Many of the people who might form subjects of ethnographic inquiry live media saturated lives, connected to diverse others across the globe … The world is a complicated place, and ethnography as a methodological stance has to struggle with the consequent difficulty of defining field sites. (Hine, 2009:7)

Hine here is talking about contemporary ethnography in general, and not specifically about ethnographies of the Internet. In thinking about how to study contemporary cultures ethnographically, some scholars in

anthropology, sociology and cultural studies have challenged some of the assumptions associated with this methodology. In particular, the notion that a culture, and hence the ethnographic "field" or "setting", is something relatively self-contained and bounded to a geographic place, like a village, has been called into question (Olwig and Hastrup, 1997:1, Amit, 2000:13, Hannerz, 1992:39). Rather, cultures are being reimagined as "belong[ing] primarily to social relationships, and to networks of such relationships" (Hannerz, 1992:39), and therefore ethnographic fields are "field[s] of relations which are of significance to the people involved in the study" (Olwig and Hastrup, 1997:8) and "their boundaries are not fixed but shift across occasions … through processes of redefinition and negotiation" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:32. See also Hine, 2008:8). Understandably, this broadening of ethnography to be concerned with fields of relationships, rather than solely with the happenings at a specific physical location, has been embraced by scholars interested in applying it to studies of the Internet (Leander and Mckim, 2003:214, Hine, 2000:10, Boyd, 2009:28).

Understanding cultures as consisting in social relationships however has consequences for how an ethnographer engages with a contemporary field site:

> In a world of infinite interconnections and overlapping contexts, the ethnographic field cannot simply exist, awaiting discovery... as an independently bounded set of relationships and activities which is autonomous of the fieldwork through which it is discovered. ... It has to be laboriously constructed, prised apart from all the other possibilities for contextualization to which its constituent relationships and connections could also be referred. This process of construction is inescapably shaped by the … ethnographer. (Amit, 2000:6)

While Amit is talking about contemporary ethnographies in general, the role of the ethnographer in shaping the field for ethnographies of the Internet in particular is stressed by Markham (2004:360,362), Hine (2000:64, 2009:18, 2005b:111), and Rutter and Smith (2005:85).

One source of anxiety for the ethnographer of the Internet therefore involves letting go of the modernist notion of the clearly bounded and independently existing field, and the certainty that comes with that, and embracing instead the more post-modernist one of ethnographer as creator (or possibly co-creator, along with her informants) of the field, along with all the uncertainties and ambiguities this entails. Hine underscores one such source of ambiguity in particular when it comes to ethnographies of technology:

> The problem in defining appropriate field sites is that it is not always possible to identify in advance where the relevant social dynamics for understanding a particular technology are going on … The identity of the technology, and thus where to start and stop in studying it, cannot be decided in advance. (2009:4)

She provides what she describes as one "iconic" example of this, de Laet and Mol's study of the Zimbabwe bush pump. According to Hine, they found that the pump had multiple identities (e.g. a hydraulic system, a community project, a heath promoter, a nation-building apparatus), and that each identity came with its own different boundaries. Deciding in advance what the technology was and what the appropriate boundaries were would have prevent them from appreciating the multiple identities of this technology, and the different social relationships it is embedded within (2009:4).

With respect to the Internet, it can also be conceptualised in different ways, sometimes simultaneously, and each of these can suggest different

appropriate field sites. Two such conceptualisations are the Internet as a

tool, or cultural artefact, and as a place, or cultural space (Hine, 2000:9,

Hine, 2009:4, Beaulieu, 2005:183, Markham, 2004:360). That is, the Internet

can be viewed as a computer mediated communications tool for doing things

like banking or reading news reports, or as a social space where one can

share experiences, make friends or just hang out.

Another field boundary issue which ethnographers of the Internet must take

into account is the relationship between online and offline domains:

> The distinction between the online and offline has been essential to
> the understanding of the Internet from its earliest days. Some of the
> early research on Internet … depicted the online space as an
> autonomous, self-contained realm, separate from the offline world. …
> However, the separation between online and offline has been
> increasingly challenged ... Researchers have recognized that online
> spaces and relations do not evolve in isolation from existing social and
> cultural processes and institutions. (Orgad, 2009b:514-5)

Orgad goes on to conclude, after citing a number of researchers in the area,

that the Internet is embedded within offline contexts which it in turn

transforms. This conclusion is echoed by Leander and McKim who state,

based on their own ethnographic research and a summary of others, that

"online and offline practices and spaces are co-constituted, hybridized, and

embedded within one another" (2003:223).

The methodological implications of the acknowledgement of this complex

relationship between online and offline is that researchers must rethink the

boundaries of the fields and the objects they study: "Even if the object of

study is located online, researchers need to ground their investigations in …

the broader [offline] structures within which it is situated …" (Orgad,

2009b:529). After a comprehensive review of ethnographies of the Internet,

Garcia et. al. come to a similar conclusion:

> While some social phenomena exist solely online, we found that there are very few research topics that justify limiting the field to online phenomena … the setting of the study should typically be defined to include relevant offline components of the social world as well as the [computer mediated communication]. (2009:56)

Hine also supports these conclusions, but somewhat less emphatically:

> Some studies of the Internet might confine themselves to a particular online or offline setting, but in other cases we may define a topic of interest that requires us to cross between online and offline … Social phenomena are not uniquely confined to online or offline sites, and it would be a mistake to allow these notions automatically to provide boundaries for our studies. (2009:18)

While Orgad, Garcia et al., and Hine (see also Bakardjieva, 2009:59-60) all

seem to be agreeing that the online site of interest at least should be

considered in its offline context as researchers construct the boundaries of

their projects, they appear to be differing over the degree of necessity with

which researchers need to engage with the offline context as a research site.

In what circumstances then should researchers consider *avoiding* the offline

context? While this must be decided by each researcher on a case by case

basis as they consider the specific nature of their studies (see for example

Orgad, 2005:64, 2009a:41), Orgad points out that there are situations where

it "might be insensitive to the context being studied, might involve

problematic ethical consequences, or might simply be impractical"

(2009a:51). She points out one specific risk in this regard:

> Since most participants in online spaces have never met face-to-face, in instigating face-to-face interactions with them researchers might place themselves in an asymmetric position, using more varied means of communication to understand informants than those used by the informants themselves … researchers might thus actually threaten

their experimental understanding of the informants' online world.
(Orgad, 2005:53)

In this section then I have outlined the key issues discussed in the literature

relating to anxieties around defining the ethnographic field, but before I look

at how these considerations impact my research, I will first look at a second

set of anxieties researchers have with regard to ethnographies of the

Internet.

3. Presence in the field and data collection

Hammersley and Atkinson summarise the basic elements of ethnographic

data collection:

> Ethnography usually involves the researcher participating, overtly or
> covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time,
> watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking
> questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting
> documents and artefacts … (2007:3)

Amit argues that physical presence is not an essential requirement in the

data collection process for contemporary ethnographies. He reviews a

number of anthropological ethnographies of contemporary field sites and

states:

> To explore these "fields", some of the contributors stayed put in one
> site for many months, others made short periodic visits to one or
> several sites, [some saw] informants daily, others very infrequently,
> still others balanced face-to-face interactions with email, letters and
> telephone calls. (2000:11)

He goes on to argue that not only is physical absence a feature of many

contemporary ethnographies, but that ethnography has always been

characterised as much by absence as presence:

> Some local arenas were restricted to long-standing initiates or to
> people of certain gender, class, ethnicity, ritual status, etc. Even the

most intense involvement in activities located at a specific site was unlikely, in and of itself, to provide direct information about influential but more distant processes and agents … hence … interviews, archival documents, census data, artefacts, media materials and more … [where required] to explore processes not immediately or appropriately accessible through participant observation. (2000:12)

With respect to ethnographies of the Internet in particular, Hine also supports the view that physical presence is not a necessary requirement, and urges the ethnographer to be "engaging in relevant practices wherever they might be found" (2009:12), and that the ethnographer has to "find ways of immersing themselves in life as it is lived online, and as it connects through into offline social spheres" (2005a:18). Deciding how to go about this however is not unproblematic. One issue involves weighing up the appeal of simply "lurking", that is acting as a passive, unannounced observer of the goings on at the online field site, versus the opportunities a more active and overt engagement might bring (Hine, 2009:11). Leander and McKim see lurking as a limited strategy for an ethnographer:

> As Baym … and Correll … both stress, this type of participant observation would threaten the authority that comes from exposing the emerging ethnographic analysis to the challenge of interaction. Part of the authority of the ethnographic representation is directly related to the interaction between informants and researcher as participant. (2003:216)

Similar sentiments are expressed by some ethnographers surveyed by Garcia et al. (2009:59). Also, Beaulieu (2004:147) summarises several ethnographers who point out that all relevant interactions may not be happening in the public space. For example, some online bulletin board interactions also involve the participants sending private messages to each other through the bulletin board's private message functionality or other methods such as email. Lurking researchers would therefore miss out on

these interactions. There are also ethical issues to do with lurking as a data

collection method, and I will address these in Section 7.

Active participation as a strategy to collect data online over simply lurking is

however not unproblematic either. Building rapport with informants is as

important in active online participation as it is in offline participation, but it

presents some specific challenges:

> There is a real challenge in building rapport online. Trust, a fragile
> commodity … seems ever more fragile in a disembodied, anonymous
> and textual setting. Harrington and Bielby … go as far as arguing that
> the conditions for people to trust one another are absent in computer-
> mediated settings. Even if we do not accept that extreme a claim, we
> cannot ignore the potential obstacles that anonymity and
> disembodiment pose in attempting to arrive at a relationship of trust
> with other people online. (Orgad, 2005:55)

Mann and Stewart also cite concerns some researchers have that since

"[Computer-mediated communication] cannot achieve the highly interactive,

rich and spontaneous communication that can be achieved [face-to-face] …

it is not conducive to establishing good interpersonal relationships …",

although they ultimately reject this conclusion (2000:127). Hine, aware of

these issues, argues that online research encounters can be "unrewarding,

stilted, terse and unenlightening" and if researchers are to avoid this, they

must "become skilled at making and sustaining relationships online"

(2005c:17).

So far in this chapter I have examined the nature of ethnographies of the

Internet, what constitutes the field for ethnographies of this kind, and how

researchers might position themselves in the field. In the following section I

will examine how these were taken into consideration in my fieldwork,

although this will first require an introductory discussion of my research informants and their selection process.

4. Research informant selection and my arrival in the field

In settling upon the specific research informants for my fieldwork, I took into account a number of criteria. One such criterion was a purely practical one. For the reasons discussed in Section 1, I decided upon an ethnographic approach to investigate my research question, but this kind of approach has its limitations: "The focus is usually on a few cases, generally fairly small-scale, perhaps a single setting or group of people. This is to facilitate in-depth study." (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:3). To this end, I first decided to exclude professional producers from my research and focus on amateurs because at the time this project was conceived amateur video makers' distribution practices appeared to be more impacted by the Internet than professionals'. To further reduce scope, I decided to only research three of the four main types of amateur producers active before the Internet discussed in the literature: The type I decided not to study was home movie makers, and the primary reason for this was that it was the type that appeared to have had the most sustained academic attention (for example, Moran, 2002, Zimmermann, 1995a), including a detailed empirical study published at the same time I was beginning my fieldwork (Buckingham et al., 2011). Finally, to allow a sufficiently in-depth study given the time available, I decided to concentrate the fieldwork on one group from each of the three remaining types, where the decision to focus on groups rather than

selections of unrelated individuals was driven by a desire to provide a coherence to the ethnographies.

In selecting the specific groups from within the three remaining types, I decided to restrict my search to groups that operated in English, to facilitate my in-depth engagement with them, and I concentrated on the US and UK to ensure a potentially large pool of interesting candidates, while still maintaining some geographic focus. I was also looking for groups that were currently actively engaged in amateur video making (since I was looking to conduct ethnographic rather than historical research), and that were also of sufficient scale to potentially provide enough material to support a research project of this kind. The groups I finally settled upon satisfied these criteria better than any of the other candidates I considered. For the rest of this section I will describe how I settled upon these groups, drawing upon the observations of the previous sections where relevant, and also briefly describe my arrival in the field for each group (a detailed description of them and our interactions will be deferred until the following three chapters however).

Alternative video producers: VisionOntv. I conducted a pilot study for my fieldwork within the first few months of beginning my doctorate. My research question at that time was more broadly focussed, and looked at online video producers in general, and did not distinguish between amateurs and professionals, nor did it require that these producers belong to categories that were active before the Internet, or any particular category for that matter. However, I knew from the literature that activists were using the Internet to

distribute videos and engage in conversations about them, so I decided to start with them. Since much of the literature I had read on the subject focussed on YouTube (see Chapter 2), I thought at the time that this would be an uncontroversial place to start looking for activists (as well as others) to research.

Since my chosen methodology was ethnography, I had decided to make a video describing my research to upload to YouTube as part of my participant observer research persona.[23] That is, I was establishing myself as a video producer on YouTube, and therefore participating in the same activities as my proposed research subjects, and was planning to use this video to engage in a dialogue about my research, and about their videos. At the time, again perhaps influenced by the literature on YouTube, I felt that activists and others would readily identify with being "YouTube video producers": That is, I felt it was a relevant ethnographic category for my research. Therefore, at the time, I believed that to participate credibly with activists (and others) on YouTube, I only needed to be participating as a generic YouTube producer, rather than specifically as an activist video maker.

After uploading my video I went searching on YouTube for research informants. I came across one activist, known as "justiciayauk", whom I messaged through the YouTube private messaging system, and through which I received a reply. Our discussion moved to email, and I eventually met up with him in London for an interview. I was also in the process of

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[23] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GegW4xC5yZQ

organising interviews with several other non-activist YouTube producers at the time (including the YouTube celebrity geriatric1927). However, at this time I began to feel uncomfortable with my approach. While my initial engagement with the field was bearing fruit, it also made me feel that "online video producers" was too broad and generic a category. I stopped the pilot at this point and reconsidered my approach.

I considered narrowing my focus to YouTube producers only, but Hine's warning, discussed in Section 2, about deciding in advance what the technology was and what the appropriate boundaries were, made me hesitate. It was at this point that I decided to narrow my focus down to categories of producers who were using other distribution methods prior to the advent of the Internet, for the reasons discussed in Chapter 1. It was also at this point that I developed and applied the criteria discussed at the beginning of this section. While this meant I did not pursue the discussions begun in the pilot study any further, it also meant that video activists were still relevant to my research, and so I turned to the literature discussed in Chapter 2 looking for activist groups I might approach. I first approached Indymedia London, initially via email, and I eventually arranged an interview with Startx, who helped run their website and was developing a new content management system for them. While informative, it appeared that they did not emphasise video as a medium, so I decided not to pursue them further. I also considered Camcorder Guerrillas, and mentioned them to Startx, but his and my estimation at the time was that they weren't very active. I then approached Undercurrents by email asking for an interview, and got this response:

Hello John
Love to help but it will have to be next month as we are flat out at the
moment.

Contact hamish@visionon.tv as he is setting up our internet tv
channel

Cheers
Paul
Undercurrents

I was intrigued by this, and duly contacted Hamish to arrange an interview.

After weeks of chasing and a few email exchanges, I eventually received this

obscure email:

can you do this Saturday at opentec conf - you would have to do the
interview as a studio TV show though (:

I had no idea what he meant. After a brief online search, I deciphered

"opentec conf" as the OpenTech 2011 open source conference in London,

and I saw on the conference website that visionOntv were running what was

described as a "revolutionary pop-up TV studio". I didn't know what this

meant either, but I was intrigued, so I decided to attend the conference and

see what happened.

At the conference I eventually found them out on a balcony with their studio

set up interviewing someone.

4.1 *The pop-up studio at OpenTech 2011 (London, 21 May 2011)*

I watched for a little while, and eventually introduced myself at a convenient

moment. I asked if I could hang around for a while and just observe, and

they were happy with that. Although I didn't bring any photographic

equipment with me, as I was only expecting to do an interview and leave

again, I had my phone with me, and I asked permission to take a photo of the

studio in operation (above). After being there for an hour or so, they were

having some sound problems, and Hamish (lower left) turned to me and

asked if I knew how they could turn up the microphone sound on Windows 7.

I eventually ended up sound "engineering" and also running one of the studio

laptops for the whole day (the details of their studio system is described in

Chapter 7). Other visionOntv members arrived during the day, and I was

engaged in a number of informal discussions with them in the down time

between interviews, over drinks after the conference finished, and also over

dinner later that night. This was the beginning of my engagement with them that stretched over a full year.

Community media producers: California Community Media Exchange. My search for a community video producer group initially began in the UK where I came across two organisations: The Community TV Trust, whose main relevant project at the time was Southwark.tv, and the Media Trust with their Community Voices project, which funded and supported a variety of local community media initiatives. Community Voices seemed by far the more substantial of the two projects, so I conducted an initial interview with Kim Townsend who ran the project, and I also had a subsequent follow up chat with her at a Media Trust event a couple of weeks later. My impression from speaking to her, and after investigating the initiatives she highlighted during her interview, such as Nunny TV (a community TV initiative of Nunsthorpe Estate in Grimsby), was that once the initial funding ran out these initiatives found it very hard to sustain themselves and often reduced dramatically in size or simply stopped.

Since I wanted to find community video makers that had sufficient scope, output and longevity to sustain my project, I began looking elsewhere. From the literature, I knew that public access television in the US was a very large scale and well-funded community media phenomenon, at least when compared with the other community media initiatives I had become aware of through my research. I therefore began looking through the websites and watching the videos of dozens of public access stations. Many had basic websites, and the video on them was often simply a webcast of their

television channels. What's more, some did not seem to have any public access programming at all, and were only broadcasting local government and education channels.[24] I eventually came across the Open Media Project, a web 2.0 initiative for public access television led by seven stations.[25] These stations seemed good candidates for my research for two main reasons. Not only were they engaged in an interesting Internet initiative, but they were also somehow connected together: I felt that I would need to study more than one station to get sufficient material for my project, but at the time I wanted these stations to be connected somehow so I could address them as a whole. But because at this stage of my research I also wanted to keep the option of visiting the stations open, given the discussion in the above section concerning the significance of offline settings, I decided against this group as they were spread across the US making the potential cost and time involved in visiting them prohibitive.

I decided however to examine these seven OMP stations further, and I saw that one of them, Davis Media Access, was part of the California Community Media Exchange (CACMX): An association of seven public access stations in the greater bay area of northern California. After sending an introductory email to CACMX via their website, I was eventually contacted by Ericha Hager, a volunteer who helped coordinate CACMX. Following an email exchange with Ericha, I conducted initial interviews via Skype with her and

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[24] While I use the term "public access stations" throughout for convenience, these stations typically broadcast other television channels in addition to their public access channels, as I explain in Chapter 5. With respect to the websites mentioned here, I later discovered through my fieldwork that the public access channels of these stations had been closed due to funding cuts.
[25] I discuss this in detail in Chapter 5.

Kathy Bisbee, the Executive Director of the Community Media Access Partnership in Gilroy (CMAP), which was one of the CACMX stations and where Ericha was based. As a consequence of those interviews I decided to attend the upcoming Alliance for Community Media conference in Tucson, Arizona, which was the public access stations' annual joint event, as they said this would be an opportunity to meet public access staff from across the US, including some from CACMX. Ericha also introduced me via email to the other stations in CACMX and helped me plan an itinerary to visit them as part of my trip to the US for the conference.

While I had hoped to study the association as a whole, it quickly became apparent once I was in the field that there was no overarching CACMX staff or organisation (and Ericha's tenure as coordinator finished as I arrived in the US), that each station functioned as an autonomous unit with its own specific local organisation, resources, operations, practices and concerns, and that the stations in fact had very little contact with each other. As a result, I decided to focus on individual centres within the association, rather than on the association as a whole. For reasons of scope, I focussed my research primarily on two centres, Davis Media Access (DMA) in Davis and the Community Media Center of Marin (CMCM) in San Rafael, and on three producers from each station, although my research also encompassed to a lesser extent station staff and producers from CMAP and Community Television of Santa Cruz County (CTV). Based on discussions with Ericha and a variety of staff, I concluded that this selection would supply enough material to sustain my project, provide an interesting cross-section of CACMX stations and producers, and also be logistically feasible.

Film and television fan video producers: The VividCon-LiveJournal group. I thought a good way to make contact with fan groups would be by attending a fan convention. While it was not difficult to find fan conventions (e.g. Starfury Conventions, 2011), I was looking for ones that were focussed on videos, rather than just had a video session, and these proved much harder to find. After some days searching for a suitable candidate, I came across VividCon (2011), a fan video convention held annually in Chicago in August. I quickly discovered it also had a sister convention, Vidukon (2011), which was a UK-based convention that had been held once before in 2010, and was due to happen again in a week's time in Cardiff (April 2011). These seemed to fit my criteria, and were the only fan video making conventions I had come across after considerable effort searching and following up leads from the literature discussed in Chapter 2, so I decided to make contact.

Initially I was unsure about how to do this. While I could have just emailed the VividCon organisers directly, I was mindful of the discussions in the literature outlined in Chapter 2 about some fans' desire to avoid attention of copyright holders, and therefore their desire for anonymity, and also the discussion in this chapter of the literature about the need to find ways of building trust with informants contacted online. I could also have tried to negotiate last minute access to Vidukon (I had missed the registration deadline by the time I discovered it), but I had surmised from the online material that this was a very small scale convention of a fairly tightly knit group, and coming in as an unannounced outsider could be intrusive and also jeopardise the research. After some reflection, and also after

discovering that LiveJournal, the online journal website, was a key platform

for the attendees of both conventions, I decided to use that platform as a way

of introducing myself and my research as an indirect and perhaps less

threatening way into the field. I therefore set up a LiveJournal account, and

made my first entry on April 1, 2011, introducing myself (Hondros, 2011).

Again, mindful of the discussion concerning trust, I decided upon full and

detailed disclosure of who I was and what research I was conducting,

including a link to my academia.edu page which contained my full name,

photo, university affiliation and a variety of other offline world information

about me.

Within a few hours of posting this I reviewed a comment to my journal entry

from Laura Shapiro, whom I later discovered was one of the prominent

members of the community:

> Welcome to the journal-based vidding community!
>
> If you're not already aware of it, you may want to make yourself
> familiar with the Organization for Transformative Works, which is
> involved in the archiving and preservation of vids and other fan
> creations, and which publishes an academic journal that I think you
> will find relevant to your interests. (:

Over the next month Laura and I exchanged seven messages via the

LiveJournal comments system as I negotiated with her to take part in my

research. I began by asking her some general questions about how her

group related to other fan video makers, and also commented on a

documentary she made on fan videos. I didn't hear from her for about two

weeks, and then I received a reply which first apologised for her absence,

and then answered my general questions. We then exchanged some

comments about her recent trip to the UK (which was the reason for her

absence, and included her attendance at Vidukon) and also struck up a

conversation about a mutual interest in drive-in movie theatres, until we hit

upon the issue of trust with this comment from Laura:

> I did have fun in Cardiff! And everywhere I went. It was a great trip.
>
> Aww, nostalgic farewells to a dead drive-in will get me every time. Joe Bob Briggs salutes you, I'm sure.
>
> I wouldn't want to take part in your research without knowing exactly what you're doing, and I imagine most fans will feel the same. I don't know if you read about it, but we recently got burned by academics [a hyperlink to http://fanlore.org/wiki/SurveyFail] and the current climate toward aca-fans is not exactly warm and fuzzy. Just a heads-up.[26]

The link led to an article on the fan history wiki site "fanlore" describing in

detail what the authors considered to be some ethically and methodologically

questionable research into fandom. I wrote a very long reply to Laura's

comment giving even more detail about my research, including my actual

interview questions, a link to my department's website, inviting her to contact

my supervisor to establish my credentials, and providing links to his pages

on the University of Westminster website, academia.edu and also the

amazon.com link for one of his books. I then received this reply a few hours

later:

> Thanks for providing these details! That helps a lot. I also watched your [pilot] video about your research, so I'm starting to put together a picture of what you're doing. I'll be happy to answer your questions, but probably not for a while. What's your timetable? I have vid deadlines![27]

Our conversation then moved to email, where Laura answered my questions,

recommended other fans for me to interview, and gave her permission for

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[26] "Aca-fans" is short for "academic fans", and describes academics that research into fandom who would to some extent also identity with being fans themselves. Henry Jenkins, for example, is a self-proclaimed aca-fan.

[27] There was also a long paragraph after this continuing our discussion about drive-in movies which I have not included here.

me to use her name with fans I chose to approach myself. However, I believe having a public record of this negotiation was important in building trust with the community in general, since I directed all potential informants to my journal entry, and they could see for themselves through our comments on that entry how I addressed Laura's issues and her agreement to get involved in my research.

5. Methods

After this initial period of negotiation, my fieldwork began, spanning a period from May 2011 until June 2012. Typical of ethnographic approaches, my fieldwork combined a variety of data collection methods allowing for both the collection of a rich data set, and the ability to triangulate the data gathered by comparing the results obtained from one collection method against those of another (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:184). These methods included interviews conducted face-to-face, by telephone and Skype, and by email, with face-to-face being my preference whenever practically possible to help build trust with my informants. They also included the observation of my informants' activities at offline events, my participation at some of those events, and the casual conversations I conducted with them while there. In addition to offline observations, I also observed and conducted a detailed examination of my informants' online activities including the videos and images they uploaded to various sites; the posts they made on social networking sites, blogs and bulletin boards; comments on their videos on the different hosting and social networking sites where they appeared; and the other traces associated with their online activity such as "likes" and video view counts. I also participated in the online activities of my informants in a

number of different ways, including making comments on their videos and posts, making my own posts and engaging in real-time text chat on the different online services they used. Following standard ethnographic practice, I recorded notes of my offline and online observations and encounters as they happened (or as soon as practical) during my time in the field (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:141), and I also used video, still cameras and screen capture software to record the images of the field for my visual ethnography.

This mix of methods allowed me some important insights into my informants' activities. For example, the questions for my initial interviews with my informants were not just shaped by the literature review, but also by some initial observations I had made of their offline and online activities, allowing me to make the questions I asked more relevant to their specific circumstances. Also, during the initial interviews my informants directed me to a variety of online sites that would have been difficult for me to find otherwise. The initial interviews also provided me with information such as informant pseudonyms, names of videos they had made, or organisations they were involved with, and online searches I conducted based on information such as this occasionally enabled me to find other online sites they used that they had neglected to mention during our interviews. In addition, I would often follow up the initial interviews with some supplementary questions to clarify apparent inconsistences between what I was told and what I later observed.

As mentioned in the last chapter, after an initial period in the field I began to realise that the situation of my informants was more complex and problematic than what I had expected based on the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, and this led me to adopt assemblage theory as part of the theoretical framework for my research. Adopting this framework shaped my subsequent engagement with the field, adding the concepts of assemblage theory to those from the literature on amateur video. This meant, amongst other things, that I asked different questions of my informants, interpreted their activities in the field in new ways, put different emphasis on their passing comments, and understood the significance of some of the phenomena I was observing in different ways. For example, frustration with a failed software upgrade, concerns about disruptions caused by a denial of service attack, complaints about takedown notices generated by bots, and criticisms of Facebook's algorithm for filtering posts, rather than just being dismissed as background "noise", became important clues to understanding the nature of the processes my informants were engaging in as they distributed their videos online.

Finally, as time went on, and the number of informants I engaged with increased, and the observational and participatory data I gather on the different groups grew, I began to triangulate upon my own assessment as to what was going on in each group. My final interviews at the end of my period in the field, which were largely unstructured, were important ways of testing this assessment, as were the informal interactions I had with my informants both online and offline around this time. These final interviews and interactions were aided by the trust that I had established with my informants

through the regular contact I had with them over the year of my fieldwork, which allowed us to engage in some frank conversations. All these sources taken together enabled me to critically assess what I was told, saw and otherwise experienced, and the ethnographies presented in the following chapters should therefore be understood as a critical account and synthesis of my experiences in the field.

As mentioned in Section 1, ethnography is an open and adaptive methodology, and so how I specifically employed these different methods, and in what combination, depended on the specific circumstances of each informant group. For visionOntv, over the course of my fieldwork I attended 14 separate offline events and meetings as a participant observer (involving over 10 full days of activity), such as conferences, demonstrations and training workshops. Some of the major events were visionOntv's coverage of the J30 public sector workers' strike in London in June 2011, their coverage of the Rebellious Media Conference in London in October 2011, and the "Making News Roadshow" workshop they conducted in Liverpool in June 2011 (this last event is discussed in detail in Chapter 7). I had various participant roles at these events, which grew in scope as our relationship developed, including filming activities (for example, I produced videos of the three events listed above, and these are contained in the visual ethnography that accompanies this document), providing technical help, operating studio equipment, managing production processes, and generally pitching in and helping out. I had an in-depth engagement with 9 members of the visionOntv network at these events, but also met and had casual conversations with

another 10 members.[28] I also conducted formal interviews with these 9

members, 5 of whom I interviewed twice. I also engaged with visionOntv

online several times a week for 12 months through the different technology

platforms they employed, such as their own portal and Facebook pages, and

my activities included watching their videos and reading their posts, and also

making my own posts, comments and engaging in text chat.

For CACMX, I engaged with 31 informants, consisting of both station staff

and producers. In addition to conducting 34 interviews, I also engaged in a

number of offline and online activities with them.[29] The offline activities

included 25 days of observation and participation at the four stations

mentioned in the last section, although they were primarily conducted at

DMA and CMCM, during two separate trips to the US (July and August 2011,

and May 2012).[30] These activities included observing the production of five

television programmes, providing some minor assistance in the operation of

DMA (e.g. answering producer queries about editing software), and

producing my own episode of the DMA series "Street Talk" for broadcast and

Internet distribution (this episode can be viewed at the visual ethnography

accompanying this document, as can an observational video of the

production of an episode of the CMCM series *YogiViews*). The online

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[28] They estimated the size of their network at around 30 people (although they said, and I also observed, that there was some turnover in the network's membership over time), which included three core members, all of whom were part of my in-depth research.

[29] Eight informants were interviewed twice, and the other informants were interviewed once. Two group interviews with management staff from DMA and CMCM were also conducted.

[30] A brief visit to Access Sacramento and an interview with its Executive Director Ron Cooper was included in this even though it was not part of CACMX because of the involvement some of the DMA staff and producers had with it.

activities primarily involved participation on, and observation of, the various Internet presences of DMA, CMCM, and the six producers from those stations over 12 months, as well as a one-off examination of the online presence of CMAP, CTV and five other producers.[31]

In addition to the station visits, I also spent 3 days at the Alliance for Community Media conference in July 2011, where I attended workshops on public access stations' use of the Internet, and had numerous conversations with the six informants that attended and with station staff from other stations across the US. In fact, in addition to the 31 informants mentioned above, I engaged in significant informal, relevant discussions at both the conference and at the stations I visited with at least an additional 27 other public access staff, volunteers and producers.

I interacted with the fan group informally online several times a week over the course of a year, which involved reading their posts and comments, and watching their videos on the different Internet platforms they used, as well as making my own posts and comments on those platforms. In addition to this general interaction, I had an in-depth engagement with 11 fans, 7 of whom I interviewed twice and analysed a year's worth of their online activity (e.g. videos uploaded, journal posts) on the different platforms they used.[32] I also attended VividCon for 3 days in August 2011, where I participated as a

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[31] However, because of the very limited amount of online interaction that the stations and producers enjoyed with their audiences, opportunities for interacting online were very limited, and I will discuss this in detail in Chapter 5.

[32] Although I did not record the volume of my online interaction, I estimate that overall I would have viewed and read more than 1,000 videos, journal posts and comments from the group over the duration of my fieldwork.

volunteer (two shifts managing the hospitality suite), as a session panellist

(presenting my research), and generally as a delegate attending sessions

and having informal discussions with all but one of my 11 research

informants, as well as a further 12 delegates.[33]

In the previous sections I have discussed the nature of online ethnography,

addressed issues concerning the ethnographic field, outlined my own arrival

in the field and provided a summary of the methods I used to engage with it.

In the final two sections I will address the key methodological issues around

visual ethnography, to contextualise my own contribution to this approach,

and then close on some ethical considerations.

6. Visual ethnography

According to Sarah Pink, visual modes of research and representation have

now gained acceptance within ethnography:

> Anthropology experienced a 'crisis' [in the late 1980s] through which
> positivist arguments and realist approaches to knowledge, truth and
> objectivity were challenged. These ideas paved the way for the visual
> to be increasingly acceptable in ethnography as it was recognised that
> ethnographic film and photography were essentially no more
> subjective or objective than written texts and thus gradually became
> acceptable to … most mainstream researchers. (Pink, 2007:1)

Pink then goes on to conclude:

> While images should not necessarily replace words as the dominant
> mode of research or representation, they should be regarded as an
> equally meaningful element of ethnographic work. (Pink, 2007:6)

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[33] My informants estimated the size of their group at about 250 members, around
half of which attend VividCon each year.

Taking Pink's position as my point of departure, I will examine, in relationship to my research, some of the methodological literature that discusses the benefits and limitations of visual ethnographic methods as a way of representing ethnographic knowledge.

Summarising the views of other researchers, Spencer argues that one benefit of using visuals in social science research is that they have:

> An explicitness and immediacy which delivers a multisensory impact. This immediacy of the visual affects us in a profound and elusive way … there is a pre-reflective reaction … something indefinable … , grounding it in material reality. It is an immediate and authentic form which verbal accounts are unable to fully encompass. (Spencer, 2011:32)

Pauwels supports this, claiming that visual representation in social and cultural research has a "vast expressive potential … that opens up the way to scholarly argumentation and new avenues of expressing the unspeakable and unquantifiable" (Pauwels, 2010:572-3). Edwards also argues for the expressive potential of the visual in her analysis of photography for ethnography:

> Photography can communicate about culture, people's lives, experiences, and beliefs, not at the level of surface description but as visual metaphor which bridges that space between the visible and invisible, which communicates not through the realist paradigm but through a lyrical expressiveness. (1999:58)

Edwards contends that ethnographers need to allow expressive forms of photography a place alongside realist forms, just as the wider discipline of photography has done. She reasons that this is necessary because "there are components of culture which require a more evocative, multidimensional, even ambiguous expression than the realist paradigm permits …" (1999:54).

Pink, after endorsing Edwards's position with regard to realist and expressive

forms of ethnographic photography, goes on to state that expressive

ethnographic photography:

> Breaks the conventions of realist ethnographic photography by, for
> example, ambiguously representing fragments and details, and
> acknowledging the constructedness of images. Like expressionism in
> documentary photography, it 'aims to present a subjective reality' and
> 'the symbolic value of the image may be more important than
> straightforward denotation' … (2007:155)

Pink also extends this case for expressive photography to ethnographic films

and video clips (see for example 2007:172,181), something also advocated

by Ruby (1982:131).

As Edwards and Pink acknowledge, realist image forms still have a place in

ethnographies, just not an exclusive one. They can be used, for instance, to

support the ethnographer's authority by providing evidence of her presence

in the field, as support and an illustration for points made in an

accompanying written text (Pink, 2007:151), or providing a form of "thick

description" of a social situation (Spencer, 2011:33). They are of course not

endorsing a naïve realism here, but one that grants that some images do

indeed document something of the research subjects that they are

indexically related to, while at the same time acknowledging the ultimately

constructed, partial and subjective nature of those images (see for example

Pink, 2007:32).

There are two main kinds of images included within my ethnography: Stills

and moving images I have created to represent elements of the ethnographic

field, and elements of the ethnographic field itself. For the ones that are

representations, some are included to express aspects of my own and my

informants' subjective experience of the field, and others are more realist in their purpose. For example, the close-up images of the cameras, mixing board and other equipment in the visual ethnography's image rotator are meant to evoke something of the material circumstances I encountered in the field, and are not primarily included to document the existence of those particular pieces of equipment. On the other hand, for example, the observational footage of Antonio Sausys producing an episode of his series *YogiViews* is primarily included to document the activity it denotes. For the images that are elements of the field itself, such as Hamish's Hackney shooting video, I have included them so users of my visual ethnography can experience elements of the field directly. Since they are not representations made by me, but are rather a sample of the ethnographic field embedded within my visual ethnography, the foregoing theoretical discussion is not directly relevant to them. However, some of the concepts expressed in that discussion such as immediacy, explicitness and the limitations of verbal accounts can be extended I believe to justify the inclusion of images of this type in the visual ethnography over an alternative textual description of them.

Hypermedia representations. While ethnographic still images are typically bound within books and articles as "figures" or "plates", and moving images are largely confined to the genre of ethnographic film, hypermedia are an alternative representational media that can include both these visual forms, as well as written text and audio. While hypermedia (such as CD ROMs and websites) are accepted media for ethnographic representation, they are only slowly emerging (Dicks et al., 2005:159, Pink, 2007:191,192).

One reason for their acceptance is that while the media potentially could be employed as "a radically unstructured and anarchic mode of communication", they can and have been employed in ways that have maintained continuity with existing forms of ethnographic representation, offering a new perspective on the poetics of ethnographic discourse, rather than abandoning them (Pink, 2007:192, Dicks et al., 2005:178).

Another reason for their acceptance is that as ethnographic media they offer some advantages and new possibilities, and I will outline some of these here in relationship to my own website. One such advantage is that hypermedia allow for different pathways to be constructed through a particular set of data, and these pathways can be used to promote both multivocality and multilinearity within an ethnography (Dicks et al., 2005:160, Pink, 2007:194). With respect to multivocality, websites could be designed with hyperlinked pathways that connect up the different media representing a particular informant (such as interview texts, photos, video clips and audio samples), which might otherwise be fragmented throughout a conventional linear ethnography and subsumed under the ethnographer's authorial narrative. Similarly, the ethnographer may also create multiple interpretative pathways through her data set which, it is argued, may better represent the complexity and diversity of contemporary society and culture than a conventional linear ethnographic text (Dicks et al., 2005:160, Pink, 2007:194).

I have used this potential for creating different pathways in two main ways in my website. Firstly, I have allowed the user to access the different pages in the website through either the home page, which contains a short narrative

on each of the three informant groups with hyperlinks to the relevant

ethnographic webpages contextualised and embedded within that narrative,

or through a menu structure which is repeat throughout the site. More

importantly though is how I have used this potential to allow my informants'

voices to be heard. Rather than using it to connect up the different

ethnographic elements representing a particular informant, which are largely

consolidated in my website in any case, I employed it to connect up the

online elements of the field itself related to a particular informant by

embedding them within the ethnography. The user is therefore presented

with alternative ways of entering into the field, which they are then able to

experience for themselves, and these choices are contextualised by the

ethnographic narrative within which they are embedded. For example, the

ethnographic representation of Antonio Sausys and his public access

television series *YogiViews* contains hyperlinks within the text to his Blip

channel, his page on the CMCM website, his WordPress site, the *YogiViews*

Facebook page and his YouTube channel. Users are also able to enter the

field through the image rotator as the website images it contains all link

through to the actual website depicted. The user is therefore able to choose

to enter the field in different ways, and once there they can see the

informants' online presence for themselves, hearing their "voices" directly

within their original context, and even use the interactive elements of those

sites to interact with the informants personally.

Of course, while I do not directly mediate a user's encounter with the field

once they are on an informant's website, my selection of the particular

informants to include in my website, which links to provide, the way I

contextualise those links, and what images I choose to include in the rotator, mean that I still maintain an indirect mediating role. In addition, the dynamic nature of websites, especially services like Facebook, mean that what the user encounters may in some cases be very different from what I encountered. What's more, the user is only able to encounter the online aspect of the field through the website, not the physical spaces I also engaged with. So while an ethnographic website may potentially offer a more direct encounter with the field than traditional representational media, it is still a mediated and partial one.

Another, related advantage of hypermedia is that an ethnography may contain a much larger amount of information than a conventional linear narrative without overwhelming the user. For instance, a website may contain many hours of video clips, but the user will only watch clips that are linked to the particular pathway they follow, whereas a linear ethnographic representation, such as an ethnographic film shown at a festival, requires all the footage to be viewed (unless you walk out!), and therefore it must contain far less footage given the attention span of the average potential audience member. My website also takes advantage of this feature of hypermedia as it contains nearly two and a half hours of my own and my informants' videos broken into over a dozen different clips embedded within various pages, as well as direct links to pages that contain many more hours of video.

A final advantage I will discuss here is the potential for hypermedia to bring ethnographic research into dialogue with informants and other interested parties, either as a completed text or work in progress (Pink, 2007:203-4) .

Functionality for posting comments could be included within the website to make such dialogue also open to public scrutiny, or email links could be provided for private comment. Also, given the potential open-endedness of a website, user feedback can be incorporated into it (e.g. additions or changes to content or navigation) even after it is published. After reviewing the works of Lyon and Ruby in this regard, Pink concludes:

> By making their work available for the scrutiny of others they demonstrate important moves towards a transparent and public approach to producing ethnographic knowledge. (2007:204)

My choice has been to limit user feedback to an email address, as I wanted to allow some interaction with users, but avoid the complexity of integrating comment functionality into the website, and also avoid taking on the burden of moderating comments. I have also decided to delay making the site public until after it has been published in an online journal, to ensure its eligibility for publication, but after that I will actively seek comments from informants and the general public alike, including these comments on the website and updating it as otherwise required.

While hypermedia representation has these advantages, it also has some problematic aspects:

> [The] dilemma of freedom versus control is one of the most contentious issues confronting hypermedia ethnographers. How can structure be introduced such that the readers can easily follow one or more authorial interpretive trails, without smothering the creative potential of hypermedia's inherent unstructuredness? (Dicks et al., 2005:165)

Both Pink (2007:192) and Dicks et al. (2005:165) stress how considerations of hypermedia design is crucial here in balancing the need for structure to allow the user to evoke ethnographic meaning from the document, while at

the same time allowing them the freedom to explore the different elements of that document in a creative way. In particular, these design considerations concern how the potential meanings the user can extract from the hypermedia document depend on how the author has integrated the written, visual and aural elements of the document, how the author has constructed the hyperlink topology that binds these elements together, the decisions the author has made about which particular pathways will run through it, and what signs are made available to the user so that they can orientate themselves within that topology.

My own design decisions have tried to balance these competing demands for structure and freedom. A user who begins with the home page will be provided with a structured narrative from where all the pages of the ethnography are contextualised within it, as already discussed above. These pages can be accessed one at a time in the sequence they are presented, and this approach provides the most structure path through the website. The user is of course free to ignore this, and can access the different pages through the menu structure, or at random from within the home page. The menu provides free access to any of the pages on the site, although the user's choices are contextualised, but not limited, by the fact that the different menu links are organised by their relevant informant group. The third and final choice the user has is it to engage with the website through the image rotator. Here the user is taken directly to the field, as discussed above, and is free to navigate through the informants' online world once there. This provides the least structured approach to the ethnography, although only a limited number of images with links are actually present.

Those that are present have been chosen to ensure an interesting encounter for the user, even if they will not understand this encounter within the context of the ethnography unless they return to the website and choose to engage with the home page or menu structure.

7. Ethical considerations

The final methodological issue I will consider in this chapter concerns the potential ethical implications of my research approach. Hine states:

> Online research is marked as a special category in which the institutionalized understandings of the ethics of research must be re-examined. Characterisations of the problem depend on the fears awakened by particular capacities of the new technology. (2005c:5)

One of the main issues in the literature in this regard concerns the researcher collecting data as a lurker, or as an anonymous or pseudonymous participant (Beaulieu, 2004:147, Markham, 2004:362, Garcia et al., 2009:59, Hine, 2005c:5). That is, the technology affords the researcher an easy method, compared to offline analogues, to conduct detailed observations of their chosen subjects' behaviour without her presence being detected, or alternatively without her offline identity as a researcher being disclosed. Using such methods however raises ethical questions concerning the subjects' privacy and consent.

My particular methodological approach meant that this concern had little relevance to my research. My initial approach to all the research informants discussed in this thesis, as indicated in Section 4, involved full disclosure of who I was and what my interest was in talking to them, and that my primary

interest was their online presence. Apart from my own personal and ethical

bias towards full disclosure, since my intention was also to engage as a

participant observer with these informants offline where possible, full

disclosure seemed the only reasonable course. With the fans, as discussed

in Section 4, I also believed that building trust with them online was very

important, as I was unsure if I would ever have the opportunity to do that in

person, and this to me was another point in favour of full disclosure.

8. Conclusion

As we shall see in the next three chapters, by adopting an ethnographic

methodology I was able to approach the complex and emergent social

situation I found in the field on its own terms, rather than with preconceived

notions of what was important. This allowed me to remain open and adapt to

the different and sometimes unexpected things I encountered there, which

the limited literature on the subject prepared me for in only the most general

terms.

For instance, by following the advice of Hine and others, I did not decide in

advance which technologies would be my focus. Rather, as we shall see in

the following chapters, I engaged with my informants wherever they were

involved in relevant practices, and this in turn meant I engaged with a

surprisingly and bewilderingly large array of technologies, some of which

they simply used as tools, and others as social spaces. If I had focussed

purely upon YouTube, for instance, where all my informant groups had a

presence to some degree, the following chapters would have told a very

different story, and one I believe that would not have accurately presented their activities and motives.

Engaging with my informants wherever they had relevant practices also meant following them back and forth between online and offline spaces. Both of these types of spaces seemed important to them, and one often informed the other (although, as we shall see later, this importance varied greatly depending on the group). Engaging with my informants wherever they had relevant practices also required me to negotiate permission to enter each new space as it emerged, but sometimes in fact deciding not to follow them into a space if it felt intrusive was a better course of action, as with the Vidukon example discussed above.

As we saw in Section 3, maintaining an ethnographic presence in a contemporary field site presents a number of challenges. In Section 4 I touched upon the different strategies I used to address these and maintain my presence in the field, which included using a wide range of technologies and also visits to physical locations. I will revisit these in the next three chapters where I will develop a detailed written representation of each of the groups I studied. Readers are encouraged to interact with the hypermedia representations of the groups in the relevant sections of the visual ethnography website while reading these chapters as they complement the written representations contained in those chapters, providing a richer

understanding of the groups and this predominantly visual subject matter

than could be achieved with text alone.[34]

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[34] Instructions on how to use the DVD are included in the _ReadMe.rtf file on the disk. Internet Explorer users should pay special attention to the instructions.

Chapter 5. Public access television online: CACMX stations and producers

The following three chapters are ethnographic accounts of the different groups I researched over the period from May 2011 to June 2012, and are a synthesis of the many interviews, participatory activities, and observations I carried out over that time and of the related documents I read. This chapter focuses on a selection of stations and producers from CACMX, an association of seven public access stations in the greater bay area of northern California, introduced in Chapter 4. Public access stations in California had been coming under increasing threat due to changes to their funding arrangements in the five or so years leading up to my research, with many forced to close. The association was set up in 2010 in response to this threat as a way of sharing best practices and resources. For the reasons outlined in Chapter 4, this chapter focuses on DMA, CMCM and a selection of their producers, but also includes references to CMAP, CTV and some of their producers.

While in the rest of my thesis online video distributors are only discussed indirectly, from the producers' perspective, in this chapter I devote some significant space to examining online distribution of public access videos from the stations' perspective. This apparent digression is justified because public access producers are related to the stations in important ways, and similar relationships did not exist between the other producer groups and their third-party distributors. Firstly, and fundamentally, a public access producer is

someone who at the very least has their videos shown on public access television, and so the producer category itself is defined by a distribution medium, unlike fans or activists. How these stations are engaging with online technologies is changing how public access videos are distributed, and therefore they are also changing what it means to be a public access producer. What's more, the stations provide materials, facilities, skills and labour to assist producers in their productions and, as we shall see, while some do not avail themselves of these, others do, and yet others would not be able to produce anything at all without this assistance. Finally, from the perspective of assemblage theory, understanding the details of how the stations operate as online distributors will allow a close reading of how they as actors try to enrol producers into their distribution assemblages, and how the producers respond to this.

The public access stations I researched consisted of a television station that broadcasted up to three separate channels over the local cable company's network, whose extent was geographically restricted to the town or county the station was located in, and some also had a low-power FM radio station. The three channels were a public access channel, which was the subject of my research, an education channel, often run in collaboration with the local school board, and a government channel which broadcasted local government-related programming.[35]

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[35] For this reason the stations were often referred to as "PEG stations", although I have used the term "public access station" throughout to emphasise this was the only aspect of the stations' operations that my research concerned.

The public access channels broadcasted programming produced by local

residents (or by people sponsored by local residents), and the charter of the

stations was such that there was very little restriction on what could be

broadcast: Typically only programming that had commercial or offensive content

was prohibited. The following description of DMA's public access channel,

extracted from their website, is typical:

> Channel 15 is a community platform. Locally originated, volunteer-produced content accounts for 1,040 programming hours per year, or [an] average of 20 hours per week. Programs produced by DCTV[36] volunteers run the gamut, from live weekly gospel or rock showcases, to political commentary; from environmental and social justice documentaries, to interviews with various prestigious emeriti of UC Davis … Public access channels began - and remain first and foremost - platforms for the free expression of ideas and opinions … Increasingly, DCTV volunteers are not only airing their programs on Channel 15, but using the Internet to distribute their content more widely. We offer training and equipment that supports these efforts as well. (Davis Media Access, n.d.)

The small number of permanent and part-time staff at the stations (typically

numbering around six) were involved in a variety of activities related to public

access television: They trained local residents in filming, editing and studio

production; maintained and managed the facilities (which included the

broadcast play-out equipment, a small television studio, a studio control room

and editing suites); loaned out equipment (mostly video cameras and

accessories); and developed, managed and maintained the stations' online

presence. They also sometimes helped the public access producers produce

shows (such as directing studio shows or operating cameras), although this was

mostly done by volunteers from the local community who were either sourced

by the staff or the producers.

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[36] DCTV (Davis Community Television) is the former name of DMA, but still used to denote the television activities of DMA.

The public access producers were not part of the stations' organisation, but rather tended to use the stations as a resource while they were working on a show or receiving training. They were typically referred to as "volunteers" or "members" depending on the station.[37] Some rarely or never visited the stations (the latter type using their own equipment and posting in shows on DVDs, such as some religious groups), while others visited a few times a week over the period while they were working on a show, and yet others with episodic studio productions visited every month or two for a few hours. Some producers had relationships going back for a decade or more, while others only visited once, or made one show, and were never seen again. The producers at any given station also tended to operate very independently of each other. My discovery of this loose affiliation of the producers with the stations, and of their heterogeneous nature, supported my decision, discussed in Chapter 4, to focus on specific stations and producers rather than trying to address CACMX as a whole.

In Section 1 I will focus on the reasons why DMA and CMCM used the Internet to distribute the videos of their public access producers, and how they went about this, although I will also make brief references to some of the other CACMX stations where this adds additional perspective. Section 2 mainly consists of detailed case studies of why three different producers from DMA and CMCM used the Internet as a video distribution technology, how they went

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[37] These terms were also used to refer to the volunteer production crews mentioned in the previous paragraph.

about this, and what interactions with their audiences followed from it. The remainder of that section very briefly explores answers to these questions in relation to my other CACMX producer informants. In Section 3 I will provide a detailed assemblage theory analysis of the ethnographic narratives developed in Sections 1 and 2.

1. The stations' use of the Internet as a video distribution technology

While the producers often made their own arrangements for distributing videos online, as we shall see in the next section, the stations also distributed producer videos in a variety of ways. Different stations emphasised different reasons for doing so. The DMA staff said the reason was to provide an accessible "[video] archive of the local community", but also because there was a growing expectation in the community that these videos be available online. CMCM staff said that the ability for the videos to be viewed outside Comcast's[38] Marin County cable network was their motivation. CMAP also cited wider distribution as a reason, but in their case it was to reach local people *within* the cable network who didn't subscribe to the cable service, not just to increase distribution for its own sake, but also to help with fund raising:

> We only have 15,000 cable subscribers, and a lot of local people say "It's great that you're [on TV], but I don't have cable so I'm not going to make a donation because I don't see you". Once we started streaming [the channels online], I saw a real shift in the community and the number of people who were viewing us has really broadened. (Kathy Bisbee, CMAP Executive Director)

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[38] Comcast Corporation is one of the US's largest providers of television via cable networks.

The methods used to distribute videos also differed, and often reflected the specific circumstances of the station in question. For example, DMA had experimented previously with YouTube, Blip and Vimeo, but they did not regard most third-party video distribution services as suitable for their needs:

> There are so many [video] sharing sites out there … but who knows how long they are going to be around, and a lot of them have a commercial model, and that's never been our first interest: our first interest is serving local interests in a non-commercial way. (Autumn Labbe-Renault, DMA Executive Director)

This desire for a more stable, non-commercial video distribution platform prompted them to adopt the Open Media Project (OMP) tool set, which they incorporated within a subdomain of the DMA website called Davis Community Television (DCTV). The adoption of this solution had however been a long and complex process.

The OMP dated back to 2005 when the City of Denver closed the public access TV station there, and commissioned the Open Media Foundation (OMF; a non-profit media and technology organisation) to find a low-cost solution that would allow public access programming to continue to be made, but turned over the operations to the community rather than paid staff. The OMP was developed as an open-source web 2.0 tool set, using the Drupal content management system, to achieve this objective. In 2008 work began on a more general solution that could suit the needs of other stations, and in 2009 seven stations

became involved in redeveloping the OMP toward this end, one of which was

DMA. [39]

The DMA management team expressed mixed feelings about their experience

with OMP. In particular, while the ambition of OMF and the seven partner

stations was to make a general set of tools suitable for any station, they felt that

the design philosophy of OMF deviated from the needs and objectives of DMA.

While OMF were aiming at a totally user-driven solution, inspired by

developments in Web 2.0 technologies, the DMA management team did not

believe this emphasis was their priority or even necessarily desirable as an

ultimate outcome. This user-driven solution allowed producers to reserve

equipment, editing suites and studios; make crew calls; create show records

(which record data about their videos, such as who the guests were) and upload

videos. It also allowed audiences to not only view the videos on the website,

but to schedule programming on the channel, rather than having it done by staff

members, by using the software to count audience votes placed on the stations'

website against different programmes and then schedule them according to

popularity.[40] While DMA had eventually adopted the producer tools by the time

of my second visit in May 2012, and in fact had led the development of them for

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[39] This short history of the OMP was distilled from elements of a number of different interviews, casual discussions and documents such as the OMP webpage on the OMF site (Open Media Foundation, n.d.).

[40] I determined this functionality of the OMP from an examination of the Denver Open Media site (Denver Open Media, n.d.), which was the flagship OMP site, discussions with a variety of public access station staff at the Alliance for Community Media conference I attended (mentioned in Chapter 4), through interviews with the station staff at my informant stations, and from OMP documentation (for example, civicpixel, 2009, Open Media Foundation, n.d.).

the OMP, they still had not adopted the audience tools.[41] When I asked when

they planned to implement them, we came to the crux of how DMA's vision and

that of OMF differed:

> There's not much benefit from encouraging [that kind of audience interaction]. It seems that most of the traffic that is driven to the [DCTV website] is from people that hear about [a particular video] somewhere, and are just going to watch it. I don't think people will come [to the DCTV website] to vote things up … and the numbers are just not there [to get meaningful results] … and I don't know if the numbers will ever get there. (Darrick Servis, DMA Director of Operations)

In addition, the management team seemed generally unconcerned by the

apparently very low social interaction on the DCTV website, witnessed by the

almost total lack of comments on the videos. When I asked Darrick about this, I

believe he spoke for the rest of the management team when he said that he did

not think it was DMA's job to turn the DCTV website into a social networking

site. He believed this would involve competing with sites such as Facebook that

had billions of dollars of resources, and that a better use of DMA's very limited

resources was to make their videos available for people to share them on those

and other sites. In reference to this and audience voting, Darrick summed up

DMA's overall objective with regard to online video, putting their reasons for

going online stated at the beginning of this section into context:

> That's why I'm choosing to focus on the archival aspect of things: To make sure we are getting as much information about the shows [as we can], and be able to link all that information together. I think that would be more useful than voting … [for instance,] if someone goes to the website to watch a show … and if they liked that guest, they can see all the shows that guest was on … or if they liked the show, they can see other shows by that producer … and drill-down through the data like that … I look at [the DCTV website] as a database … it is [a video] archive of

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[41] Some of the elements of the producer tools were still being tested at this point, and therefore not open to the general producer population, although a small group of producers were trialling them, along with the staff. In particular, the old system of the DMA staff creating the show records and uploading the videos for the producers was still in operation.

> the local community … the way people interact with information is ever evolving quickly … I've always looked at having the archive as the one foundation.

While the choice of OMP for DMA seemed sufficiently justified by their objective of having a non-commercial video archive that they could ensure would be around for the long-term, there was also another reason for choosing it which was never made explicit in the many conversations and interviews I conducted at DMA, but was witnessed by how they went about the OMP implementation: OMP potentially allowed them to integrate the television and online production and distribution process.

However, the development and implementation of OMP had proved problematic and was consuming more time and resources than anticipated. It eventually became clear to me that the reason for this was the difficulty in integrating the OMP with the Cablecast cable television system, used to broadcast the public access channel: The tools, when fully implemented, would allow the producers to create a show record and upload a video to it, and the OMP would automatically create a video file with the appropriate metadata ready for broadcast via Cablecast, and simultaneously upload another video file in a different format with different metadata to the website for the Internet audience. The OMP producer tools could have been implemented without this integration relatively easily, however DMA were insisting upon an integrated and automated solution with the ultimate objective I believe of freeing up staff time to do what they considered more useful activities, such as training producers. While Darrick believed they were close to completing this integration, lack of time and resource meant that staff and producers were not getting sufficient

training in the tools, and this lack was also delaying the completion of better

procedures for using them and the associated documentation. These problems

were compounded every time a new bug in OMP was found, as this often

required rewriting procedures, documentation and training materials. Producers

and staff trialling the tools were therefore sometimes using the tools incorrectly

and causing problems for the system as a result.[42]

While the DCTV website was the main method DMA used to distribute producer

videos, they did utilise two other distribution technologies: The Internet Archive

and Facebook. The Internet Archive (archive.org) is a US non-profit

organisation which tasks itself with preserving Internet content for posterity, and

DMA used it as a way of archiving all their programmes to provide backup

redundancy. They also used it to host certain videos on their website that

produced traffic spikes that their own hosting environment could not cope with,

such as programmes produced by candidates for upcoming elections.

While DMA had their own Facebook page, my observations of it found that they

rarely used it to distribute producer videos, but rather used it to announce news

and events at the station, or to share links relevant to community media in

general, such as developments in legislation. The main reasons Autumn gave

for not distributing producer videos on Facebook were lack of resources to

devote to this activity, and also a reluctance to drive traffic to the DCTV website

while it was still work in progress. Also, while Facebook was an unashamedly

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[42] The observations in this paragraph are derived primarily from interviews with Darrick and Alex Silva-Sadder, DMA's programming manager, casual discussions with them and other DMA staff, and my observation of general DMA office activities.

commercial platform, Autumn also accepted that it was an important platform for them to use in reaching out to the local community and beyond, and that there was no practical, non-commercial alternative currently available. (Links to DMA's DCTV website, their Internet Archive page, and their Facebook page are contained with the "Stations" page of my visual ethnography.)

CMCM provides an interesting contrast to DMA with regard to their choice of platforms and how they implemented them. Their main platform was a website based on Miro Community, which was a type of video aggregation software offered with a general public license by the Participatory Culture Foundation (Miro Community, 2012. A screenshot of this website and a link to it is contained in my visual ethnography). CMCM did not host or upload videos themselves, rather the producers made their own provisions for hosting and uploading (as we shall see in the next section), and then logged into their CMCM Miro Community account and provided an RSS feed to the hosted videos. CMCM staff then had to clear the videos before they went live on the Miro Community site, and clearance was only withheld if the videos contained offensive or commercial material, or hadn't been shown on the cable channel yet.[43]

Sam Long, Associate Director at CMCM, and the one responsible for developing and managing their online presence, said that CMCM had been initially attracted to Miro because it did not require them to take on the cost and

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[43] This latter reason underscores the staff's perception of CMCM as primarily a television station rather than an Internet service, and reflected the conditions of its funding arrangements, which required it to maintain television distribution and restricted spending on Internet activities.

responsibility of hosting videos, and because its aesthetics, usability and

functionality at the time were on a par with commercial aggregators.[44]

However, Sam had started to question whether it represented a sustainable

solution, explaining the situation as follows:

> Being so understaffed, [we're] not able to create something [ourselves]
> … Miro is wonderful, especially when it first came out, but, for instance,
> putting [high definition] video into it is tricky … and it needs a complete
> redesign [to address this] … also, Blip videos were becoming a problem
> to integrate into Miro … Blip managed to fix whatever was causing that,
> but the minute any of these [hosting services] move ahead of Miro in
> technology, we're not going to be able to use the content coming from
> them … Miro is a fairly decent sized company, but the staff they have on
> [Miro Community] is pretty limited, and a lot of them are [volunteers]

As a result, Sam felt they were coming to a decision point: Whether to commit

to Miro Community for the longer term, and start to invest time developing it, or

look for an alternative or even develop their own solution from scratch. For

instance, he had considered using some of the OMP tool sets as one potential

alternative solution, but had rejected the idea:

> They just don't look good enough … [OMP] doesn't allow for an
> experience that is really that functional. It works, but it is not that nice
> looking, nor is it easy to use … to me the Denver site is a perfect
> example of a lot of time going into something that might already be out-
> dated … things need to be packaged well for [the audience] to be
> interested … with the media landscape improving so rapidly, and it
> becoming so easy to create decent looking stuff, we can't be looking
> much poorer than YouTube at this point in time … (Sam Long, CMCM
> Associate Director)

Concerns about the lack of sustainability of Miro went beyond simply a fear that

it would become an obsolete technology. Unlike DMA, Sam's objective for their

online presence was for it to become an engaging online destination. He

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[44] The following discussion of CMCM's online presence is based primarily on my
interviews, emails, Skype calls and informal face-to-face conversations with Sam both
at CMCM's offices and at the Alliance for Community Media conference. However, this
testimony has been cross-referenced with the interviews and conversations with other
CMCM staff, and my own online and offline observations, and I believe it generally
represents the views of CMCM staff and management.

wanted to increase audience traffic and interaction with the videos by creating a more engaging experience for them (like the DCTV site, the traffic to their current site was modest and the audience were not leaving any comments). In addition, he also wanted to make it more attractive for producers, to encourage them to post their videos there in the first place. Sam had some ideas about how to do this, such as aggregating producers' other relevant online content with the videos, such as their WordPress sites, or by embedding Facebook commenting functionality within the site, but Miro Community did not allow either of these options in its current form.

CMCM used Facebook in a similar way to DMA, announcing news and events, such as member[45] orientation, monthly mixers and training, and also occasionally to share videos created by the station staff, such as their coverage of a local film festival. While they posted links on their Facebook page to drive traffic to a page on the Miro Community site, which promoted "highlights" for that fortnight's upcoming programming on the television channel, this was simply a page with text and stills (and no videos). Also, they did not embed producer videos on Facebook, nor post links to them there. Their reasoning for this was different from that of DMA. Sam argued that if they only promoted some producers, then others would see this as favouritism, and they would then feel compelled to promote all their producers. However, Sam said CMCM only wanted to be associated with the highest quality productions, because this was the image they wanted to project into the community. This was not only part of

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[45] For CMCM, "member" refers to local residents who are current or potential producers, crew or editors for programmes, and is used in a similar way to DMA's term "volunteer".

their overall organisational objective, but reflected their concern with the

tenuousness of their funding: They saw maintaining an image of a high quality

community media centre as one that would bolster their position with respect to

maintaining current and securing future funding.

Finally, while Sam stated their reason for using Facebook was about engaging

with producers and their audiences as well as updating them on current

happenings, I suggested to him, based on my observations of their Facebook

page, and those of CTV who had a similar ambition, that neither producers nor

their audiences were engaging very much with either station's Facebook

page.[46] Sam explained this state of affairs as follows:

> [I agree,] it's not a conversation … you find at times producers will start
> making comments, but it never goes beyond two people … we tried to
> maximise the use of Facebook, but we were running up against a wall …
> it could just be an age thing - we haven't taught Facebook as a class -
> maybe we should. We ask people to share things on Facebook, but the
> only people that do are staff … no one will engage in that sharing … I
> don't think it is because people don't care; maybe it's because they don't
> get it.

The age reference relates to CMCM's management's assessment that most of

their producers are aged between 50 and 70 years old, and the suggestion here

is that they may not "get" how to use Facebook in this context since they are not

as familiar with social networking as younger people. His reference to teaching

Facebook as a class reflects how CMCM, along with DMA, CMAP and CTV,

had extended their original remit as public access stations to train local people

in film making techniques, such as camera use and editing, to include Internet

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[46] In fact, producers and their audiences were not engaging significantly with the
Facebook pages of any of the four stations I observed, although only CMCM and CTV
had explicitly stated that this engagement was one of their objectives (as opposed to
simply using the pages to provide updates and make announcements).

technologies related to video distribution. However, even in the short time CMCM had been active, they had already had to rewrite their training curriculum to take account of both the rapid changes the relevant technologies were undergoing, and the changes to how third-party distribution platforms did business. (Links to CMCM's Miro Community website and their Facebook page can be found on the "Stations" page of my visual ethnography.)

2. The producers' use of the Internet as a video distribution technology

As was already stated in the introduction, producers operated independently of each other, and of the stations with which they were affiliated. In this section I will sketch out how my producer informants used the Internet as a distribution technology, primarily through case studies of three producers from DMA and CMCM. While no two of the eleven producers I researched shared identical reasons for, and methods of, adopting the Internet as a distribution technology, these case studies provide a broad range of the situations I encountered. I will also supplement the case studies with a summary of the highlights from my findings for my other producer informants at the end of this section.

Case study 1. Frankie J. Woods, a resident of Davis, was a man in his late thirties who worked as a DJ and had been affiliated with DMA for over a decade. His stated aims in producing television programmes were two-fold: To use them as promotional tools showcasing his skills so he could get contract work as a video maker to supplement his income, and to "[show] youth that they can do what they want to do without a negative edge … I make positive TV".

He did this through producing programmes that were almost exclusively about the local hip-hop music culture.

Frankie had an ambivalent relationship towards the Internet as a distribution medium. He saw it as important because it "gets me known outside of Davis", and "because it is something you have to do", referring to what he saw as the audience's expectation that public access shows should be available online. However, he struggled with the medium in several ways. For instance, he had a YouTube channel, set up in January 2009, but he stopped uploading to it during the time I was researching his activities. He told me his reason for this was that YouTube takes many of his videos down. He interviews hip-hop artists, and sometimes records their performances as part of this, and he believes YouTube is taking them down because they mistakenly believe he does not own the copyright to the videos. He also complains of videos he uploads never appearing at all, and assumes this is due to the same reason. When I asked if he ever challenged these takedowns, he indicated that he did not know the process for doing this, and in fact I was unsure he was even aware that it was possible to do so before our discussion. In relation to this, when I asked whether he had received written takedown notices from YouTube, he did not remember ever receiving one. I was left wondering at this point whether some of the non-appearance and disappearance of videos may have been due to technical problems, rather than copyright related issues, or it was just that he was not receiving the notifications.

Frankie had previously used MySpace, having set up an account in December 2005, but it had been dormant for some time, and did not have any videos on it. When I asked him about this, suggesting its focus as a music-based social networking site made it a good fit with his activities, he replied: "It used to be [about music] … not anymore - MySpace is dead". Because of these issues with YouTube and MySpace, Frankie had more recently emphasised Facebook as a distribution platform. While he had maintained a Facebook page for his production activities (under the user name FrankDoggPro) since July 2010, he had only recently started to directly upload his videos there, rather than just providing links to other hosting services, like YouTube. He believed they had more lenient terms of services with respect to copyright, and that they also allowed him to upload longer videos. However, his relationship with Facebook had also been problematic over the time I was observing his activities. On at least two occasions he took down his Facebook page for a few weeks. When I asked him why on one occasion, he said that "I wanted to take a break from it … I'll probably put it up again [in a few weeks] … I'm spending too much time online … I have to make an income, and it is a free service".

Of all the public access producers I researched, Frankie had the most online interaction with his audience around his videos, although this was mostly on Facebook, and it was typically restricted to only 2 or 3 "likes" and as many comments, with one of those usually being a response from Frankie. While he also got the occasional comment on YouTube, he didn't respond as he was not familiar with how that aspect of YouTube worked. Frankie was unconcerned by this lack of interaction, as he had no interest in developing an online community

around his videos on Facebook or elsewhere, but rather saw these websites as

"broadcasting stations", suggesting a more traditional television attitude toward

audiences.

However, Facebook was only an interim solution until he got his own website: "I

hate to say it, but Facebook is the best platform for what I am doing …

Facebook is my broadcasting station right now until I get my own site up". The

phrasing of his comment also underscored his ambivalence toward third-party

distribution platforms. He summarised this ambivalence while explaining why

he wanted his own site:

> I don't like to use other people's sites because they can tell me what I
> can and can't post up … that's the whole reason I started this whole thing
> - I want to be able to post up whatever I want, and deal with the
> consequences from that.

This site was in development over the whole 12 months I had contact with

Frankie, being done by an associate of Frankie's in his spare time. However, at

the final interview Frankie said that it was not going to happen now as his

associate didn't have the time, and Frankie didn't have the money to pay him.

Finally, like all DMA producers, Frankie's videos were eventually uploaded by

the station staff to the DMA website. However, while Frankie liked that the

website didn't have the restrictions the commercial services did, he believed the

site got little traffic compared to commercial ones and hence it held little interest

for him as a distribution technology. (Two examples of Frankie's videos, and

links to his YouTube channel, MySpace page and Facebook page are

contained within the "FrankDogg Pro" page of my visual ethnography.)

Case study 2. Deborah Whitman, also a resident of Davis, was around sixty

and a retired administrator for the State of California. At the time of my

research she primarily produced environmental videos, although she had also

produced a few other videos mostly about social and political issues in Davis

and Sacramento. She had a non-profit organisation, Environmental Voices, as

a vehicle for her video making activities, and it consisted of her and volunteers

she would enrol from time to time to help out on specific projects on a sporadic

basis. The mission of Environmental Voices, as she stated on the

organisation's website, "is to help preserve our future by providing education

and research about toxic chemicals and how they affect our health and the

environment" (Environmental Voices, 2010).

Unlike Frankie, she had a very positive view of the potential of the Internet for

her work:

> I'm trying to market my non-profit, and I'm trying to reach a lot of people.
> These issues are critical issues I'm really passionate about, and this is
> my way of getting it out amongst the people in an inexpensive way … it is
> one of the best ways … you can reach so many more people.

While this reason for using the Internet (an inexpensive medium to achieve a

high reach) was unsurprisingly common among my public access informants,

Deborah also had the perception, like some other of my informants, that one

had to be on the Internet:

> I talk to so many people now that don't watch TV, but they watch things
> on their computer. So everything seems to be in computer mode now
> and you are behind the times if you are not reaching the mass amount of
> people who are now on computer.

YouTube was the only video hosting platform Deborah used for her videos.

When I first spoke to her, the reason she gave was simply that she did not know

of any others. However, by the final interview she had become aware of other hosting platforms, but had continued to use YouTube in spite of two significant issues she had with it. Firstly, her primary video work was the environmental documentary "Skylines", and because its length was 90 minutes she had been forced to break it into smaller parts so it could be uploaded to YouTube. Frankie Woods from the first case study had reported a similar problem to me when he initially decided to use YouTube, but rather than continuing to make the longer form public access programmes and breaking them up, he started making shorter length ones he could upload in one piece.

Overall, she found the YouTube time restrictions confusing because she had noticed that some people had longer videos uploaded there than she was able to upload herself but didn't know why. The second issue she had with YouTube was that she did not have the technical skills, time or patience to upload her videos: While she had in fact learnt how to shoot and edit videos through classes taught by both DMA and Access Sacramento, she lamented that they did not offer classes on uploading as far as she was aware (unlike CMCM, for instance). This was compounded by the fact that she did not have the money to pay other people to do it, so she had to rely on volunteers. Unfortunately, finding a volunteer for this task had proved difficult, which meant that although she had a number of completed videos ready for uploading, nothing had been uploaded in the 12 months I was observing her online activity. I believe this is also the reason why she didn't change from YouTube, even though other services existed that she had more recently become aware of that allowed her to upload longer videos.

While Deborah had an Environmental Voices Facebook page, it had very little activity. Started in July 2010, she had only made nine posts in total, seven of those during the 12-month period I was in contact with her. While there were links to other people's environmental videos, and to two radio appearances she had made, she did not post any of her own videos there. There was also no audience activity on the page within the timeframe of my fieldwork. When I asked her why she didn't use Facebook more, she acknowledged its importance to non-profits but had very limited time to devote to online activities because of her other commitments and general dislike of sitting in front of the computer for long periods of time. [47] She also admitted to health problems that seriously restricted her computer usage time.

With regard to the rest of her online presence, like Frankie and some other producers, she also had a MySpace page which had fallen into disuse: The only activity appeared to be some still photos related to the topic of her "Skylines" documentary, uploaded in April 2008. She also had her own Environmental Voices website, as mentioned above, but there was no activity on this over the course of my fieldwork, and it also only contained one of her videos, the first part of "Skylines", which was embedded from YouTube. Her most recent video, "Breaking Ground for Peace", which she had produced in association with others, was uploaded to Vimeo by one of her collaborators. The video was also

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[47] She also acknowledged the importance of Twitter in this regard too, although she didn't have a Twitter account for the same reasons.

hosted on the website of the organisation "I am Peace …", which was another

of her collaborators.

Given her limited time and patience for online activities, I was not surprised to

hear she had no desire to interact with her audience online or create an online

community around her work, and that she was not particularly interested in

getting online comments. In fact, she had switched off the YouTube

commenting function because of a concern about getting negative comments:

> I have the comments turned off [on YouTube] because I'm very sensitive,
> so if I had any bad comments, even one, it would sway me from doing
> what I'm doing … I'm afraid I'd get my feelings hurt and I wouldn't do any
> more on the Internet.

For her, the most important thing about having the videos online was that she

could direct the people she engaged with at offline forums to them, which

included environmental activist events and meetings, and radio interviews.

Finally, she felt that in the future the Internet would allow her to make more

radical videos than she was currently making:

> There are a lot of controversial things I'd like to put on [DCTV] but I don't
> … like Bohemian Grove … and the Illuminati … I'm really concerned
> because there are … people who control public access, like Comcast …
> where the funding comes from … and the City of Davis puts money in the
> pot as well, so I want to make those people happy … I don't want to put
> things on there that would make them wish they weren't putting money
> into [DMA].

Deborah said that she was unable to make these videos currently because she

produces all her videos at DMA, and that it was DMA's policy that anything

produced there also had to be aired on DCTV and distributed on its website.

However, she felt that once she had her own equipment she would be free to

make and distribute (on the Internet) these kinds of videos. (The first part of

Deborah's video "Skylines", and links to her Environmental Voices website, YouTube channel, and Facebook page are contained within the "Environmental Voices" page of my visual ethnography. That page also contains a short video interview with Deborah where she talks about her video making and distribution activities.)

Case study 3. Antonio Sausys, a resident of Marin County, was a fifty-year-old health practitioner and yoga teacher, and produced the series *YogiViews* at CMCM. His purpose in making the series was "to spread the word of Yoga, not from a teaching standpoint, but by exhibiting the social, spiritual and mental aspects of Yoga, and [show] how it permeates the culture in so many ways". Each episode was typically half an hour long and they were usually produced in the CMCM studio with a full crew of four to six volunteers, although they were occasionally done on location. When I asked him why he uploaded the episodes to the Internet, he said "the TV channel has limited distribution, and I want them to reach the world". He also hoped to make an economic return on them in the future when the online platforms he used introduced mechanisms for selling his videos, either as subscriptions or pay per view, but he did not want to use the currently available option of advertising as he thought this would "irritate his audience".

He uploaded his videos to Blip like many of the public access producers, and embedded them in several places: The CMCM website, his own *YogiViews* WordPress site, and his *YogiViews* Facebook page which he also used to make

announcements about the show. When I asked him why he chose this

particular combination of platforms, he said:

> I don't like that you have the YouTube logo when you watch videos …
> also, on YouTube you have to be under 10 minutes or have an account,
> but with Blip you can post as much as you want … and the third reason
> is that Facebook is a much more community-oriented platform than
> YouTube, and so it allows for a number of things that YouTube does not
> … and because it is such a prominent presence in social media.

While Antonio highlighted these negative aspects of YouTube during our first

interview, he in fact did maintain a small YouTube presence. When I asked him

about this during our second interview he admitted he did find the

recommendation pane useful (where thumbnails of related videos were

displayed). He liked the idea that people looking at other Yoga videos on

YouTube could be referred through to his channel. The videos on his YouTube

channel were tailored to this, comprising mostly trailers and highlights of shows

around three minutes long made especially for the Internet, and which

contained his WordPress site's URL.

With respect to the platforms where he embedded his videos, he felt using the

CMCM site brought a particular additional kind of audience he wanted to

engage with that differed from the other platforms:

> On YouTube there is everybody, on Facebook there are people that
> [know you] and don't have a lot to do, and on CMCM there are people
> wanting a particular kind of content … it's a bit like the [audience] for
> PBS … : [A television audience] interested in deeper topics and
> [programming] with better quality in terms of aesthetics.

He used WordPress because it had an easy to use commenting function, and it

allowed him to garner comments on the episodes from people outside his

Facebook circle. He felt this was important because the people commenting on

WordPress were not previously known to him, unlike his Facebook friends, and

that their comments were therefore "fresher", based on the video they just saw, rather than being framed by their relationship with Antonio and the other people they know that are his Facebook friends. Antonio was therefore selecting the different components for his assemblage based on the kind of audience he was trying to create for his videos, and the kinds of interactions he wanted to have with his audience around those videos.

However, like all my public access informants, and contrary to his hopes, Antonio had very little online interaction with his audience. The place it occurred most was Facebook, and he believed this was because it was designed as a place to interact, and therefore encouraged it and made it a natural part of using the site, but that Blip and the CMCM website were not (and neither had comments on any of his videos). He however felt Facebook encouraged only positive comments, and he would have liked it to at least have had a "dislike" button, so his audience could give a more realistic assessment of things. While he initially had hoped for comments through his WordPress site, he in fact got very few, and in addition because he got so many spam comments he had stopped reading them altogether and lamented that WordPress didn't have a better way of filtering these.

He was generally disappointed with the very slow pace with which his online audience was building. He attributed possible causes to both the niche subject matter of his videos, which were not about "pop culture yoga, but go deeper", and his failure to use Internet technology to market them better. He attributed this failure to lack of time, resources and knowledge. For instance, he had run

a Google Ads campaign previously with the help of his wife who worked in marketing, and while he felt this was very successful he did not feel able to run such a campaign on his own, nor commit the necessary time and resources to it, and he was reluctant to trouble his wife again with this task. (An episode of *YogiViews* and an observational video produced by me documenting the making of that episode are contained within the "YogiViews" page of my visual ethnography. That page also contains links to Antonio's Blip, CMCM, WordPress, Facebook and YouTube pages.)

Highlights of findings from other producers. With respect to his reasons for going online, John Morrison, the Californian Film Institute Education Director, and producer of *Aspect Ratio*, a series on CMCM interviewing local and visiting filmmakers in San Rafael, highlighted the on-demand and archival aspects of online video:

> On-demand video is much more interesting to me than being broadcast on the airwaves because if you miss it you miss it. If [CMCM] weren't doing that I wouldn't bother making videos otherwise because I don't think the audience would be that large [for TV only]: If a school teacher wanted to use an interview with a particular director of a film they were teaching, they wouldn't be able to catch it at just that time it was broadcast, but they can just download it.

Larry Strick, a personal injury attorney in Marin County who produced a series about local politics called *Marin Voices and Views*, said he produced the show to inform people about the legislative machinations in Sacramento, the state capital, but also as a marketing tool for his law firm: He said the series was a way of increasing his reputation in the local community as many people were impressed by the fact he had his own series, even though the programmes did

not directly refer to his law practice. He put his videos online so he could embed them within his law firm's website, thus directly linking his practice to the show. He was also interested in understanding his audience better, and uploading his videos to the Internet and then using Google Analytics to study their usage allowed him some information in this regard: No information on the television audience was available since Comcast did not provide it to CMCM (or to any other station I studied).

Some producers did not upload their videos at all. Richard Dussell, who produced the performing arts series *Look Mom, I'm On TV* at CTV in Santa Cruz simply said that "I'm too lazy to do that …it's more junk to deal with".[48] When I first spoke to Nicolette Daskalakis, then a first year undergraduate film making student at the University of Southern California and a resident of Davis, she did not upload her videos either, which were mostly a collection of short films and interviews about life in Davis:

> Maybe I'm not with the new technological times, but as an artist I'm hesitant (both with photographic and video work) to automatically post something. You have to be careful … the second you upload it you have to understand where it is going and who is viewing it. These are videos that I've put many hours into, and I want to give it thorough thought before I post them.

This was not only an expression of concern about managing her audience, but also a concern about having her work reproduced by others without her consent and without attribution, which had happened to her with her photographic work before. In spite of this, she was considering using Vimeo, and by the time of the final interview she had in fact begun using it. She said she only posted her

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[48] I later discovered that two episodes did eventually find their way onto the CTV website, but they were most likely uploaded by the CTV staff.

strongest work there so that there was nothing that would negatively impact her reputation as a professional filmmaker in the future. Her reason for using Vimeo over YouTube, which was the choice as she saw it, was that she perceived the audience on Vimeo as being more of an artistic and professional community, and she also had some concerns about the rights YouTube claimed over uploaded videos.

Blip was however the platform of choice amongst my informants who made traditional public access programmes, which were typically a series of shows half an hour to an hour in length. This was because Blip was known by my informants to be a platform that took videos of that length, although late in my fieldwork YouTube was offering longer video lengths to some of my informants but for various reasons none had migrated their longer format work to it before I concluded my research.[49] However some producers who made shorter format work used YouTube, including those who used Blip for their longer format shows, as it was either considered the default platform or one where the biggest audience could be found. In fact Sandra Leigh, the producer of four different series at CTV including the music programme *Spilly Chile's "Bowl of Rocks"*, whose shows are uploaded to Blip, laments that she did not have the time to break down her shows into smaller segments to upload to YouTube so as to attract a bigger audience.

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[49] One main reason was that the longer video lengths were still insufficient for some. For example, Keith Gudger, who produced the series *Wood Works* at CTV told me, "YouTube used to be 10 minutes max, then they raised it to 15, then they told me that since I'm such a prolific independent producer they would extend my time … and I tested it, and now I get 20 … well, my shows are 28 ½".

In general, station staff reported that video views on their websites were low, with numbers in the order of a thousand a month over their whole archive. Similarly, producers also said that audience traffic was relatively low on the different platforms they used. Blip did not provide information on the number of times a video was viewed, so it is not clear how popular these videos were, but the ones uploaded to YouTube often had less than a hundred views, with a few getting into the hundreds, and the rare occasional one getting into the thousands. Audience interaction was also very low: My informants had almost no comments on their videos, either on the different hosting platforms, or on any of the different sites they embedded the videos within. These sites included their own websites, or third-party websites of affiliated organisations. Facebook, which was commonly used to link to or embed videos hosted elsewhere, garnered the most comments, although as mentioned above these were only typically one or two comments and "likes" per video, and none developed into a conversation of any kind. The producers' use of Facebook was restricted to their personal pages or ones set up for their production organisations, and they did not use those of the stations.

Several of my public access informants reported that they got comments in person from people in their local community, both friends and strangers, who had seen them online (and also from some who had seen them on television). For instance, Jesus Rivera, who was a student at Gavilan Community College in Gilroy, and who had only just begun making programmes at CMAP, said that while his friends watched his videos on Facebook (which were embedded from

YouTube), they would usually wait until they saw him in person to comment, and that he preferred this in any case as it felt more personal.

The reaction of the producers to the lack of online views and comments covered the full spectrum, with some producers frustrated that they didn't get more, others somewhat ambivalent, and still others completely unconcerned: The reaction depended on the specifics of their motivations for making videos in the first place, and how they understood the Internet fitting into this. A lack of time or technical expertise about how to go about driving more traffic and interaction online were key complaints amongst those who wanted it.

3. Assemblage theory analysis of CACMX stations' and producers' use of the Internet

The stations. In Section 1, we saw that Autumn, DMA's executive director, expressed a concern about using third-party distribution services. The first part of Autumn's concern was about enrolling actors into DMA's distribution assemblage that she regard as too precarious for their needs, and the serious drain on resources that would be entailed if such an actor failed and the videos had to be uploaded again to a new service. It is an acknowledgement that while these organisational actors can be treated as black-boxed or punctualised within DMA's distribution assemblage, they are in fact precarious assemblages in their own right.

What's more, Autumn's decision to exclude these distribution services also because they were often commercially focused is a territorialisation process to ensure the homogenous, non-commercial identity of DMA's assemblage. It can also be understood as an acknowledgement that the commercial interests of such actors are hard to translate into non-commercial ones, because many of the commercial features of these services are not customizable by the user. For example, DMA cannot prevent advertising appearing in the same page as the producers' videos on such services. Also, even if they could be enrolled within the assemblage in their current configuration, they may undergo changes over time that intensify their commerciality which the typical user has very little power to prevent. Oprah's advent on YouTube and the resulting controversy it entailed, discussed in chapter 2, is an example of this. If such an intensification of the commerciality of a distribution technology within DMA's assemblage did occur it would be a deterritorialisation process, increasing the heterogeneity of the assemblage. DMA would either be forced to accept the new, mixed commercial and non-commercial identity of their assemblage, or detach this component and reterritorialise on a new, non-commercial platform, with the unfortunate consequence of having to devote scarce labour to uploading their videos again.

Daunted by these possibilities, DMA adopted the OMP tool set and became involved in its further development, along with six other stations, as we saw. While the development process to make a general set of tools suitable for any station can be seen as a territorialisation process, a movement toward homogenising the seven stations around a particular tool set (similar to the

standardisation processes undertaken in the computer industry example in Chapter 3), the controversy over the degree of user control the tool set allowed threatened to destabilise this group of stations and jeopardise both OMP's development and its usefulness to DMA. To avoid this, we saw that DMA decided to concentrate their scarce internal technical resource on leading the development of the aspect of the user tools most useful to them: A process of translating the tools so they could be enrolled within DMA's distribution assemblage.

However, we also saw that the development and implementation of the OMP was problematic for DMA. Before using OMP, DMA maintained the stability of its original video distribution assemblage by a continual, manual process of enrolling videos into it. This involved them in a territorialisation process, where the videos given to them by hand by the producers were made homogenous with the respective video distribution systems existing within the assemblage (this process was almost literally a translation, as the videos had to be converted by DMA to the mpeg2 codec for broadcast, and to the mp4 codec for uploading to the DCTV website). By enrolling OMP, they attempted to replace themselves as the actors in this translation process. However, OMP was resisting its enrolment into DMA's video distribution assemblage. This resistance in turn was causing DMA's attempts to enrol the producers into the assemblage in this new way to fail, threatening the viability of DMA's new distribution assemblage. The DMA staff were therefore caught in the unfortunate situation of having to work on three translations at the same time (the videos, OMP and the producers) causing a considerable strain on

resources, the consequence being an overall drop in the output of the existing video distribution assemblage.

While CMCM's online video distribution assemblage was also precarious, and its stability was only maintained through on-going processes, it had a different set of challenges to those of DMA as we saw. For a while both Blip and Miro Community were punctualised within the assemblage, but Blip's own identity as a dynamic assemblage of people, technologies, and the rest revealed itself when it changed the technology it was using[50]. Similar to the example of the computer industry discussed in Chapter 3, the different rates that the two organisations, Blip and Miro, were adapting to technological changes was causing heterogeneity in CMCM's distribution assemblage, making it unstable. If we think of Blip and Miro Community as part of a population of online video distribution assemblages (DeLanda, 2011:Appendix), then Miro eventually reterritorialised Miro Community on this new technology, homogenising itself again with Blip, and thereby making CMCM's assemblage stable again. While this process of reterritorialisation was done by Miro, CMCM were having to engage in their own process of reterritorialisation or translation with regard to high definition video technology. Producers were taking advantage of Blip's capacity to host high definition videos, but again Miro was not adapting to this technological change as fast as Blip, and CMCM were required to make some changes to the format of their Miro Community site to accommodate these different aspect ratio videos. This reterritorialisation on high definition

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[50] Sam did not know what the particular technological change was that Blip made in this example.

technology returned stability to CMCM's assemblage. Sam's dilemma was whether he could rely on Miro to keep pace with the more challenging technological changes, leaving CMCM only having to deal with the relatively minor ones, or instead take on the development of Miro Community internally allowing CMCM to make changes to it beyond the ad hoc ones they were currently doing. Faced with this dilemma, he was also considering enlisting different actors in place of Miro Community, as we saw.

Rapid changes in distribution technologies created instability for CMCM and its producers in other ways too. The creation and teaching of their training curriculum can be seen as a coding process, where language is part of the formation and stabilisation of the different producers' distribution assemblages, particularly in respect to encouraging the use of CMCM's Miro Community site. The teaching of the curriculum can also be seen as a translation process, where the interests of the producers to create and distribute videos is translated by CMCM into including their Miro Community site as part of the *producers'* assemblage. The changes in technology that were occurring can therefore be seen as decoding processes, or ones that would cause translations to fail and actors to detach, requiring CMCM to maintain an on-going coding and translation processes through rewriting and re-teaching their training curriculum. DMA faced a similar situation with regard to training producers in the use of the OMP producer tools.

Changes to how third-party distribution platforms did business was also impacting CMCM's training curriculum as mentioned at the end of Section 1,

and this was another source of instability. Like DMA, they also had concerns about the commerciality of third-party distribution services. While they had previously taught classes in using Blip, they now considered it a commercial entity because of changes to its business model, and therefore no longer felt able to promote it, and so they dropped it from their curriculum, reterritorialising their distribution assemblage on non-commerciality. Blip's increased commercialisation was not a concern for all the stations though: for instance, CTV continued to teach Blip classes as they were more relaxed about its commercial reorientation, and in fact were considering ways to generate sponsorship revenue through it, indicating that their distribution assemblage was more tolerant of heterogeneity in this regard.

CMCM differed from DMA in how it went about enrolling producer videos into its distribution assemblage. DMA were able to enrol videos into their distribution assemblage by making the station "an obligatory point of passage" (Law, 2009:146, Callon, 1986:204) - the producers could not get their videos broadcast unless they submitted the videos to the station - and by then tying their online site into the broadcast submission process, as we saw above. While CMCM was also an obligatory point of passage for broadcast, they did not tie their online site into the broadcast process because they did not want to take on the burden of uploading the producers' videos, and therefore had to use more indirect methods to interest producers in its use. While training was one of these methods, they also ensured as best they could that the distribution technology they selected, maintained and developed over time was one that was consistent in their estimation with the interests of their producers, to entice

them into enrolling CMCM's online site into the producers' own online

distribution assemblages. CMCM's concerns, noted above, about aesthetics,

usability, obsolescence, new functionality, audiences, and comparisons with

other distribution sites can all be seen in this light.

The producers. Like the stations, maintaining the stability of their assemblages

was also a problem for at least some producers. We can see from Section 2

that Frankie had difficulty maintaining the stability of his distribution assemblage

with regard to YouTube, MySpace and Facebook. For YouTube, Frankie's

perception was that it was resisting enrolment within his assemblage because it

was continually reterritorialising on copyright material and therefore mistakenly

refused or removed his videos. Since he perceived that he would be unable to

maintain YouTube as a reliable actor within his assemblage, he enrolled

another actor. While his perception may have been correct, he did have at least

one other enrolment strategy open to him that he did not pursue, as we saw.

His relationship with YouTube was therefore ultimately determined by

YouTube's power to detach itself from Frankie's assemblage against his will,

and Frankie's lack of the required legal and technical knowledge to employ

alternative enrolment strategies. The situation with MySpace was different in

that Frankie detached it from his assemblage voluntarily as he perceived it was

no longer relevant, although as an individual user he had little power to

influence MySpace's managers and owners in the choices they made that led to

that, such as moving away from a focus on music. Frankie's issue with

Facebook was yet a different problem: Here he sometimes felt that the on-going

burden of maintaining Facebook's enrolment within his distribution assemblage,

through providing regular updates, outweighed the benefits it brought him with respect to his objectives as a video maker, resulting in its occasional detachment by him from the assemblage.

Frankie was finally left with an assemblage that failed to fulfil his objectives in some key respects: His main objective of having his own site went unfulfilled as he was unsuccessful in translating his associate's interests into one's consistent with his distribution assemblage primarily for want of resources. While the DMA website had attached itself to his assemblage, he had little interest in it, as we saw. Ultimately, the stability and success of his assemblage depended on Facebook, a third-party he had very little control over and one that he perceived as requiring considerable effort to maintain which he could ill afford, as he needed to spend it finding and performing paid work.

We saw that the success of Deborah's distribution assemblage depended even more on others than Frankie's, because of her limited computer skills, and her limited time and patience for computer-based activities. While she had been mostly unsuccessful in translating the interests of volunteers to those of her environmental video projects, meaning that many were not even uploaded, she had been successful in enrolling collaborators in her peace project.

Also as we saw, like Frankie and Deborah, Antonio transformed his videos to make them homogenous with other YouTube videos with respect to their length so he could enrol YouTube within his distribution assemblage. However, unlike the other two video makers, he managed to do this in a way that enabled him to

still produce and distribute longer form videos by enrolling Blip as his main hosting platform. But even though the process of enrolling Blip did not require him to abandon longer form videos, he believed it did require him to translate the production aesthetic of television to that of the Internet to enrol audiences: "Because of the smaller screens of the computers, and the smaller screens of the phone, I prioritise very tight head shots with no head space, so it is more [Internet] user-friendly". Antonio's changes to his videos, along with Deborah's breaking up of her videos and self-censoring of topics, and Frankie's move to short form videos are all examples of how different components in an assemblage can act upon and modify each other.

Overall, while we saw that Antonio's distribution assemblage was stable, and constructed with a certain kind of audience, functionality and video aesthetic in mind, this was not enough to achieve his objectives: He needed to perform additional processes related to Internet marketing to enrol audiences, and like Frankie and Deborah in different but related circumstances, lacked the time, resources and necessary skills to do so.

4. Conclusion

The stations and producers had a broad range of reasons for going online, and these depended on how they saw the online environment in relation to their overall objectives as video distributors and makers. While being able to reach a potential audience beyond their local cable television network area was a common reason given, there were many others given also. Some were very

much tied to local concerns, such as reaching local people who did not have a cable television subscription, or creating an accessible video archive of the local community for that community. The archival aspect of online technology was also emphasised in the context of creating an education resource for schools, and as a place to direct people engaged with offline to videos in situations where it was not possible to show them those videos (e.g. a radio talk show). Others gave reasons tied to features of the technology, such as its ability to analyse audiences in an accessible way, and the mechanisms it had for generating financial return. While some believed being online was expected by their local community, and that the television audience was increasingly moving online, others resisted going online at all because of the effort involved or to protect their developing professional career.

The public access stations' and producers' decisions about which distribution technologies to enrol within their assemblages was often based on an assessment of how well those technologies aligned with their specific circumstances and overall objectives with respect to video distribution: The decisions were not simply calculations about maximising audiences. For instance, while YouTube was part of a distribution strategy for some, mainly because of the potentially large audiences it could deliver, it did not play a major role overall for my informants and was in fact considered problematic by many: Restrictive terms of service, intrusive branding, video length restrictions, negative comments and the generalist nature of the audience being the main reasons cited. In fact DMA, CMCM and some of the producers made decisions around platform choice and use that deliberately restricted audience size. For

instance, CMCM's decision to limit their distribution of producer videos on Facebook was made to maintain the stability of CMCM's distribution assemblage.

Blip was commonly used to host videos because it accommodated the typical public access programme length, had discrete branding and was perceived by some as less commercial than the alternatives. However, Blip was not considered adequate on its own, but rather was simply used as a hosting solution with videos from it being embedded within Facebook, Miro Community, WordPress and elsewhere. While Facebook was often used by producers because it was perceived as a platform that was best suited to fostering interaction with audiences, none of my informants had been successful in creating any significant interactions around their videos: For those producers disappointed with this outcome, lack of time, resources and expertise in how to do this were commonly cited reasons for failure.

In fact, lack of time, resources and expertise were often cited by my informants in other contexts, and appeared to be considerable limiting factors on their activities. The different processes of translation, territorialisation and coding required to create and maintain the assemblages required a good deal of time and skill, and sometimes required resources that were not available to the producers. This often meant that the implementation of adequate distribution solutions were delayed and inadequate solutions had to be tolerated for a time or indefinitely, that some platforms were not exploited to their full potential or just fell by the wayside, or that completed videos simply did not get uploaded.

While stations attempted to help producers with some of these, their resources were very limited too, and they suffered from similar problems, although on a larger scale.

The distribution assemblages were precarious not only because of this often burdensome on-going maintenance required to keep them stable, but also because many of them depended on actors over which the stations and producers had little control. As we saw, stations and producers were effectively powerless to prevent third-party distributors from undertaking actions that resulted in their unilateral detachment from an assemblage or that made them no longer suitable components, requiring their voluntary detachment. In fact, from the perspective of the producers in the case studies, the distribution technologies in general did not behave as inert and dutiful components of their assemblages, and in addition to being sources of potential instability also caused the videos to be acted upon and modified by the producers in either form or content.

We shall see in the next chapter that while the fan video makers had mostly different reasons for going online, enrolled a different albeit overlapping set of distribution technologies to do so, and managed to foster considerable interaction with their online audiences unlike the CACMX producers, their distribution assemblages were also precarious and required considerable maintenance.

Chapter 6. Film and television fan video producers online: The VividCon-LiveJournal group

This chapter focuses on the group of film and television fan video producers introduced in Chapter 4 who constellated around the annual VividCon fan convention in Chicago and the LiveJournal online journal website. The group started to take on the form that I found it in at the beginning of the 2000s: The migration of the group's members to LiveJournal from other Internet technologies such as email mailing lists was already fully underway by 2001, and VividCon was founded in 2002. Some of my informants from this group were pioneers of fan video making, active from the mid-1970s, while others had only become involved during the Internet era. The videos they made were of the type discussed in Section 1.b of Chapter 2: Typically montages of scenes from different episodes of a particular television series created to rework that material in some way, with the original soundtrack replaced by a music track chosen to support the theme of the reworking. Sometimes they also involved combining scenes from different television series, or scenes from films. Their specific reasons for reworking the film or television source material varied, although they all centred on using music video montages as a medium to actively engage with the source material, and share that engagement with others. For example, as my informant Obsessive24 phrased it[51]:

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[51] Most of my informants used pseudonyms when engaged in fan-related activities, and were referred to by these names in conversations and documents. To preserve their pseudonymity, I will follow this practice here.

> I guess my goal in making the videos is for others to see what I see in the source … especially in terms of subtext and drawing out things about peripheral characters that aren't in your face in the source.

For Luminosity, making fan videos was a way to "subvert the text, highlight the text and talk back to the text", and for Carol S it was a "mode of making argument about a show":

> I find vidding easier than writing fan fic[52], or even trying to draw even vaguely decent art. As a means of responding to the show, and sharing what I'm thinking about the show, it was the most accessible creative outlet for me.

Section 1 of this chapter is a general discussion of why my informants adopted the Internet as a distribution technology put in the context of their traditional distribution methods. In Section 2 I will focus in on why they used the specific Internet technologies they did and how they used those technologies, and Section 3 will examine the interactions with their audiences that followed from this use. In Section 4 I will provide an assemblage theory analysis of the ethnographic narrative developed in the preceding sections.

1. Internet adoption in the context of traditional video distribution methods

All my informants had adopted the Internet as a distribution technology for their videos, although their reasons for doing so varied, as did the degree of enthusiasm with which they did it. Some did it to get a larger audience than

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[52] "Fan fic" is short for fan fiction, and refers to a style of writing done by fans which uses fictional works, such as television programmes, or famous people, as material for their own fictional works.

was possible through the traditional means of conventions, meeting up with

friends or posting out physical media. For example, Here's Luck stated:

> Web distribution is the best way to be sure that a vid is reaching as many people as possible, and that's important to me; I make vids because I want to see them, but I put them on the web so other people can see them.

This was something supported by Obsessive24:

> There aren't many cons dedicated to vidding … there's a bigger audience online … you go to VividCon and there are a 120 people … online it is unlimited … I've noticed from my website statistics that there are a lot more people downloading the vids that don't engage with me at all … the people who talk to me are people I know, but they only represent 5 or 10% of my total hit count … so all these people who are downloading my vids … I don't know who they are … I don't know who is watching my vids … they don't show up at cons … so if I released them privately then they wouldn't see the vids.

Unlike Here's Luck and Obsessive24, Luminosity's reason for adopting the

Internet was because it provided a more convenient way to reach her existing

audience than traditional methods, rather than as a way of expanding it.[53]

AbsoluteDestiny's reason initially was also not about finding a larger audience,

but about finding an audience that would understand and appreciate his work:

> I want to share the vids I've made with like-minded others. Those people are generally and most easily found on the Internet. I started in AMVs [anime music videos] and while the UK had a reasonable anime scene in 2001 it didn't have a very large AMV scene - that scene was online so if I wanted to show my work to people who might either 'get it' or have thoughts about it other than 'nice use of clips to music' the vids had to go there.

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[53] Distribution via the Internet was not always considered more convenient than using DVDs. An entry by my informant Laura Shapiro in LiveJournal posted May 2003 asks whether people would be prepared to pay for a DVD of her videos. One commenter on the post responded they would because "on dial-up, it just takes too long to [download] everything that looks interesting", and another commenter said "This is wonderful because having the horribly slow dialup connection at home, it's not feasible for me to be downloading vids regularly to watch". (Shapiro, 2003)

He in fact only became aware of the group and the traditional methods they had

of sharing videos after he started uploading his videos to the Internet.[54] The

producers who had already established their audiences through traditional

distribution practices had more choice when it came to adopting the Internet

than AbsoluteDestiny, and for some of them its adoption proved a difficult

choice. Informant Laura Shapiro summarised her fears concerning the early

use of the Internet for video, and these echoed those of the fans discussed in

Chapter 2:

> Prior to the early 2000's we kept our work offline and in strict confidence,
> due to fears about persecution from copyright-holders and more
> nebulous but equally substantial fears of being misunderstood or mocked
> by the mainstream.

Laura went on to explain that the group did not consider the Internet a safe

place for their videos until 2007:

> After attending a planning meeting for the DIY Video Summit in early
> 2007 and hearing the positive responses from the other makers there, I
> posted to my [LiveJournal account] about it and came home to find that
> my corner of fandom had listened: hundreds of vidders were putting their
> vids up for streaming at iMeem, and I did the same. It just took a little
> understanding of the milieu in which we were now operating - a much
> more open Internet in which homemade videos were commonplace - for
> most of my community to open its doors and begin offering our work
> online and unrestricted.

The group was already well-established on the Internet by this time, with some

members having used various technologies since the mid-1990s to engage in

fan-related text-based discussions, and share things like fan fiction and images.

Once their fears over using the Internet for video had been overcome, some

saw it as logical to integrate their video distribution within this established online

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[54] He initially made contact with the group after one of its members had come across a
video of his on an AMV site and had it shown at VividCon, which resulted in someone
subsequently making a post about it on the LiveJournal VividCon community page
which was then stumbled across by a friend of AbsoluteDestiny's who brought it to his
attention.

community. For example, Speranza stated "my fan community is now online

and global, so sharing video online allows me to show my work to everyone

who I think might be interested in it …". Laura and Luminosity made similar

points saying that their videos are online because that is where their "fannish"

social life is located. Speranza cited an additional reason, which was also given

by the fans discussed in Chapter 2:

> As a fan vidder who is really invested in the history and longevity of the
> fan-vidding community, I don't want us to get written out of the history of
> remix culture. Other remix groups are putting their work online, but fan
> vidders kept their heads down for a really long time. I'm part of the group
> that felt that it was important for fan vidders to stand up and be counted.

Prior to this general adoption the group had used the Internet as a video

distribution technology in a very limited way: Some producers maintained their

own websites, and anyone interested in viewing the videos had to email them

first requesting a password, which was typically only granted to people known to

the producer, and this would allow the would-be viewer to download the video

file to their computer. Although all my informants still exercised some degree of

caution with regard to using the Internet, which affected how they used it (a

topic I will also explore in detail in the next section), Carol S was one of the

most defensive, holding onto the fear expressed above about being

misunderstood, and therefore still restricted access to her videos:

> My online presence is … limited … With my videos you need to know the
> source material well … I don't think they are generally accessible … so I
> don't want my videos out there and tripped over by people who don't
> know the fandom.[55] They are … a form of community dialogue for me.

For her this dialogue took place at VividCon and with "fannish" friends. She had

been making fan videos for over 15 years, and was not interested in using the

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[55] I will discuss how she specifically went about limiting distribution of her videos in
Section 2 where I address her concerns to do with copyright.

Internet to find a wider audience, but rather used it somewhat reluctantly to

substitute for physical media, the traditional method of "distance distribution",

which she believed was a safer method. In particular, she used it so friends

who were not geographically local to her and those not able to attend VividCon

could see her videos:

> When I started doing it I would use VCRs and send out tapes … I'm used
> to distance distribution … but tapes and DVDs are a little bit more self-
> limiting in their distribution and for me a little more comfortable … but
> these days if you are going to get to anybody it needs to be electronic.

While Carol S's comment suggested that Internet distribution had made DVDs

obsolete, something that Laura also agreed with, the Internet had not in fact

replaced them entirely. Their main on-going role was at VividCon where all the

videos premiered there were given to attendees on a compilation DVD set in

their delegate packs, and later mailed out to non-attending delegates.[56] In

addition, the hospitality suite of the convention had compilation DVDs by

different video producers on sale, and compilation DVDs from previous

VividCons and by an assortment of producers were also available for loan

there. I believe DVDs still survived because, as we shall see in the next

section, my informants valued high quality video images (with respect to bit

rates, frame rates and encoding) and DVDs allowed for higher quality images

than Internet streaming, and were a more convenient way of distributing a large

number of high quality videos than downloading.

VividCon itself had also not been replaced by the Internet. In fact, some

producers held off uploading their newest videos to the Internet until they had

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[56] For example, the 2011 VividCon delegates were given a 4-DVD set containing 88
videos.

been premiered at VividCon, as they preferred the feedback a live performance

gave: [57]

> There's nothing to compare with getting live, in-person responses in real-time. Making a whole roomful of people laugh, cry, or thunderously applaud is the best reward I can imagine for the labor of vidding, but more than that, it reaffirms the sense of shared thoughts and feelings that knits the community together. "I was moved by this, so I made a vid that expressed my feelings, and it moved you, too". Art is communication. Real-time responses are the purest form of that. (Laura Shapiro)

Other producers, while also appreciating the atmosphere of a VividCon

premiere, generally preferred the immediacy of online distribution:

> I think a con is special … it is quite fun to have a premiere … and go to the con and engage in that atmosphere … but for the majority of my vids I premiere online because I want the instant gratification … I feel like "I'm done with this, let me show it to you" … 80 or 90% of my vids would be premiered online … I'd always make a premiere [at VividCon] every year, but it is like a supplement … with ClubVivid [a VividCon premiere session] the deadline is the end of March, but it doesn't get shown until August, and by then you are like "is this even my vid – I forgot I made this!" … the Premiere Show [deadline] is the end of June, but even then it is a two months wait. (Obsessive24)

While AbsoluteDestiny, like Laura, stressed the importance of watching a video

together with others in the same physical space, saying that it "can really

elevate a vid's effectiveness", he felt that the decision whether to debut a video

online or with a live audience depended on the nature of the video in question:

> Some vids are for specific audiences and some of those audiences are in a specific room, be it a living room or a convention room. Much of my vid work was made for a convention premiere but there are some of my vids which I've felt more suited to an online debut - usually because a certain vid may work better outside of a convention context.

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[57] As the name indicates, the VividCon organisers required that for a video to be eligible for showing at any of the premiere sessions it must have not been shown at any other conventions, uploaded to the Internet, or made available publicly in any way.

2. Specific Internet technologies: Reasons and uses

My informants used a large and diverse set of Internet technologies to distribute their videos. Luminosity, for instance, used eleven different platforms to distribute her videos during the period of my fieldwork, which included journaling, social networking, video hosting and other types of sites.[58] In this section I will discuss how and why my informants used these specific technologies, focussing on the journaling platforms LiveJournal and Dreamwidth because of their crucial role within the group's activities, and then addressing the many other platforms by aggregating them by the specific reasons why they were used.

For several years leading up to the time of my fieldwork, LiveJournal had been the primary online platform used by my informants' group to share and discuss videos. Luminosity described it as the "central location for a lot of fannish activity … people I've known in fandom for 17 years are in LiveJournal … I have a stronger connection with my fannish friends there than anywhere else". As mentioned in Section 1, prior to the adoption of LiveJournal the different group members who were active at the time used other Internet technologies such as email lists and bulletin boards. Videos were not actually distributed on these earlier technologies, but they were used rather for discussing them. One of the

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[58] These were YouTube, Viddler, vidders.net, Eyecandy, Tumblr, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Archive of Our Own, LiveJournal and Dreamwidth. She had also previously used Vimeo, Blip, Stage6 and iMeem.

main platforms used for this was the Yahoo Groups "vidder" email list, whose

webpage had the following description of its purpose: [59]

> To discuss all aspects of fannish video: making them, watching them, artistic aspects and technical aspects; a list for those who vid and those who like to watch vids. Our motto: VENI, VIDI, VIDDED: I showed up, I watched TV, I made something of it. (vidder-owner, 1999)

LiveJournal's early role in my informants' group was similar, and also initially did

not involve video distribution. Speranza recounts her experience of the

transition from email lists to journals:

> The move of media fans, broadly speaking, from mailing lists to journaling services happened before the vidding community per se came online *as* "the vidding community" because the technology for distributing video wasn't there yet. By which I mean - vidders and vid fans overlapped with and were part of media fandom broadly speaking, and it was the discursive activities of fandom - show and episode meta, talking about vidding tools and trade - that was conducted via mailing lists and then moved to journaling platforms in the early 00s to 2002-3ish.

> At this time, broadband was not yet common and there were no streaming platforms. Some people were beginning to put videos online for download … but that didn't happen much until the middle of the decade … and streaming not until the second half of the decade, 2007ish.

My informants cited a number of reasons why they made the transition to

LiveJournal from email lists. The friends' list of LiveJournal accounts was one

main reason given: Account users were able to designate selected journal

entries as readable only by those on the friends' list, and the platform also

aggregated all the entries from those on the friends' list into a separate feed for

the user to read, allowing for more selective communication than was possible

with email lists. Another reason cited was the "threaded" comments feature of

LiveJournal: The platform not only allowed users to post comments on a journal

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[59] The list was still active during the time of my research, and while some of my informants said that they still occasionally received emails from it, none of them had posted to it for several years.

post made by another user, but it also allowed users to post comments on those

comments, providing a more flexible method for online discussion than email

lists. Laura summarised the attraction of this feature to the group as follows:

"We're much less interested in one-off comments … we're more interested in

creating an on-going conversation, and being able to follow that, and also being

able to read other peoples' on-going conversations".

LiveJournal also provided the group with additional flexibility as to how they

organised online compared to email lists. On one hand, as Speranza stated, it

had the advantage of allowing users their own "personal webspace, especially

for those fans who'd never been able to host their own website before", and

Obsessive24 described this using the spatial metaphor of it being "your own

little house … and you can visit other people's houses". Some felt this private

aspect allowed them to discuss subjects at greater length and with more

freedom:

> The announcements of vids moved over to LiveJournal because we felt
> we could more deeply discuss [them there] … it was a personal journal,
> where you could say "this is my journal and I'm going to mouth-off about
> this!", where I wouldn't ordinarily do that on a list, but in my journal I had
> made this imaginary safe space … and I would go on and on about vids
> … (Luminosity)

On the other hand, Here's Luck stated that LiveJournal's so-called communities

functionality, which allowed for shared, public journal pages, was also a reason

for adoption since it reproduced key elements of emailing lists. This

functionality allowed for topic-specific LiveJournal journaling webpages to be set

up by a user who acted as an administrator and who could grant other users

membership of the community, allowing them to post to it also. I will discuss

some of these features of LiveJournal in more detail in Section 3 where I

examine the group's social interactions around videos distributed via this platform.

During the period of my fieldwork, the way my informants shared videos on LiveJournal was fairly similar. They would post a journal entry announcing a new video, listing the visual source material and music used, with a summary of the video's contents, plus some other information including LiveJournal search tags. The video would be embedded in the entry, and one or more versions of it in different codecs, usually of higher quality, would be available to download via hyperlinks (I will discuss the locations where these videos were hosted in detail below). Comments by the audience about the video were appended at the bottom of the journal entry. (Several examples of this use of LiveJournal appear in the "Fans" section of my visual ethnography.)

While LiveJournal was still central to the group's video distribution activities during the period of my fieldwork, some of my informants had begun in recent years to use other platforms in parallel to it, although none of them had left it entirely. The primary platform they were moving to was the relatively new journaling website Dreamwidth, and all my informants maintained accounts there during my fieldwork.[60] The reasons given for the move were that my informants felt that LiveJournal had become problematic in some respects, and also that Dreamwidth offered some advantages. My informants trace the

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[60] They typically managed both accounts by posting to their Dreamwidth accounts and using its cross-posting function to automatically post the entry to LiveJournal.

beginning of their dissatisfaction with LiveJournal to a controversy they called

"Strikethrough":

> After the change of ownership there was a big culling of communities and users … it was at the point in which advertising became a large feature on LiveJournal … some of these [culled communities] were … to do with homosexuality … obviously slash fans, slash fic writers and slash vidders got scared that they would be somehow censored … people felt that the reason [LiveJournal] did it was because the advertisers were complaining. (AbsoluteDestiny)

Here's Luck summed up the resulting impact of this controversy on the group:

> Fandom had been a huge part of LiveJournal … and we had done a lot to support that site [financially] … so there was a real, serious sense of betrayal … that LiveJournal had sold us up the river … people wanted to go somewhere else, but didn't have anywhere else to go until Dreamwidth showed up.

Another reason given for the move by several of my informants was that

LiveJournal had become an unstable platform. The causes of this instability

were periodic denial of service attacks which my informants suspected

originated from the Russian government or its supporters because LiveJournal

was a prominent platform for political dissent in Russia, used by many high-

profile bloggers critical of the government. The final main reason given for why

LiveJournal was now thought of as problematic within the group, and why

alternatives were being explored, was a change in how it engaged with its

users:

> LiveJournal had gone from being a very open company where the people running it were in constant communication with people using it, working out best-practices, working through privacy policies and terms of service, to a company that was largely just making decisions for financial reasons that would have deep implications for the people using the service and they didn't care. (AbsoluteDestiny)

Dreamwidth, by contrast, was seen as far more fan-friendly:

> Dreamwidth is basically a fannish social media platform … its goal and its birthing came from a fannish place, so there's a comfort there that their coding and stuff has me in mind … I know the people that develop

Dreamwidth … are fannish people … if I have a concern about an issue that was only fannish, I wouldn't be hesitant to ask about it, whereas with [LiveJournal] I know they don't care. (Luminosity)

Here's Luck elaborated on how Dreamwidth collaborated with her group and other fans:

LiveJournal just stopped being fandom-friendly, whereas the Dreamwidth folks … were interested in facilitating the kinds of things that made fandom on that kind of site doable and appealing ... [for example], there were more user pics on default accounts … they were much more interested in listening to what kinds of features people wanted, so when people were trying to transfer communities from LiveJournal to Dreamwidth they were very interested in what kinds of features would make this doable for [us] … there were a lot of little technical things as well as an overall attitude.

While LiveJournal and Dreamwidth were the primary places my informants sought their audiences, these sites did not host videos. My informants therefore, as mentioned above, had to host their videos elsewhere and then either embed the videos within their journal entries, or provide links to the videos in those entries. In the next part of this section I will examine the reasons why my informants chose the particular site or selection of sites they did to host their videos, and how they used those sites. At the same time I will also examine their reasons for using sites in addition to LiveJournal and Dreamwidth for embedding their videos, and how they went about using them.

Copyright. Issues concerning copyright featured prominently in the choice of hosting platform, and in how the chosen platforms were subsequently used. As mentioned in Section 1, Carol S was cautious in how she distributed her videos, and her choice of hosting service reflected this:

I'm on Viddler in part for copyright reasons … music [rights] holders are less likely to be scanning Viddler than they are YouTube … [my videos are] less likely to be tripped over there … when I started vidding fair use

discussions were only happening around fiction not vids, so part of me still doesn't want to get noticed.

Carol's defensiveness extended to how she embedded her videos from Viddler within her journal entries: While she left the entries announcing her videos on LiveJournal and Dreamwidth open to the public, she used "minimal tagging" making them "not completely unsearchable, but [it] take[s] a little effort".

Obsessive24 also maintained a somewhat defensive posture with regard to her use of Vimeo. During our discussions she mentioned that she maintained password protection on her videos hosted on it "so there is no chance of someone just stumbling across them". While this comment was in the context of a discussion concerning how she manages her audience, echoing some of the concerns about being misunderstood or mocked, in a post on a bulletin board thread giving advice to new fan video producers she also related this practice to concerns about copyright:

> Most of us password-protect at Vimeo because Vimeo is known to take down infringing content and suspend accounts. I've heard of it happening even with password protected videos, but at least that happens less often. And since Vimeo is one of the better streaming sites out there in terms of image clarity, framerate etc, we try not to get our accounts suspended if we can help it. ☺ (Obsessive24, 2012)

Obsessive24 had previously had her fan videos on her YouTube channel, but decided to remove them because of copyright concerns. She summed up her position on the "About Obsessive24" section of her channel:

> Due to copyright concerns I am no longer streaming vids on YouTube. Please visit my site if you would like to download a vid.
>
> If you are currently hosting any of my vids without my permission (whether credited or otherwise), I would appreciate it if you could remove them. (Obsessive24, n.d.)

A concern about how YouTube enforced copyright infringement claims was one

of the main reasons why most of my informants avoided using it, or why they

used it only in a limited or reluctant way. Here's Luck's response, when asked

why she used the platforms she did to upload her videos, was typical of many of

my informants' stance towards YouTube: "Really my attitude is 'anything but

YouTube'; YouTube has a history of removing vids for any or no reason,

including but not limited to ridiculous copyright claims". Speranza, when

describing her deliberations about finding a new host for her videos after the

demise of iMeem (discussed below), expressed a similar view: "By that time,

YouTube was … already getting a reputation for its takedowns and rough

attitudes toward fair use. So I am currently hosting at Blip, which does at least

have an explicit fair use policy". Although AbsoluteDestiny had adopted

YouTube for his videos (for reasons I will discuss below), he had done this only

recently, and he explained that copyright issues were the reason why he

delayed his adoption of it: "What I didn't want was to get into a situation where

take down notices were causing me to be some kind of media nomad where I'd

have to be moving my content from one place to another … I was afraid of this

for a long while". However remaining on YouTube had required him to actively

defend himself against "plenty" of DMCA notices for videos he considered were

fair use.[61] Some of these included what he considered particularly spurious

claims that he believed were generated automatically by corporate "robots that

look for tags … and just give you takedown notices … that's the sort of

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[61] The Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) of 1998 is part of US copyright law and contains provisions for parties to issue notices concerning copyright infringement and for notified parties to respond with counter-notices claiming fair use (US Copyright Office, 1998). A link to a LiveJournal post by AbsoluteDestiny recounting his experiences of defending against DMCA notices on YouTube is contained in the "Use of Internet" page of my visual ethnography.

annoyance that held me back from using YouTube". He had considered using

Vimeo in preference to YouTube, but in spite of the workload that it generated

for him, he considered that YouTube handled copyright claims in a better way:

> Vimeo … doesn't have as transparent a content copyright matching system as YouTube does (not that YouTube's is what I would call transparent) … certainly there have been plenty of times where vidders have just had things taken down with no notice … I was mostly concerned about how little process there was involved in the takedowns, while at least with YouTube you have a form for DMCA counter-notices, and [the process] is reasonably upfront.

Platform dependability. Laura had also adopted YouTube recently, around the

middle of my time in the field, but for different reasons and also very reluctantly:

> I never wanted to nor thought I would. LJ [LiveJournal] preventing those Blip embeds at the same time vidders.net started asking for money made it impossible for me to reach the LJ audience without adopting a free streaming technology that LJ could support. Rather than fiddling with Viddler, Vimeo, or any of the other small players, I went ahead and jumped to YouTube because I figured it was the most likely to be supported, and supported for a long time to come.

At the heart of Laura's choice was the issue of platform dependability,

something that troubled all my informants. Speranza, for instance, believed that

"having a stable home for video hosting" was a much bigger issue for the group

than the problems with the journaling platforms discussed above. Concern

within the group about a hosting service's dependability originated from their

experience with iMeem. As we saw in Laura's quote in Section 1, the group as

a whole went to iMeem when they first adopted Internet distribution. However,

in 2009 iMeem decided that it would no longer host videos, and only gave its

users a few days notice that this was going to happen.[62] This caused the group

a lot of disruption because alternative hosting had to be sought, all the videos

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[62] This reflected more or less the general perception of my informants concerning the iMeem controversy, although some of my informants would refer to it in a way that suggested instead that it ceased trading altogether.

had to be uploaded again, and journal entries containing embeds and links had

to be updated. Also comments on videos, hit counts and even some videos that

were not backed up were lost. Some of my informants, such as

AbsoluteDestiny, believed that iMeem took this decision since they were not big

enough to fight the DMCA notices they were being served by copyright owners.

Laura, in spite of her misgivings about YouTube chose it as a replacement for

Blip and vidder.net because she felt it would be more stable than the "small

players". Luminosity, after having her Vimeo account suspend for a breach in

terms of service over a copyright infringement claim, also adopted YouTube

because she too had concerns with the smaller services, and wanted to find a

stable "repository" for her videos:

> I used to have everything up on iMeem before it was shut down … then
> Vimeo, I got TOSed[63] from Vimeo for making fan vids … I had everything
> on Vimeo … [then] I had everything on Stage6[64] … I've just started
> putting everything up on YouTube … there have been so many platforms
> that were fantastic for their time but shut down because they were not
> turning a profit, or they were having to deal with too many DMCA notices.

The idea of having not only a stable repository, but also a permanent one had

influenced Laura and Luminosity in their decision to use Archive of Our Own

(AO3; links to their pages on this site are contained within my visual

ethnography). This was a platform developed and run by the Organization of

Transformative Works (OTW), a non-profit fan run organisation, and built on the

open-source "Ruby on Rails" web development framework (Archive of Our Own,

2013). In the stage of development it was at during my fieldwork, it was

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[63] "TOSed" is a fan term (pronounced "tossed") meaning that the service in question
invoked a clause in its terms of service agreement with the user to close the user's
account, and is typically related to imputed copyright infringement.
[64] Stage6 was a video hosting service run by DivX Inc. that was required to shut down
for financial reasons in 2008. (DivX, 2008)

primarily a place for fan fiction and it did not host videos. However Speranza, who was actively involved in the OTW and the platform's development, explained it did allow producers in its current form to create a directory of their videos and embed and tag them there, so it could at least act as a permanent place both for fans to leave their comments and for producers to track hits on their videos. Luminosity explained her attraction to the permanence of AO3:

> One of the things I am excited about with AO3 is that it is fan owned and it will be a permanent repository … if they're on AO3 they're not going anywhere. I've lost track of vids that I like that are on LiveJournal, when people drop off and close their journal, … you lose all that fannish history, all that fiction, all those vids.

AO3 however had only had limited success in interesting my informants in its use: AbsoluteDestiny, Obsessive24 and Here's Luck all felt that the work required to create entries for all their videos on the site was not justified given its restricted current functionality.

Concerns about the dependability of third-party hosting services was one reason why all my informants also maintained their own websites alongside the other services they used. For example, Here's Luck explained that she uploaded videos not only to third-party streaming video services, but also maintained her own website where the videos were available for download: "A lot of fans like to download vids we love … because we want our own copies in case the vidder leaves fandom or the streaming site shuts down".

Quality. The other reason Here's Luck gave for why she maintained her own site for downloading was that it allowed her to provide higher quality versions of her videos than those available on streaming sites. This concern for quality was

emphasised by other informants too, not only with respect to offering

downloadable versions of their videos, but also in their choice of third-party

hosting services. For example, as Speranza explained: "A bunch of us started

at iMeem back when YouTube's synch was really dysfunctional: fan vidding is

dependent on good video-audio synchronization". Laura initially used Blip partly

because she believed it "offers good visual quality and playback", and

AbsoluteDestiny avoided Viddler because he believed the video quality was

poor, due in his opinion to the way the videos were encoded and the very low

bit rates used. Also, Obsessive24 had initially used BAM Video Vault but

moved to Vimeo because she said BAM converted streaming videos to 15

frames per second, while Vimeo used the source videos frame rate.

Audience. As mentioned earlier, LiveJournal and Dreamwidth were the main

platforms where my informants sought their audiences, but these were not the

only platforms used. For example, AbsoluteDestiny's choice of YouTube was

not only about using it as a place to host videos for embedding into his

journaling sites, but also about expanding his audience beyond those journaling

sites and his own website: "There came a point where I felt there was a whole

audience of people who were just not in any way aware of my work - my work

wasn't really easily sharable compared to any YouTube work". This contrasted

with Luminosity's and Laura's use of YouTube, both of whom were not

interested in reaching the YouTube audience. While Obsessive24 had taken

down all her fan videos from her YouTube channel because of copyright

concerns, as mentioned above, she in fact had set up a separate, anonymous

YouTube account to host just one video so it could reach the YouTube

audience:

> It was a Brittany Spear's real person vid[65] … I thought it had a bit more
> relevance in terms of who could watch this vid and appreciate it outside
> of fandom … so I had that up on YouTube without my contact details … I
> set up a different YouTube account to host that specifically because I
> didn't want it associated with me or my LiveJournal presence.

Some of my informants were also using or considering Tumblr for distributing

their videos. Like the journaling sites, Tumblr did not host videos, but enabled

them to be embedded within posts to the site. For Here's Luck, Tumblr was a

way of getting to an audience she might not otherwise reach on her other

platforms. She characterised the audience on Tumblr as being younger and

much more interested in the immediate impact of shared images than an

engagement in lengthy text discussions, in contrast to the LiveJournal and

Dreamwidth audience. She also believed that particular fandoms were

focussed on Tumblr, such as that of the television series *Glee*. This is why she

chose, as her first post to Tumblr, a *Glee* video that she described as light and

not requiring a lot of reflection (a link to this post and the *Glee* video are

contained on the "Use of Internet" page of my visual ethnography).

Facebook and Twitter were not commonly used by my informants for

distributing their videos. When they were used, it was to simply announce a

new video, and this was done through posts that contained a short text

comment about the video and a link to the entry announcing the video on

LiveJournal or Dreamwidth. This use was mainly about reaching people who

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[65] "Real person" is a fan term used to describe a genre of videos or fan fiction pieces
that are about actual people, and are typically about people famous within popular
culture.

were part of their wider social network but who did not follow their journal posts.

Laura said that she also used Twitter because of its immediacy:

> Twitter gets checked by many people way more often … for people who
> use mobile devices, they're seeing Twitter all the time … they may not be
> logging onto LiveJournal or Dreamwidth until they get home from work,
> but they'll see the vid announcement at lunch on their iPhone.

Other reasons. While copyright, platform dependability, quality and audience were the main factors influencing how and why my informants used the technologies they did, a number of other reasons were given also. Specific aspects of a site's technical features and functions influenced whether some of my informants used it or not, and this was something we saw with the adoption of LiveJournal over email lists discussed above. For the hosting platforms, Obsessive24 used the password protection feature on Vimeo as we saw, and she indicated that this was one of the reasons she chose it at the time over alternatives such as Blip. The maximum length video a site could host was another technical feature that also influenced some decisions: For example, one of Luminosity's earlier videos, "Scooby Road", was 42 minutes long and her initial choice of Viddler over some alternatives such as YouTube was influenced by Viddler allowing longer videos, although as we saw she adopted YouTube later for different reasons. Other reasons given included a platform's terms of service, the financial cost to use a platform, how easy the platform was to use, and how the overall focus and philosophy of a site fitted with those of my informants (the perception of Dreamwidth as fan-friendly discussed above being one example of this).

Case study of Luminosity's use of Internet technology. My ethnography of the group's use of the Internet has so far been organised around their key

platforms, LiveJournal and Dreamwidth, and around their main reasons for platform choice, as I believe this is the best way of representing what I encountered in the field. However, I will finish this section by quickly sketching the uses of these platforms from the point of view of a single user to give an alternative perspective on my findings from the field. Also, my visual ethnography contains a counterpart to this case study, which allows the reader to explore the different elements discussed below for themselves.

Luminosity was a woman in her forties and lived in the US. She had been involved with fan communities online since 1995. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, Luminosity concurrently used eleven different platforms to distribute her videos during the period of my fieldwork. She announced her videos by posting to Dreamwidth, and then used Dreamwidth's cross-posting function to simultaneously post to LiveJournal. Links to the Dreamwidth posts would be posted on her Facebook and Twitter accounts. In the latter part of my fieldwork, she also started embedding her videos from YouTube within Tumblr and Pinterest, an online pin-up board. Also, while she was not using it regularly, she had also embedded three of her videos within her Archive of Our Own account.

The most recent journal posts contained videos embedded from YouTube, although ones in the earlier period of my fieldwork had videos embedded from Viddler. However, even in the later period where she embedded from YouTube, she still uploaded a copy to Viddler for redundancy in case YouTube rejected a video. She also uploaded a copy to vidders.net to support that site, as it was a

fan-run project, although she stopped doing that during the course of my fieldwork when it started charging subscription fees. The journal posts also contained a link that enabled the video to be downloaded in a higher quality format from Luminosity's own site, Eyecandy. At the beginning of my fieldwork she told me she had anticipated using Critical Commons[66] but decided against it later as it was proving too difficult to use, particularly its requirement for a text commentary to be posted with every video to support fair use arguments, should the need arise, against claims of copyright infringement. Also, before the period of my fieldwork she had previously uploaded videos to Vimeo, but as we saw was "TOSed" from it, and she had also used Blip but there were long delays clearing her videos for publication to that site so she became impatient and stopped using it.

In addition to Luminosity's own efforts to distribute her videos, others also distributed them for her, sometimes with her permission and sometimes without. For example, *New York* magazine ran a story on Luminosity and had links to two of her videos, "Vogue" and "Women's Work", within the Internet edition of their story, the copies of which were supplied by Luminosity but hosted on the magazine's website (Hill, 2007). Another example she gave was when a user of Vimeo had downloaded one of her videos, "Scooby Road", and then uploaded it to their own account without permission while still giving her credit for it. I will take a closer look at my informants' audiences' redistribution practices as part of the discussion in the next section.

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[66] "Critical Commons is a public media archive and fair use advocacy network that supports the transformative reuse of media in scholarly and creative contexts". (Critical Commons, n.d.)

3. Distribution technologies as social spaces.

The group's producers were engaged in sustained online interactions with their

audiences about their videos, unlike the public access producers. Online

interactions were generally very important to my informants:

> I do definitely engage with others about my vids … I love feedback and
> especially lengthy discussions and critique, vid meta, etc. I view the work
> as art and like any art I enjoy talking about it, dissecting it, figuring out
> how and why it works (or doesn't). This is one of the most rewarding
> aspects of my community: we love to discuss the work! (Laura)

Similarly, AbsoluteDestiny said:

> I tend to post my vids for comment on LiveJournal and Dreamwidth ... In
> terms of engagement, I use them primarily for feedback and discussion.
> Criticism and commentary can be as important as the celebratory parts
> of fandom so I think it's vital wherever I post my works for there to be a
> way for conversation to be sparked by them.

Here's Luck not only appreciated comments, but actively encouraged

commenters:

> I respond to every comment left on my vid posts; sometimes people are
> nervous about leaving comments, so I want to let commenters know that
> feedback is appreciated - both because I personally appreciate it and
> because I hope that positive reinforcement will encourage them to leave
> comments for other vidders.

Luminosity also stressed the importance of replying to comments: "It's only

polite. Feedback is the coin of the fannish realm, and I'd like to have it 'with

interest'; therefore, I strive to keep those lines of communication open between

the viewers and me". My own experience in the field supported these

sentiments: I left a number of comments about videos on my informants' and

other group members' journal entries over the twelve months of my fieldwork,

and all my comments were answered by the producers, and done so courteously and typically very quickly.

To illustrate the kind of interaction being discussed here, I will briefly outline a discussion that occurred on LiveJournal concerning a video posted by Obsessive24 (a link to the relevant LiveJournal entry and related screenshots can be found on the "Internet as Social Space" page of my visual ethnography). The journaling sites were the primary distribution platforms where these interactions took place, and the discussion under examination here is typical of the ones I observed there. The video at the centre of this illustration was a montage of clips from episodes from the series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and concerned the unrequited love of the character Riley for Buffy. There were 43 comments on the video posted over a period of six months from the date of the original journal post.[67] The first comment was by Speranza, and was 160 words long. The comment had two main themes, firstly it was a celebration of the video because it agreed with Speranza's reading of the Buffy/Riley relationship, and secondly it provided her analysis of that relationship and her thoughts on why the *Buffy* television audience did not take to Riley as a character. Here's Luck replies to Speranza's comment by simply saying: "Yes to a lot of this" (Obsessive24, 2011).[68] Comments on comments by someone other than the video producer, like this one, did occur occasionally but from my observations

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[67] During the period of my fieldwork she posted 17 videos to her LiveJournal account, and they attracted on average 46 comments ranging from around 10 to 70 per post, with one outlying Harry Potter video attracting 175 comments.

[68] The various quotes from the comments below concerning this video can all be found appended to the journal post at this reference, and for simplicity's sake I will not be referencing them individually in the discussion that follows.

did not appear to be common. Obsessive24 replied to Speranza's original comment with a typically generous "OMG, thank you so, so much!", and then gives her own thoughts on the audience reception of Riley.

Comments, and replies, varied considerably in length. Some were very short, celebratory comments, referred to as "squees" by the group, which typically received similarly short responses from the producers: An example for Obsessive24's video was the comment of "Beautiful vid!", to which she responded simply "Thank you :)". Some however went into a lot of detailed analysis: One comment on Obsessive24's video ran to 900 words, and contained detailed analysis of the video using time codes. This comment was focussed on how the editing techniques used helped tell the story of the Buffy/Riley relationship, for example, an excerpt from the comment reads: "1:03 - We see Riley come up on Angel. Having Angel's 'real' introduction be through a clip with Riley and not Buffy was unexpected but helped center the vid in Riley's POV". Obsessive24's response is correspondingly long, running to nearly 300 words.

As mentioned, the structure of the comment threads was typically flat, rather than branching, with an audience member making a single comment on the post and the producer responding with a single comment constituting the whole exchange. I was somewhat surprised by this, and by the fact that there weren't more long comments, given the importance my informants placed on thoughtful discussion. They offered me several explanations for this. One was that these

discussions did occur, but that LiveJournal and Dreamwidth were just the

starting points for them. For instance, Obsessive24 stated:

> If someone wants to talk to me about my vid I prefer to do it on LJ
> through the commenting system … it's the accepted practice … I like that
> it is in a public forum if you don't know that person very well - it feels
> safer … of course, if you do start to get to know them very well then
> email is the preferred way because you get to the more specific issues
> and the things you might not be comfortable saying publicly online.

In fact my informants listed a variety of other technologies and places where

these discussions took place once the initial connection was established on the

journaling sites, and included a dedicated fan video chat room on Internet Relay

Chat (IRC), private instant messaging services, Skype, telephone and face to

face meetings at conventions and privately.

Another reason given for not posting long comments on the journaling sites and

using other methods for communication instead was to do with the group's

etiquette: Carol S believed that "making people go through long comments is

rude". She also picked up on the last point of Obsessive24's above concerning

what is said in public:

> If you want to critique it is done in private via email … it prevents
> negative third party reaction, and there is a realisation that even well
> meant critiquing can be painful. It limits potential explosions … the
> vidding process is a very emotional one.

Luminosity agreed that many producers were not comfortable with critique, and

lamented that this had created a "cult of nice" in the group in recent years. She

said that this had resulted in only bland comments being made in the public

forums, meaning that these were no longer channels for constructive criticism

and so denying producers feedback that might otherwise help them improve.

Obsessive24 agreed about the lack of constructive criticism, and argued that

the "cult of nice" resulted from the effort it took to produce it:

> I've just started giving concrit again very recently after 3 years of only saying nice things or not saying things at all … the reason I stopped giving it is that I didn't have the time … it takes much more effort to sit down and give concrit that's actually constructive and not too mean, than it is just to say I like this and this, and imply the things you don't talk about you didn't like too much … even if you phrase it very nicely there are still going to be people saying "I don't want to listen to this", so after a while it got too tedious, like "I don't have time to do this" … but I've just started again because I think it is a good way to open up some conversations, especially for the newer vidders.

These interactions between producers and audience members turned into

significant friendships in some case. AbsoluteDestiny's comments summed up

my informants' view on this:

> I've met some of my best friends this way. It's the long tail of social networking - people with niche common interests are likely to be a good match socially. It's generally been online meeting followed by an in person meeting usually at a convention and then meeting up just as friends for no other reason than friendship.

Most of my informants indicated that these friendships formed primarily with

other producers in the group, who were of course also part of the audience,

rather than with those that were group members but who didn't make their own

videos. Obsessive24 talked in detail about her experience of how these

friendships formed:

> The relationship wouldn't form over the course of one vid … you keep commenting as that person keeps putting out more vids, and there is a kind of mutual admiration that forms. I find that I engage more with vidders than non-vidders because we understand better what the other person is trying to achieve, also how difficult something might be that doesn't look hard.

> I think a lot of my vidding relationships came from beta or collaborative discussions where you've talked to each other publicly then become trusting enough to say, "I've got this new vid, can you take a look at it and let me know what you think?". It builds from there, and after a point, once you get in to talking a lot about the creative side of things, you start

knowing each other better as people, your family lives or whatever …
then there is a shift from a vidder level to being friends.

Speranza framed the producer-audience relationship, and the resulting
friendships sometimes arising from it within the group, with the notion of
community - a term regularly used by my informants to describe their group and
its dynamics:

I don't see this as a creator/audience relationship: it's more like art
produced within and for a community … Vidders are, as far as I know,
quite unusual in the level of closeness of the community, partly because
we are a community with a really old history …

In addition to giving comments, the audience would also actively redistribute the
producers' videos. This was typically done through the journaling sites, and
was called a "rec" (short for "recommendation") or a "signal boost". The
audience member would make a journal post with a short commentary of why
they thought the video or videos were worth recommending, and provide links to
the relevant LiveJournal posts made by the producers containing the videos.

4. Assemblage theory analysis of fans' use of the Internet

Like the public access stations and producers in the previous chapter, the fan
producers had difficulty in maintaining the stability of their distribution
assemblages. One source of instability was from the resistance the producers
sometimes faced when trying to translate the interests of the different third-party
distribution platforms into ones consistent with the producers' goals: The third-
party platforms were actors in their own right, and powerful ones at that, and
had their own goals with respect to video that sometimes diverged from those of
the producers. We saw cases when the platforms would reterritorialise their

hosted content on what they believed was legally used copyright material, to satisfy their own corporate goals, and this sometimes caused their platforms to detach from the producers' assemblages. Luminosity's experience of having her account suspended on Vimeo was an example of this, as was AbsoluteDestiny's explanation of why iMeem no longer hosted videos. In such cases the producers' translations failed, and they were effectively powerless to prevent this. Also, while the actions of the third-party platforms with regard to copyright would not always generate instability in the producers' assemblages, they would sometimes force them to renew the translation work done on the platform to prevent instability. AbsoluteDestiny's need to deal with regular DMCA notices was an on-going process of translation where he repeatedly had to affirm to YouTube that his interests were in fact aligned with theirs when it came to the copyright material they were hosting on his behalf.

Beyond issues concerning copyright, the third-party platforms took other decisions as actors that caused instability in the producers' assemblages. Laura's assemblage became unstable because, in her belief, LiveJournal had made deliberate changes to its site so that Blip videos could no longer be embedded within it, and because vidders.net had decided to adopt a commercial model: Since she wanted a free video hosting service compatible with LiveJournal, she was forced to detach Blip and vidders.net from her assemblage and reterritorialise it on YouTube which was such a service. Another example concerned the so-called "nymwars" with Google: AbsoluteDestiny explained that Google took down user profiles, including those of some fan video producers, from their social networking site Google+ that

used pseudonyms, despite user protests, because Google wanted "real people" as users to sell to advertisers.[69] Google was, based on AbsoluteDestiny's explanation, reterritorialising itself on "real people" because of commercial concerns that resulted in the detachment of pseudonymous users from its assemblage.

Another source of instability in the producers' assemblages originated from instabilities within the third-party platforms themselves: Third-party platforms were not just actors, but they were precarious assemblages in their own right too that would sometimes become unstable or come apart entirely. LiveJournal's instability in the face of denial of service attacks was one example of this, as was Stage6 detaching from Luminosity's assemblage because it was no longer able to maintain itself financially and had to close down.

My informants' practices in general with regard to third-party platforms reflected their perception that the enrolment of these platforms was precarious. As we saw, many of my informants enrolled redundant journaling and hosting platforms into their assemblages, others enrolled platforms they believed would be less precarious (e.g. Carol S's use of Viddler because it was a relatively low profile service), and yet others employed various enrolment strategies to minimise the risk a platform would detach (e.g. Obsessive24's use of password protection on Vimeo). In spite of these and the other practices reviewed so far in this section concerning third-party platforms, my informants believed they had

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[69] AbsoluteDestiny also mentioned that Google eventually allowed limited pseudonym use.

little power to prevent the unilateral detachment of any or all of them from their assemblages, and this was a source of anxiety for the group. The development and use of their own platforms was one way they believed they could reduce the precariousness of their assemblages, as we saw in the previous section when discussing my informants' own download sites and the AO3 fan project. However we also saw that AO3 had limited success in enrolling my informants in its current form because it did not host videos. Speranza explained that working out how AO3 could host videos was in fact a complex undertaking:

> There's a giant open source community trying to figure out the best way to host video … beyond YouTube and commercial streaming. The thing is that most people working on this are also looking for eyeballs - exposure for their work. But fan vidders don't have this problem: on the contrary, their vids have the potential to go viral, so the OTW is hesitant to built a traditional streaming service for vids because success of one vid could take down their servers and blow out bandwidth for the organization entirely.

Speranza said OTW was considering torrent technologies as an option since these overcame server bandwidth constraints by distributing hosting through client computers, but these were problematic also: "The legal situation around even totally legal torrenting is very dodgy, and a lot of people's cable companies automatically throttle their Internet service if they see torrents even if the torrents are totally legal". Speranza continued that because of these complications the OTW was delaying making a decision on what technology to use until they saw the kinds of solutions the open source community came up with. Developing AO3 so it would interest more of my informants and accommodate their potential audiences was therefore a complex and extended process of translation.

In addition to the work the producers did to enrol and maintain the different platforms they used in their assemblages, they also engaged in processes to enrol and maintain audiences too. For example, as we saw, they not only placed journaling platforms at the centre of their assemblages as a way to stimulate and manage audience discussion about their videos, but they also actively encouraged audience comments through their prompt and courteous responses. In addition, once the audience members had connected to their assemblages through comments on their journals, we saw that the producers sometimes maintained these connections by enrolling a variety of other technologies they believed were better suited to this task (e.g. email).

The audience-producer interactions were also coded to some degree to help maintain the stability of the group as a whole. The fan group can be thought of as an assemblage of assemblages, with the journaling sites being the primary components where those assemblages interconnect, through commenting, friend's lists and other mechanisms. The "cult of nice" Luminosity complained about above can be seen as a linguistic coding of the practice of comment-giving by restricting comments to "nice" ones only. This coding most likely helped prevent the "explosions" Carol S mentioned, which can be understood as controversies that could lead to some group members' assemblages being detached from those of the group as a whole, or lead to the breaking up of the group into smaller groups that no longer interacted with each other.

Finally, there was a desire expressed by many of my informants to territorialise or reterritorialise their assemblages on "fannish" technologies, although these

processes were still on going. For example, as we saw, while some of my informants had added Dreamwidth as a component to their assemblages partly because "fannish" people ran it, none had entirely abandoned LiveJournal because it still played a central role in the group. Similarly, while one of the reasons some of my informants used or were considering using AO3 was because it was fan run, its potential role as a replacement for the journal sites and third-party video hosting sites had not been realised in any of my informants' assemblages because of its limited functionality in its existing form.

5. Conclusion

The fan producers, like the public access stations and producers in the previous chapter, had a broad range of reasons for distributing their videos on the Internet. While some saw it as a way to gain a larger audience than was possible through their traditional distribution methods, others saw it as a convenient way of reaching their existing audience already established through those traditional methods. For some of my informants who started producing videos unaware of the traditional methods, it was a way of finding an audience that would understand and appreciate their work. Alongside these specifically audience-related reasons, we also saw a desire expressed by some of my informants to integrate the distribution of their videos within their wider "fannish" activities, which were already well-establish on the Internet before they adopted Internet video distribution.

Also, while the Internet had been adopted generally by the group, some of my informants delayed doing so, or did it reluctantly, echoing concerns in Chapter 2 about the increased risk of their videos being found by those who would misunderstand or mock them, or by copyright holders who might pursue legal claims against them. In addition, like the public access producers, this general adoption of the Internet as a video distribution medium did not mean that traditional methods had ceased to be used as they continued to perform important functions within the group.

As we saw, my informant group used a large and diverse set of Internet technologies to distribute their videos, and they gave a broad range of reasons why they used the particular technologies they did. LiveJournal was used by all my informants and was central to the group's video distribution activities, although the group had initially adopted it for reasons to do with its superiority as a platform for discussing rather than distributing videos. However, there was dissatisfaction within the group concerning LiveJournal, originally stemming from a sense of betrayal over the Strikethrough controversy, and continuing because of its perceived on-going lack of concern for its users and its periodic instability as a platform. Dreamwidth was judged as superior in these respects and was being considered as an alternative by some producers. With respect to the many other platforms used by my informants, concerns over copyright issues, platform dependability, streaming quality, and the size and type of audiences the platforms had were the main considerations they took into account when deciding which technologies to use.

Unlike the public access producers in the previous chapter, the fan producers generally believed interacting online with their audience was very important. These interactions would typically start with a comment on a video through one of the journaling sites, and they would then sometimes be continued using a variety of other technologies. In some cases these interactions would continue over time, and sometimes even led to lasting friendships. In fact, my informants typically characterised these interactions as between members of a close community rather than as ones between producers and audiences.

Third-party platforms were a major cause of instability within my informants' assemblages: These platforms sometimes proved difficult to maintain within their assemblages because they were both powerful actors in their own right whose interests sometimes diverged from those of my informants, and also precarious assemblages themselves. My informants used various enrolment strategies to minimise the risk of these platforms unilaterally detaching from their assemblages, and this sometimes required on-going maintenance work, although the belief that they had in fact little power to prevent this prompted them in the development of their own alternatives. My informants were also engaged in work to enrol and maintain their audiences within their assemblages, and the overall producer-audience interaction was coded to some degree to prevent it creating instability in the group's molar assemblage. We shall see in the next chapter that the activists of visionOntv also had significant concerns about the stability of their assemblages, although for different reasons and using different technologies.

Chapter 7. Video activists online: visionOntv

This chapter concerns the online video activist group visionOntv introduced in Chapter 4. VisionOntv began development in 2008 as the online video project of the activist group Undercurrents, discussed in Chapter 2. In 2009 it was incorporated as a separate limited company, jointly owned by Undercurrents, the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, which was the venture's funder[70], and the two visionOntv founders Hamish Campbell, who was also a member of Undercurrents, and Richard Hering, a former BBC television investigative journalist. While Undercurrents had originally considered keeping the project within itself, Rowntree preferred a legal structure that allowed them some formal control over it.

VisionOntv was a multifaceted entity: It made activist videos for distribution on the Internet, it distributed its own and other people's activist videos on the Internet, it developed and maintained its own online video distribution platform, and it trained other people in how to make activist videos and distribute them on the Internet. It also developed its platform as a model for other video activists to

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[70] The Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust was an organisation that funded "political campaigns in the UK to promote democratic reform, civil liberties and social justice" (Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust Ltd, 2013). The funding for visionOntv was in the form of a one-off grant at the beginning of the project that was used to cover expenses and to pay a small allowance to Hamish, Richard and Marc (introduced below). That funding ran out in October 2012, although visionOntv was still operating as of April 2013.

adopt. In Section 1 I describe how and why the three core members of visionOntv went about developing and running this online video venture, and how they used it to engage with their audiences. The facets of visionOntv I will focus on in this section concern their video making and distribution activities, as well as their work towards making the platform available to other video activists. In addition, the core members maintained a very inclusive attitude toward visionOntv membership, and as a result there were a number of other people involved with the venture, and I will briefly discuss this aspect of visionOntv at the end of Section 1. In Section 2 I will look at the Merseyside Street Reporters Network and how it emerged out of the "Making News Roadshow" training workshop visionOntv ran in Liverpool during my fieldwork. In Section 3 I will analyse the ethnography presented in the earlier sections using assemblage theory.

1. Promoting social change through video production, distribution and platform development

VisionOntv was developed and run by Hamish and Richard, both British and in their late 40s, and one other core member, Marc Barto, a French man in his late 20s, who joined the project at the beginning of my fieldwork. While their offices were registered in Swansea, at the same address where Undercurrents was registered, they in fact primarily worked out of a flat in north London in which two of them lived, and a room in Hackspace, a hacker community space in central London.

VisionOntv's purpose was to promote social change through the Internet using video. One way the core team did this was by creating their own videos and distributing them and the videos of other activist and alternative video makers on the Internet. Hamish claimed that visionOntv was in fact one of the largest online video activist projects in the world, with Marc estimating that they aggregated over 19,000 videos, which included over 1,000 videos produced by visionOntv. The videos the core team of visionOntv made themselves varied considerably in length, format and complexity. Also, visionOntv were generally prepared to trade off video quality against increased quantity and turnaround time. Hamish in particular believed that visionOntv's limited resources were better used in creating more videos than editing existing footage. This meant, for instance, that visionOntv almost never edited any of their videos, and simply uploaded the raw camera footage to save time, relying on different shooting formats and techniques to ensure the videos' coherence.

One common format was the "street report", which was the shortest format video they made and was 30 seconds to one minute in duration and comprised a single shot. These were made by one person, typically just using the video camera on their phone. They had a voice-over reporting on whatever the subject of the video was, and were uploaded unedited to the Internet. An example of one of these was Hamish reporting on a police cordon set up on a street in Hackney after a shooting that he happened to pass by one evening (visionOntv, 2012; this video can be viewed on the "visionOntv" page of my visual ethnography). Interviews were another common format they produced, and these typically happened at demonstrations or conferences. They usually

involved the "pop up studio", introduced in Chapter 4, which had two main configurations. The simpler configuration was used, for example, for the interviews Hamish and Marc produced at the "J30" demonstrations in London, held in support of the public sector workers' strike on June 30, 2011. Here Hamish operated a laptop running the Wirecast software program which took the video feed from the laptop camera facing Hamish, the interviewer, and mixed it with the video feed from a small USB camera mounted on the laptop facing the interviewee by embedding it as a window within the latter feed. Wirecast mixed these video feeds with the audio feed coming from a microphone connected to the laptop operated by Marc.

The more complex configuration again involved a laptop running Wirecast, but this time taking a feed from two camcorders (a one-person shot of the interviewee, and a two-person shot of the interviewee and interviewer), a microphone, and another laptop providing live cutaways of found footage, websites or stills. The operator of the laptop running Wirecast could select between the different feeds, and decide which ones to use and mix together, and whether to embed one feed within another. Wirecast in this more complex configuration ran something like a virtual television studio control room, with the Wirecast operator in the role of the control room director. While volunteers often took some of the different roles required to operate the more complex configuration, one or more members of the core team would usually arrange the interviews and the locations where they were shot, manage the setting up of the

equipment, and direct the making of the interview.[71] These interviews varied in length from around five to 15 minutes and, like the "street reports", were uploaded unedited to the Internet. One example of this type of video was a ten-minute interview conducted with John Pilger at the Rebellious Media Conference in London during October 2011. (My visual ethnography contains videos documenting the production of both the John Pilger interview, and the use of the simpler configuration of the pop up studio at the J30 demonstration and elsewhere.)

Hamish described the type of videos visionOntv made as "agitprop" (agitation propaganda): "It's truthful, powerful, propaganda … with propaganda used in the dictionary term which simply means putting your view across in the best possible way". Richard also used this term to describe their video making, and elaborated on it further: "Agitpropaganda … has a very respectable tradition in film - film is one of the most powerful media for informing people in a way that they can feel … [our films are] a quest for justice".

How and why visionOntv distributed videos online. Hamish explained his initial reasons for distributing videos on the Internet:

> I originally put video on the web not so that people could watch video on the web, but so they could download it from the web and show it at screenings. That's why I did the CDs and the [VHS tapes]: The value of video is groups of people watching it together, it's not about an isolated person on a single screen.

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[71] VisionOntv regularly used volunteers in a variety of capacities in all facets of their venture.

Hamish's comment concerning physical media refers to his early time at

Undercurrents where he would host screenings in the UK and elsewhere

playing activist videos using VHS players or CD drives on laptops. The

visionOntv platform was, during the period of my fieldwork, a video-streaming

platform however, and it did not allow downloads. Hamish explained the

situation as follows:

> The visionOntv project started as a downloadable project, it then
> became, just by inertia … a streaming project because it was what
> worked, what was easy, what everyone wanted … but now I'm getting
> frustrated with that, and I want it to go back to a screening network
> because that's what excites me, although the online one is fine and it can
> continue. It's a really hard thing to do, but that's what I want to do.

Hamish explained that they had originally experimented with peer-to-peer

torrent file technologies for the visionOntv platform in addition to the streaming

technologies, which would have allowed downloading, but the torrent

technology didn't work for them so they abandoned it. Hamish elaborated on

why he was more excited by people watching activist videos at screenings

rather than online:

> It's more fun, it's more human … the Internet has this isolatedness …
> everyone sitting in front of their laptop, and no one is communicating. …
> [watching] video on the Internet is this isolated, individualistic experience
> - it's a disempowering experience for the audience. … I've always joked
> that visionOntv wants to be a dating network, because physical people
> meeting physical people is what matters.

While Richard also believed in the value of screenings - stating that "there is

nothing quite like fifty people in a dark room watching a screening together, and

then being able to talk about it afterwards" - and had issues with the

individualistic nature of watching videos online, he placed a greater emphasis

on this way of watching videos than Hamish. He believed that having videos

available to view online was an opportunity to reach a larger audience than was

possible with screenings. Marc put even greater emphasis on the value of online viewing than Richard: For him, screenings were of little value as they only attracted "lefty" people who were already largely in agreement with the message of the videos, but he believed the Internet allowed him to reach a different audience entirely. Specifically, he wanted to produce videos that would be seen by the "soccer mum" and other kinds of people who would not normally attend an activist screening, not just to inform them, but more importantly to inspire them to use the "tools they have in their pocket" to capture events they witness themselves. In this respect, he saw people watching videos on the visionOntv platform as a possible first step along a path that could lead those inspired by them to read the training information on the site about how to make the kinds of videos they saw there, and perhaps even sign up for the "Making News Roadshow" training workshops visionOntv offered.

These differing opinions within the core group about why the visionOntv venture used the Internet as a video distribution technology were more a question of emphasis and aspiration, rather than anything that was causing significant conflict within the core team, at least within the period of my fieldwork. For instance, while Hamish was frustrated by the fact that visionOntv had become a video streaming project with no immediate prospects of offering downloads, he still supported it continuing in that form, as we saw, albeit not exclusively so.

VisionOntv's online video platform was the central element of their venture, and the primary place that they directed people to for viewing their videos (links to, and a screenshot of, the visionOntv platform are contained in my visual

ethnography). It was a large and complex website built on the Liferay content

management system.[72] The main feature of the website was the various video

"channels" it contained, which were both promoted on the home page and

available from the website's menu. There were five main channels, and 11

minor ones, which organised the videos on the site under different themes. For

example, one of the main channels was called "Grassroots", and it was

described as follows on the website: "What's really going on in the UK?

Activism, news, local campaigns, direct action - the country's alive with thought,

resistance and alternatives. Watch these programs and then get out there and

do something!" (visionOntv, n.d.-a). The different channel pages had Miro

Community embedded within them, which I introduced in Chapter 5, and this

technology was used to aggregate the videos. The videos themselves were not

hosted by visionOntv, but rather were hosted elsewhere and linked to Miro

Community in three main ways. One method involved directly linking individual

videos from third-party hosting services. Marc explained that anyone with

administrator access to the visionOntv portal, which included the three core

members plus a few other people they trusted sufficiently, could do this. The

videos were selected on the basis of what the administrator thought would

constitute a worthwhile addition to a specific channel. All the videos made by

the core members of visionOntv were linked to the site in this way from either

YouTube or Blip (links to visionOntv's presence on these services are contained

in my visual ethnography). The other two methods involved the linking of an

RSS feed from specific accounts of third parties on different video hosting

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[72] The following description of the website is based on my analysis of it conducted near
the end of my fieldwork, which was more or less the form it had throughout that period,
although it has continued to evolve since then.

services into one of the channels. Hamish described one of these methods as involving a "trusted feed", where all the videos upload to a specific YouTube, Blip or other video account by a person or organisation trusted by a visionOntv platform administrator would automatically be linked through to the relevant channel on an on-going basis. Hamish explained that the other method functioned in a similar way, except that the person or organisation was not sufficiently trusted, and so Miro Community queued their videos up for individual approval or rejection by an administrator.

VisionOntv's core members used Tubemogul to upload their videos to the Internet.[73] This was an Internet technology that allowed them to upload their videos once, to TubeMogul, which would then automatically upload the videos to the different accounts they had on YouTube, Blip, Metacafe and Dailymotion. Hamish indicated that they also uploaded some of their videos to smaller video hosting services such as Vodpod and blinkx that were not supported for free by TubeMogul, when they had the time or volunteer resource to do it. This meant that their videos appeared on over ten different sites. Hamish explained that they did this so that as many people as possible had the opportunity to see their videos. While Richard agreed with this, he explained their rationale with respect to the different hosting platforms they used in more detail. Firstly, he thought that the audience for their videos was a niche audience, and that being on as many places as possible was the best way to reach them as different hosting sites attracted different audiences. For instance, he believed that Blip attracted

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[73] TubeMogul separated off its video uploading software into a separated service called OneLoad near the end of my fieldwork.

a "more cultivated audience" than YouTube. However, this desire to be as

many places as possible was tempered by the fact that their funding was tight,

so that's why they only used free hosting services. He also pointed out that if a

video needed to be put up on the visionOntv site quickly, such as when they

wanted to cover an event that was unfolding live, they would upload it to

YouTube and link to it from there rather than Blip. He explained that Blip could

take between six and 12 hours to make a video available on its service after it

was uploaded.

Both Hamish and Richard cited examples of problems visionOntv had in dealing

with YouTube. Problems over the use of copyrighted material featured highly

amongst these problems, just as they did with the fan producers in the last

chapter. Richard explained that sometimes visionOntv would upload videos of

other producers onto their YouTube channel to promote them, but some of

these videos used copyrighted music. Two of these videos were removed by

YouTube at the request of the music copyright holders resulting in visionOntv's

YouTube channel acquiring "two strikes"[74]. VisionOntv as a result had become

very cautious about uploading anything to YouTube with copyrighted music.

Hamish also gave an example of problems with YouTube with respect to

copyright. It concerned a video they had on their channel by Adbusters, the

anti-consumerist organisation, which was issued with an infringement notice

based on a complaint by the copyright holder of the video footage it used.

While the video was initially take down by YouTube, visionOntv filed a counter-

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[74] One strike is scored for each successful content removal request. With "three strikes" the YouTube account is suspended and all videos are removed, and the user is prohibited from opening a new account. (YouTube LLC, 2013)

notice claiming fair use and the video was restored. Hamish said that they

exercised some editorial control with respect to YouTube because of potential

legal issues like these: "We don't put out stuff on these corporate sites which we

can't win … if we [have] something … we can't actually win on YouTube we put

it out on Blip, because Blip is not the target for lawyers".

Apart from issues over copyrighted material, Richard said visionOntv had other

problems with YouTube:

> In the case of pro-Palestinian content, there are organised groups …
> which repeatedly flag such videos as "inappropriate content". After a
> certain number of flaggings, the YouTube [algorithm] hides the content.
> Another big problem with YouTube is the … tendency of the search
> engine to privilege corporate media content over independent or citizen
> media. This again is algorithmic by popularity … but companies can now
> pay to go up the YouTube search rankings.

Richard also felt that YouTube was very inaccessible as an organisation: He

recounted a recent "scary moment" when the whole visionOntv YouTube

account of over 800 videos was taken down temporarily without explanation and

with no way to contact YouTube or Google for an explanation.

Richard also had a general issue with corporate hosting sites in that they might

run out of money and have to close or make unacceptable changes to their

business in order to survive:

> One we're hosting on at the moment … [has] two years angel investor
> funding, [but] when that runs out will they be economically viable? In
> order to become economically viable will they start charging fees? Will
> they remove your content if you don't pay? Will they remove their
> [syndication] functionality so people are driven to them as a portal as
> opposed to being able to extract the content from them and put it
> wherever we like? Those kinds of things become a real problem with
> corporate sites because it is very hard to make money on the web by
> media.

When I asked Hamish whether he had any ideological issues with using

corporate hosting sites, he summed up the core teams perspective on this when

he said:

> We have a philosophy of "use and abuse" … for example, we break
> YouTube's terms of service: We've got an aggregated media player
> which plays videos via RSS from lots of different sources [including]
> YouTube. … YouTube gets no revenue from it, gets no control over it:
> We're just stealing their file and streaming it, which is against the
> YouTube terms of service. We're trying to treat big corporations as
> dumb pipes, because they have huge pipes so we might as make use of
> them while they are there.

However, he emphasised visionOntv had to build their own infrastructure to run

in parallel to the corporate infrastructure:

> If we are just naively using YouTube we are just walking down a dead-
> end. That's why I want to bring torrents back in: Put it out by YouTube
> but automatically torrent it. So if it gets taken down we can say, "we've
> been censored by YouTube, but you can still get the video by installing
> this client". It allows us to stand proud and say, "we are distributing
> these films".

They also used corporate sites to promote the videos they uploaded, linking

them to Twitter and Facebook in addition to their own visionOntv site (links to

their accounts on these sites can be found in my visual ethnography). For

Twitter, they had a separate account for each visionOntv channel, and they

would post announcements about videos that would either include a link to the

relevant visionOntv channel, or a link to the video on Blip or YouTube. They

also had a visionOntv Facebook account that operated in a similar way with

respect to videos: They would either post a link to a visionOntv channel which

also contained a still from the relevant video and a brief comment, or they would

embed the video itself in a post linked to their YouTube account.[75] Hamish had

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[75] Marc explained that linking directly to the video in Miro Community from Facebook or
Twitter was a problem technically, so Hamish and Richard linked to the relevant

also wanted to set up a Facebook account for each channel, but said that he did not have the time to do so himself, and that he had not found a volunteer willing to take on the job, so they currently had only one visionOntv Facebook account. The core members also had personal Twitter and Facebook accounts, although Hamish and Richard rarely used theirs to promote visionOntv videos, and Marc kept his personal social networking persona completely separated from his visionOntv role and so he did not promote the videos on these sites at all.

In addition to Twitter and Facebook the visionOntv core team had ambitions of announcing and embedding their videos in other third party sites. During my fieldwork, Richard said that they had not had the resources to pursue this distribution strategy, however they were approached by one organisation asking to take a video feed from them. This was the New Internationalist, who took elements of the visionOntv "Global Views" channel and embedded it within their home page. New Internationalist did this by embedding the open source JW Player within their site, which linked to a playlist they compiled of visionOntv "Global Views" channel videos, which in turn linked to the individual videos on that channel.

The visionOntv platform as a model. Another way they went about trying to achieve their purpose of promoting social change through distributing videos online was to develop the visionOntv platform as a model for online media distribution for other video activists to adopt:

channel within the visionOntv platform where the video was to promote the visionOntv platform. Marc believed that this approach was potentially frustrating for the audience, who had to go searching for the video on the channel, so he preferred to post a direct link to the video, which meant linking directly to where the video was hosted.

> VisionOntv is about creating an open media network. Instead of having lots of isolated individual efforts and lots of incompatible sites, we can have lots of different sites - lots of different efforts - but they can all talk to each other and create a greater whole, which is not owned by anybody. VisionOntv is one node of that greater whole, but to achieve the greater whole we've got to create the tools, the networks and the standards that connect things together. (Hamish)

By "open", Hamish is referring to both open source software, which is software where the source code is freely available to the public, and open standards, which are standards whose technical details are available to the public and usable without payment. He believed that using open software and standards would ensure operability between the different future activist video projects that adopted their model, as well as making the model free to adopt. Marc described this aspect of visionOntv's purpose in a similar fashion:

> [VisionOntv's] online agenda is to build a network of nodes where visionOntv is not the centre, but is the exemplar node … what we currently have are separate [activist] islands building similar projects, which are not talking to each other … if you want to be one of the nodes [in our network] you have to use open standards.

By "not talking to each other" he was referring to the fact that many of these "islands", by which he meant online activist sites, used different software and standards from each other and didn't allow the information on them to be easily exported and fed into each other. The visionOntv platform was being developed as an exemplar of what a node in this network needed to be, but Marc stressed that before they could promote it in this way to other activists they needed to make their platform work properly first, so their advocacy of it would carry more weight with the other activists. However, all three core members explained that they had had considerable difficulty in getting the visionOntv platform to work as they wanted. For example, Liferay had been a major source of their platform development difficulties. One situation involved

their attempt to upgrade from Liferay version 6.06 to version 6.1. The version

6.1 upgrade contained "OpenSocial", which was a framework that allowed for a

variety of social networking tools to be used with Liferay. This was important to

visionOntv as they believed it would help stimulate user interaction on their site

(which I discuss at the end of this section) and also allow for users of future

nodes in the network to more easily interact with each other. However, the

upgrade process had not gone smoothly. On a visit to Hackspace in February

2012, Richard told me that their recent upgrade attempt had failed. What's

more, they were having trouble getting any support from the Liferay staff to help

them work out why: Richard believed it was part of Liferay's business model to

not adequately support the free and open source "Community Edition", which

visionOntv used, to encourage users to upgrade to the "Enterprise Edition",

which came with support but was not open source and required the payment of

a license fee. Hamish agreed with this view, saying later that, "Liferay started

out as an open source project to make the world a better place … then they

decided to 'go big', but going big means they have to [make a financial return],

so they're tying down all the free usages of the [software]". In my final interview

with Marc around two months later, the upgrade had still not been successfully

completed, and he said this was very frustrating as it was delaying them moving

to the next stage of the platform's development.

VisionOntv in fact had a general problem with getting the technical help they

needed for their platform's development. Hamish said that volunteer "geeks"

were only interested in solving technical problems that they found challenging,

and that many of visionOntv's technical problems did not qualify, or they would

only solve them in a way that they found interesting. Hamish also said that the

quality of solutions developed by the "geek" volunteers they sourced from within

the activist community were not typically high. One example Hamish gave

concerned getting the RSS feeds into the visionOntv platform to work the way

visionOntv wanted them to:

> We got some activist geeks on board to do it … [but] they went and did something completely different. They didn't do RSS … : They did what they thought should be done, not what we asked them to do. We looked at [their solution] and thought, "we can't use that, it is completely irrelevant".

During the final interview Hamish said they had made five different attempts to

resolve this problem, using five different volunteer programmers, but still had

technical problems with accepting RSS feeds into their platform. The final

attempt was in fact by someone who was trying to solve it the way visionOntv

had asked, who Hamish found from outside the activist community, and while

he had solved most of the issues related to the feeds, he was unable to resolve

the problem entirely.

Overall, the visionOntv site in the form it was at the end of my fieldwork was not

what the core team wanted. In fact, Hamish explained that it was simply a

holding site that was only supposed to have lasted for three months but in fact

had been in operation for the entire year of my fieldwork. Without the

visionOntv platform functioning as they wanted it to, the core team were unable

to promote it as model for other activists to adopt. Hamish therefore believed

that while visionOntv had been successful in creating the video content for a

future network, it had so far "utterly failed" in building the network itself.

Interactions with audiences online. The visionOntv core members had very little interaction with their audiences online, although the circumstances for this varied somewhat by platform. With respect to the visionOntv platform, they said that they did not get any comments on any of the videos there, and this was confirmed by my own observation of the site over the period of my fieldwork. Hamish and Marc said the reason for this was that the tools on the visionOntv site for audience interaction were difficult to use. Hamish added that the reason the tools were difficult to use was because the "geeks" who were building the open source tools were only interested in spending their time on developing technical solutions to problems, rather than making those solutions easily usable by non-technical people.

They also had very few comments on the videos on their Facebook account. From my observation of the activity there, videos typically attracted only one or two "likes" each, and only one or two comments, and many had no comments at all. Similarly, there were very few comments on any of the posts on their Twitter channels, although Richard said that their video posts did get retweeted sometimes. With respect to the video hosting sites they used, with the exception of YouTube, there were almost no comments on these either. Hamish explained that they did not in fact encourage people to comment on these "corporate sites", but only posted on them to drive traffic to the visionOntv platform, because he believed that they were not conducive to fostering the conversations that could eventually lead to the formation of communities of social change.

For example, he cited two problems with Facebook in this regard. Firstly, he

believed that many of the visionOntv posts to that site were not in fact

appearing on the feeds of their Facebook followers because of an algorithm that

service employed to manage the volume of posts individual users received.

Secondly, he worried that Facebook was acting like a "memory hole", with all

the comments on posts becoming lost. He was referring to two specific features

of Facebook in this regard: Firstly, that only the most recent conversations were

presented to the user through the feed on their home page, with the rest quickly

disappearing from easy access, and secondly that standard Internet search

engines were not indexing Facebook comments because Facebook was a

closed system. Put in the context of our other conversations, Hamish was

contrasting Facebook here with open source tools like wikis and bulletin boards,

where search engines index the comments, and where they persist over time,

rather than using dynamic feeds like Facebook. He was also concerned by the

fact that these comments were owned by the corporations whose sites they

were on. Richard expressed a similar sentiment, and summed it up as follows:

> There are two main tools on the Internet [that] are not bound up in
> corporate sites – the forum and the wiki – and we intend to take people
> out to forums so they can ask each other questions, so there is some
> permanence. The problem with commenting is that it is ephemeral.

While these sentiments also applied to their use of YouTube, its circumstances

were somewhat different from those of Facebook and the other corporate tools

they used: The visionOntv YouTube channel attracted by far the most

comments of any of the platforms they used (although it appeared that most of

the videos on it attracted little or no comment).[76] However all three core

members expressed little interest in the comments they got there. Richard

considered the comments as "low quality", and described YouTube as a

"ranters' bin", although he did answer factual question asked about the videos

he was involved in making. For example, he had posted a video about a shelter

in Japan that was feeding tsunami victims, and someone had asked whether

they were eating irradiated food, and he responded to this. Similarly, Marc

responded to comments to clarify things in his videos if he believed the videos

were not clear on the specific points raised by the commenters. However he

said he did not spend too much time replying to YouTube comments as he was

too busy with other visionOntv activities, but he said that even if he had more

time to do it he probably wouldn't bother, as he did not think they were worth

replying to:

> I'm not even talking about trolling or things like that, which is a big
> problem … I think forums are a solution - an old solution, but still a
> solution. But on YouTube it doesn't work - it is the worst place for
> community building. It is an entertainment website … people just
> consume videos, and the comments are empty or conflicts, and there are
> no outcomes from this.

He did acknowledge that YouTube can help to foster communities in some

situations, but not in visionOntv's case:

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[76] The visionOntv YouTube channel had 993 videos as of March 2012, so conducting a
full analysis of it was beyond the scope of this thesis. However, I analysed a sample of
the first 50 videos uploaded to the visionOntv YouTube channel during the period of my
fieldwork. This analysis was conducted in April 2013, meaning these videos were all
between 21 months and 2 years old at the time of the analysis. Of the sample 33
(66%) videos had no comments, 7 (14%) had 1 comment, and only 5 (10%) had more
than 3 comments. The top 3 videos in the sample, measured by the number of
comments, had 23, 9 and 7 comments each. I also analysed the 5 most viewed videos
on the channel overall, all dating from 2009, and these had between 200 and 500
comments each, except for the single most popular video, "How to live without money",
which had 3,922 comments (and over one-third of the total channel views).

> YouTube works for certain communities obviously - very specific stuff, but not for us. I don't blame [the audience] because we might lack direction … they might not see what is the main thing on [our] videos because we do everything - any kind of social change video, and it can be hard to see what [we] are about … [definition is] something we are really trying to work hard on now … . But YouTube was never at the centre of our project … it is the perfect tool to abuse, but not to use …you can't every really get to know someone online there … it is not built for talking, it is just built for trolling.

With respect to replying to comments in general, on any site, Hamish and Marc both expressed the view that what they really wanted was for the audience members to engage in conversations with each other online, and for visionOntv not to have to be involved. As Marc put it: "I would love it if people talked to each other without us …we've done our part, we've done the film". However, since they were unable to foster conversations on the visionOntv platform because of inadequate tools, and were reluctant to do so on corporate sites for the reasons just discussed above, the core members were left frustrated with respect to their overall objective for visionOntv: Creating conversations around the videos they distributed was the first step for them in their overall objective of creating communities of social change. Hamish in fact admitted that they had been unsuccessful in fostering these conversations online, and said that developing online communities was hard and something that visionOntv perhaps did not understand how to do. That is why he said visionOntv's emphasis was currently on trying to develop communities offline, and then move them online, and I will discuss an example of this approach of theirs in the next section with regard to the Merseyside Street Reporters Network.

VisionOntv's other members. While this section has focused on the three core members of visionOntv, many other people worked on the venture in a part-

time, volunteer capacity. The core members granted membership to visionOntv to other people very informally, and this usually just involved someone asking to get involved in the venture, although sometimes people were approached to get involved, as with the programmers discussed above. Sometimes these approaches were very ad hoc. For example, as I described in Chapter 4, I was asked by Hamish to help with a particular technical problem they had when I first met them at OpenTech 2011, and this quickly turned into me operating one of the "pop-up studio" laptops. Also, they had only met the person operating the other studio laptop at the OpenTech conference the night before, and she just happened to be staying with them as a "couch surfer". Overall, Marc estimated that there were around 10 people the core team could regularly call upon to help with projects, such as filming at conferences or helping with running training workshops, and that there were another 10 to 20 people who helped moderate the visionOntv channels and were part of the "wider network of friends" who helped promote visionOntv and got involved in its activities on an ad hoc basis.

The turnover rate for both groups of volunteers was quite high though, and Marc estimated that few people stayed involved for more than one year. Marc gave different reasons for this turnover, including that they had no money to pay anybody who got involved, that visionOntv didn't function yet as an activist network to keep people involved, and that visionOntv wasn't a "brand", so it didn't help the volunteers build up their *curricula vitae*. Two other informants, both long-term members of visionOntv who had become less involved with the venture in recent times, gave their personal perspectives on this situation. One

informant, Shaun Firkser, said visionOntv had become a lot more focussed on "citizen journalism" in the last two years, and this was not a form of activist video he was interested in, preferring to make more "polished" documentaries. Also, Kayte Fairfax said that visionOntv's reliance on volunteers with minimal training, the use of makeshift equipment and an emphasis on producing lots of videos quickly meant that she had become uncomfortable with the quality of visionOntv's output, and wanted to concentrate more on her own video activist projects.

2. The "Making News Roadshow"

We saw in the last section that the core members of visionOntv went about trying to achieve their purpose of using online video as a way of promoting social change by making their own videos and distributing them and the videos of other activists, and also by developing the visionOntv platform as an exemplar for online media distribution for other video activists to adopt. The final way they went about using online video to promote social change was by organising and running workshops to train people to make activist videos, showing them how to use the visionOntv platform to distribute these videos, and helping the participants organise into self-sustaining online video activist groups or "nodes" within the visionOntv network.

These workshops were promoted as the "Making News Roadshow", and were described as a series of free "citizen TV reporter workshops" that emphasised helping participants get their videos made quickly and easily:

> Start making reports straight away with the equipment you already have. You don't even need a camera! Lack of experience is no problem. Commitment to make citizen media straight away is much more important. … During our weekend workshop, people will learn using easy templates all the skills they need to make their news and get their story out. Using ... [a] mobile phone, camera or only photos found on the web, participants will create their own version of the news. (visionOntv, 2011)

Hamish explained that the principle of the workshops was to keep the video making process as simple as possible so the videos could be completed and uploaded quickly, and not just left "sitting in the camera".

During the period of my fieldwork visionOntv conducted two such workshops, one in Liverpool and one in Japan, and although they had plans for others in that time, they had insufficient resources to do them, as they were relatively expensive and time-consuming events to prepare and run.[77] The following is a brief case study of the Liverpool workshop in June 2011, which I observed and was occasionally involved in as a facilitator. The case study focuses on my observation of the online activities of the video activist group set up in its aftermath, and my interviews with some of the members of that group. A counterpart to this case study is contained within my visual ethnography, which allows the reader to explore some of the aspects discussed below for themselves.

Case Study: Merseyside Street Reporters Network. Hamish and Richard conducted a screening in a central Liverpool pub on the Friday night before the two-day weekend workshop for the participants and other interested parties, showing a variety of their own and other activist and alternative videos. Around 25 people attended the workshop on the Saturday, although about a third of those were gone by the afternoon most likely due to the chaos caused by the need to change venues on short-notice at lunchtime.[78] By the second day the numbers had dropped to about 10 participants. The workshop concentrated on teaching visionOntv's video templates, and mostly focussed on practical

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[77] The Japanese workshop was an opportunistic one, and was run by Richard and his Japanese wife as part of a trip they were taking to Japan for other reasons, and was inspired by the events of the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.
[78] It became apparent in the morning that the venue had been double-booked and visionOntv, who were using it for free, had to (very reluctantly) yield to the paying party by lunchtime.

exercises.[79] The facilitators also went around helping the participants upload their videos to the Internet, and Hamish ran a session at the end of the second day going through this in detail, as well as explaining the functionality of the visionOntv platform, and how to link an RSS feed from the participants YouTube accounts into it. Hamish had set up a section within the visionOntv platform for this, where the workshop group was dubbed the "Merseyside Street Reporters Network" (MSRN).

After the workshop, the MSRN met up on five occasions in local venues on an approximately monthly basis, but only around four members attended these on average, and the last meeting was in October 2011. The MSRN Facebook group was where almost all of MSRN's online interaction occurred. It was set up by Celia Watson just after the workshop, who was a local Liverpool visionOntv volunteer, and who also helped set up the workshop. Marc had made an early post to the Facebook page to encourage people to use the wiki and bulletin boards set up for MSRN on the visionOntv platform instead, but this appeared to have little effect. In fact, only nine entries were made on the wiki during my fieldwork, and the only one not made by a visionOntv core member was by Celia. The bulletin boards got a little more use, but there were only about 20 posts from people other than the core team, and all these were done in the first month after the workshop, and mainly concerned getting technical

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[79] There were three such templates taught at the workshop I attended: The "street report" introduced in the previous section, which was shot with a mobile phone; an animated, video slideshow using stills and the Animoto video creation web application; and the video news report which was a quick turnaround two to three minute video using a camcorder (visionOntv, n.d.-b). Hamish said that these templates were the distillation of the many years of video making experience that both he and Richard had acquired, and were designed to help new video producers quickly make effective videos that could be ready for uploading to the Internet within four hours at the most.

help with uploading videos. The MSRN Facebook group itself had posts by 14

people, including Hamish, Marc and me. Also, only about half the posters

posted regularly. Facebook was used to announce meetings, discuss

upcoming events to film, and provide links to relevant websites. Only 11

MSRN-made videos were announced on Facebook, compared to around 60 on

the visionOntv platform, although the core team assisted in the uploading of a

significant number of these.[80] Posting to Facebook dropped off rapidly from

late-January 2012, and there were only six posts in total from then until May

2012.[81]

In addition to my general observations of the MSRN and my participation with it

online, I also followed the activities of two of its members, Greg Vogiatzis and

Sara Newton, from our meeting at the initial workshop until the end of my

fieldwork. Greg and Sara were both in their late thirties and native

Liverpudlians. Greg said that the workshop was the first time he had ever made

a video. He explained that he wanted to make videos because he wanted to

"document political activism by filming various marches and protests", and to

promote a local housing cooperative he was setting up. He uploaded his videos

to the Internet as he believed it was an easy way of keeping the investors in the

cooperative up to date on progress, although he did admit it had its limitations

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[80] The actual number of relevant videos on the MSRN section of the visionOntv platform was difficult to determine because of its technical limitations, and so the above number is an estimate based on my observation of the channel over time. Also, by about half way through my fieldwork the MSRN channel had begun to take "trusted feeds" from the YouTube channels of people outside the original workshop group, which were set up by people outside the core team who had administrator rights on the platform. This resulted in many videos appearing on the platform that had nothing to do with the purpose of MSRN or visionOntv.

[81] In fact, from the end of my fieldwork in May 2012 until April 2013, there were only two more posts.

as not all the investors had convenient access to the Internet. He also wanted to use the Internet to engage with the younger members of the cooperative, teaching them to be "street reporters" too, as a "youth diversionary activity" and to give them an outlet to express themselves constructively.

He uploaded his videos to YouTube and linked them to the visionOntv site using an RSS feed. This was done at the workshop by a facilitator, and used his son's YouTube account because Greg didn't want to go to the effort at the time of setting up his own account. However, some time later Greg's son wanted his YouTube account back, but Greg didn't know how to change the RSS feed, which meant that for a few months none of his new videos were appearing on the visionOntv platform, although he eventually got some assistance with this and resolved the problem. Also, when Greg's son reclaimed his YouTube account he made it private, which meant that none of Greg's older videos appeared on the visionOntv portal (or anywhere else).

He uploaded his videos to YouTube because it was the simplest to use, and posted links to the MSRN Facebook group as well as his own personal Facebook account because "Facebook is a universal tool". Specifically, he posted videos to the MSRN page for the benefit of people who couldn't attend the physical MSRN meetings to keep them up to date on what local activist events he had been covering, and to "drum up support to increase attendance" at subsequent meetings. He also used the Animoto video creation web application to make some of his videos, which was one of the visionOntv templates as we saw, and he linked those to Facebook also. He explained why

he thought the group from the workshop was using Facebook in preference to the visionOntv platform:

> The visionOntv system is a bit clunky … [also] the workshop was spent teaching people how to make videos … and not a lot of time was spent on the site itself. We're tried to self-organise around that with somebody going to the site to teach the others, [but] it is one of those things where you need to put a little time into understanding it and operating it, when you can just post [immediately] via the Facebook page.

Greg had very little interaction with his audience online. He didn't get any comments on his videos on the visionOntv site, and very few on YouTube or Facebook. However, this did not concern him as his immediate focus was on establishing the MSRN as a group, rather than cultivating an audience. He also saw the MSRN as primarily an offline group that used online tools to organise and maintain momentum between meetings. However, he explained that ill health had prevented him from getting more actively involved in maintaining the group. Also, from a discussion in April 2012 at the end of my fieldwork, he was disappointed that the MSRN Facebook group didn't take off as the group's communication tool, and he believed this was because "Facebook users are bombarded with notifications and just switch off to stuff that isn't priority or immediately relevant". He said that the combination of his ill health, the fact that no one else was willing or able to step in and organise the group, and the failure of Facebook as a communication tool, meant that the group eventually dissipated.

For Sara, as with Greg, the visionOntv workshop was the first time she had ever made a video. She made videos to give her view on local activist and community happenings:

> It gives me an opportunity to give my point of view … [on the] activism that happens around me, and things that happen in my community … I was able to attend the June strike … It felt really liberating to give an alternative to the mainstream media's spin on what was happening and why it was happening.

She thought there was no point in showing her videos at activist meetings, as that would be just "preaching to the converted" in most cases, but the Internet allowed other possibilities:

> I see anything I do as part of a critical mass … if somebody came across my video [on YouTube], they wouldn't necessarily change their mind, but if they came across it in the context of lots of other people reporting similar contradictions to mainstream media, then we become something rather exciting and important.

She uploaded her videos to YouTube because it was the service she was introduced to at the workshop. Her YouTube account was also linked via RSS to the MSRN section of the visionOntv platform at the workshop. These were in fact the only two places her videos appeared. However, by the time of our second interview at the end of my fieldwork, she had become uncomfortable using YouTube on ideological grounds, and was considering changing to Vimeo where she thought making a profit wasn't "the be all and end all".

While she was a member and regular commenter on the MSRN Facebook group for the first few months of its existence, and had a personal Facebook account, she didn't link or upload her videos to either. Her attitude to posting videos on the MSRN page was the same as that toward activist meetings, in that she felt it wasn't worth doing as it was "preaching to the converted". For her the MSRN Facebook page was for organising meet ups, seeing what the different members were up to, and staying in contact with them. For her personal Facebook account, Sara explained that her videos were "not polished

enough" to withstand potential criticism from some of her Facebook friends who did not share her political views, although she planned to put them there when her video making skills had improved because she felt this kind of criticism would be a good opportunity to "preach to the unconverted". Her attitude towards the YouTube audience was very dismissive by contrast: "If I am judged, I don't have to take the judgement seriously … the bands of howling deriders that often come around anything political on YouTube … you can easily dismiss [them]". In general, she was not particularly interested in engaging with her audience, nor had the time to do it, and felt that her job as a video activist stopped at making and uploading the videos.

Sara's video making activity and MSRN Facebook activity dropped off almost completely a couple of months after the workshop. Within the period of my fieldwork she had made twelve videos, and all these were uploaded in June and July 2011, just after the workshop. She explained in our final interview that she had lost her phone not long after the workshop, which was her only video-making tool, and that she could not afford to replace it.[82] This caused her some loss of momentum with respect to her involvement in MSRN, which meant she stopped attending meetings and directly visiting the MSRN Facebook page. She also said that her usual motivation for engaging with Facebook groups was when they came up on her personal Facebook feed, but she said that the MSRN posts were not appearing there.

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[82] She did in fact eventually replace her phone, but not until the end of my fieldwork.

Both Hamish and Marc said that the purpose of the Liverpool workshop was to set up the MSRN as one of the nodes of their envisaged future network, discussed in Section 1. They admitted however that their attempt to set it up was premature, and this had had some unwanted consequences. Firstly, the visionOntv tools were not ready, so the MSRN were using "the wrong tools", namely Facebook, as we saw. Secondly, the network did not yet exist, so there was no one for the MSRN to interact with apart from visionOntv, which meant the core members were heavily involved in supporting and maintaining the MSRN for some time after the workshop. Overall, however, the visionOntv core team considered the Liverpool workshop a success because they learnt something about the workshop and node-building process, and because it resulted in a significant number of alternative videos being added to the visionOntv platform, in spite of the fact that the MSRN did not flourish into a self-sustaining entity.

3. Assemblage theory analysis of visionOntv's use of the Internet

In Section 1, we saw that visionOntv maintained the stability of their video distribution assemblage by employing certain strategies and processes. One such strategy was to enrol multiple video hosting services. While part of the reason for this was to allow them to enrol a diverse audience into their assemblage, it was also to create redundancy. This was an acknowledgement by visionOntv, like some of my informants in the previous two chapters, that they had little power in preventing these hosting technologies from detaching

from their assemblage, and therefore needed to have redundant hosts for their videos.

They also acknowledged that the precariousness of these hosting services' enrolment derived from both the precariousness of some of the hosting services themselves, due to their potential lack of commercial viability for instance, and from potential decisions these services might make as actors. One prominent example of the latter case we saw was the issue with YouTube over copyright music, which Hamish managed by reterritorialising their YouTube account on videos he believed he could defend as fair use, and enrolled Blip in its place for other videos.

We saw that Hamish's ambition was to use torrent technology as his preferred backup to YouTube, and also to achieve his goal of creating a downloadable service. However, visionOntv had been unsuccessful in enrolling this technology into their assemblage. In fact, they struggled with enrolling other technologies into their assemblage too. One example of this we saw were the difficulties they had translating RSS technology to their needs. Another was the problematic Liferay upgrade process. This latter example can be understood as a failed translation process: Upgrading the software to include social networking tools, thereby removing their reliance on the pre-existing, difficult to use commenting functionality, was an attempt to translate Liferay into something that would better coexist with their audience. The upgrade process can also be understood as a failed reterritorialisation of the assemblage, as it was an attempt to separate a component from it that was not consistent with

visionOntv's desired identity as a platform for fostering conversations, namely the pre-existing Liferay commenting system, and attach the new OpenSocial one that was.

Also, even once the technologies were successfully enrolled within the assemblage, the translations would sometimes fail, as we saw when Greg's son switched his YouTube channel from public to private and thereby detaching it and Greg's videos from the visionOntv assemblage. The enrolment of VisionOntv's video production technologies within their assemblage was precarious too, and would sometimes fail: VisionOntv relied on old, damaged and makeshift hardware, and hacked and open source versions of software, which sometimes meant that the "pop up studio" in its more complex form required considerable maintenance to function as part of the overall assemblage, or would fail to function at all on some occasions.

VisionOntv also had difficulty in enrolling and maintaining people, as well as technologies, within its assemblage. As we saw, visionOntv ultimately wanted to foster conversations around the videos they distributed as a first step in their overall goal of creating communities of social change. They were unsuccessful in fostering these conversations because they believed their own platform's complexity resisted their attempts to enrol audiences, and because they did not attempt to enrol audiences into the commercial social networking sites they used because they believed they were not suitable for such conversations.

VisionOntv also had a problem with enrolling and maintaining volunteers within their assemblage as we saw. For example, part of the RSS problem was the failure on several occasions by visionOntv to translate the interests of "geek" volunteers into ones that would help visionOntv solve the problem at hand. More generally, we saw that the enrolment of volunteers was typically short-lived, due to visionOntv not being able to translate the volunteers' longer-term financial, professional or social interests into something that visionOntv could offer. However, sometimes even when these interests were successfully translated, the translations proved to be precarious. For example, we saw with both Shaun and Kayte that their interests diverged from those of the visionOntv core team over time, which meant that their enrolment within the assemblage was becoming increasingly precarious.

The failure to enrol volunteers for the longer term meant that the core members of visionOntv were involved in on-going processes of enrolling volunteers into the venture and training them. These processes were both directly and indirectly about maintaining the stability of the assemblage: They were directly so in that there were some critical processes in the assemblage that the core team was unable to perform itself (such as specific technical tasks, like the RSS feed implementation). Also, they were indirectly so in that volunteers freed up the core team to concentrate on other tasks and push the venture towards its goals while their commitment to it lasted.

The training of volunteers can also be seen as a territorialisation process to maintain the identity of visionOntv: It was partly meant to ensure that the

volunteers adhered to visionOntv's processes and principles, instilling in them such things as a commitment to visionOntv's way of making videos and to continuing the development of the visionOntv platform using open source software and standards. In fact, visionOntv developing their platform with open source software and standards and promoting it as a model for others can be partly understood as a territorialisation process also: It was an attempt to ensure the stability of the larger network they were trying to create by making each of the nodes within it homogenous, where the nodes can be understood as molecular assemblages, and the larger network itself as a molar assemblage. The "Making News Roadshow" can be seen as part of this larger territorialisation process: It tried to form collections of people in geographically localised areas into activist groups that similarly shared visionOntv's commitment to their video-making practices and open source software and standards. The goal was then to enrol these groups as nodes alongside visionOntv in the larger network.

Hamish and Marc both admitted however, following their Liverpool experience, that the workshops alone were insufficient to fix the identity of the groups along these lines, particularly since the visionOntv platform was proving difficult to use in its current state of development; the MSRN's reterritorialisation on Facebook only a few weeks after the workshop was partly a consequences of this.

We also saw the precariousness of Greg and Sara's enrolment within the MSRN. Greg's video had become detached from the visionOntv assemblage for some time, when his son reclaimed his YouTube account, because of a lack

of technical knowledge in how to set up an RSS feed. Also, the onset of ill

health at the same time meant that he had little time or energy to devote to the

different processes required to maintain his enrolment within MSRN, such as

making new videos and uploading them and his old videos to his new YouTube

channel, attending MSRN meetings, posting to the MSRN Facebook page and

spending the time to learn how to use the MSRN section of the visionOntv

portal. Sara's enrolment had also become precarious, due to the loss of her

phone: Her video making and distribution activity was a key process for

maintaining her enrolment within MSRN, and she was unable to perform it

without her phone. Without this process, she depended largely on Facebook's

post-sorting algorithm to feed posts from the MSRN Facebook page to her

personal Facebook page to keep her attached to the MSRN assemblage. She

was however not receiving posts from it, either because of the algorithm's

decisions or a lack of actual posts on the MSRN page, and so she eventually

became (at least temporarily) detached from the MSRN assemblage.

4. Conclusion

VisionOntv's approach to achieving their goal of promoting social change

through the Internet using video was a broad one: We saw that they produced

videos, trained others in video production, distributed their videos and those of

others, and developed their own distribution platform as a model for others to

adopt and use. While they had initially hoped to use the Internet as a more

efficient way than physical media to distribute videos to those who wanted to

host local screenings using downloaded copies, technical problems

implementing this and other factors had meant that visionOntv had become a streaming video project instead. While there was some lamenting over the individualistic nature of streaming video viewing, there was also an acknowledgment that it was a way to reach a larger and different audience from those attracted to traditional activist screenings.

VisionOntv's own distribution platform was built on the open source version of Liferay, and had Miro Community embedded within it to aggregate videos, which was also open source software. In spite of the various technical issues they had with their platform, which created delays and frustrated them in achieving their goals, the core members remained committed to using only open source software and open standards, to ensure that their platform could be adopted by others without cost, and also so that those who adopted it would be able to integrate their projects with each other and visionOntv. They did however also use corporate sites as part of their project, although they had an uneasy relationship with YouTube and concerns about Facebook. They also thought the corporate sites were not in fact suitable places to engage with their audiences, but rather simply used them as places to host or promote their videos. However, since they were unable to foster conversations on the visionOntv platform because its current tools were inadequate for the task, and since they were reluctant to do so on corporate sites, the core members were left frustrated with respect to their goal for visionOntv: Creating conversations around the videos they distributed was the first step for them in their goal of creating communities of social change.

While the MSRN had initially tried to use the visionOntv platform to conduct their interactions, they quickly moved to Facebook as it was a more user-friendly and familiar platform. However, as we saw, the group was unable to form as a self-sustaining entity, and activity on Facebook eventually became negligible, as it did in their other online and offline forums. The personal circumstances of some of the members at least contributed to this, but given the state of the platform and the lack of supporting network, the initiative also appeared to be somewhat premature.

The core members were engaged in many on-going parallel processes to stabilise the visionOntv assemblage with respect to the wide variety of people and technologies that were a part of it. At the same time they were involved in other processes, such as the Liferay upgrade and "Making News Roadshow", that attempted to transform and develop the current assemblage into something more consistent with their goals. Overall, however, the visionOntv assemblage during the period of my fieldwork was a temporary and inadequate solution with respect to their goals, took substantial time and effort to move towards those goals because of the resistance it faced from people and technologies, and while it was relatively stable, it required considerable on-going effort to remain that way.

Chapter 8. Conclusion: Making Connections

While in the last three chapters I have answered the questions asked at the beginning of this thesis for each of the informant groups, in this chapter I conclude by comparing and contrasting these answers across groups, synthesizing my findings and looking for key themes. I then make some concluding remarks on my chosen approach, highlighting some of the consequences of that choice, and point to directions research in this area might take in the future.

Reasons for Internet adoption. We saw in the last three chapters that my informants had a broad range of reasons for adopting the Internet to distribute their videos, and these largely reflected their individual circumstances and their specific objectives as video makers. While no one reason dominated, the ability of the Internet to economically reach a larger audience than traditional methods was unsurprisingly the one most often cited. For example, it potentially enabled Frankie to be known outside the Davis local cable television franchise area, Obsessive24 to gain a larger audience than she could get at conventions, and for visionOntv (according to Richard Hering at least) to gain a larger audience than they could achieve at activist screenings. Some informants however, such as Luminosity and Carol S, were not concerned about increasing the size of their audience, but instead used the technology as a more convenient way of reaching their existing audiences. Even some of those informants interested in

increasing their audience were only concerned about reaching a geographically local one, such as Kathy at CMAP's desire to reach people within their local franchise area who did not subscribe to cable television.

Geographically local concerns in fact featured in other reasons given by my informants for adopting the Internet: For example, Greg used it to engage with investors and local youth related to his housing cooperative, Larry to associate his television programme to his San Rafael law practice to enhance the reputation of his practice, and for DMA it was a way to create a video repository of their local community for their local community. Adopting the Internet for the purpose of creating a video repository or archive was a reason given by other informants also, such as Deborah using it so people she met could be directed to her environmental videos, John Morris using it to create an educational resource for teachers, and Hamish seeing it as a place for people to go to download videos to use at public screenings. In addition to this on demand feature of Internet video, other technological advantages of it over traditional methods were cited, including the ability to analyse public access audiences and potentially monetise them, and the ability to integrate with the fans' existing Internet activity.

Since the different reasons my informants had for going online reflected their individual circumstances and their specific objectives as video makers, no significant themes emerged at a group level. For instance, with respect to the public access producers, while Antonio and Frankie used the Internet so their videos could break out of the geographic confines of the local cable television

franchise, Richard Dussell didn't bother with uploading them at all, being happy to just be on local television, and Nicolette delayed using the Internet for some time and then later only adopted it in a very limited way. Similarly, as we saw with the fans, Obsessive24's and Here's Luck's desire for a larger audience was not shared by Luminosity or Carol S. Finally, while Hamish was passionate about using the Internet to create an activist screening network, neither Marc nor Sara saw much value in this as screenings were simply "preaching to the converted".

One theme that emerged across the different informant groups was that the Internet had not completely replaced traditional distribution methods, which continued to exist alongside it in some form, although the reasons for this differed somewhat by group. For the public access producers, the conditions of the stations' funding, which required them to maintain cable television distribution, and the conditions the stations in turn put on their producers, were important reasons why cable television distribution survived in the face of the Internet: The public access producers typically relied on the stations' equipment and expertise to make their videos, and since the stations required that producers who used their resources must first show their programmes via cable television before distributing them on the Internet, the producers were tied to television distribution if they wanted to make videos. The desire to sometimes watch a video in the company of others, rather than on one's own, ensured that enough fan videos remained reserved for VividCon premieres for that convention to continue to thrive, and that visionOntv both continued to host activist screenings and aspire to facilitate others to do so. Finally, for the fans,

DVDs still survived because they provided higher quality images than the Internet, and were a more convenient way to distribute large numbers of videos than the Internet in the specific circumstances in which they were used.

These findings extend and enrich our understanding of why video producers adopt the Internet, locating their motivations within their specific circumstances and objectives as video makers. In particular, with regard to the types of video makers that are the subject of this study, it provides a sustained investigation of their reasons, adding to our understanding of them gained from the literature, which typically does not address these reasons in detail. My research also adds to our understanding of how and why older video distribution technologies sometimes continue to co-exist alongside newer Internet-based ones that *prima facie* appear to be superior, a subject on which the literature on the types of video makers researched here was silent.

Specific Internet technologies: Reasons and uses. We also saw in the last three chapters that my informants adopted a wide variety of Internet technologies during the period of my fieldwork to host, announce and discuss their videos, connecting them together in different ways to create their distribution assemblages.[83] Like their adoption of the Internet in general, they gave a very broad range of reasons for adopting or avoiding these different specific technologies.

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[83] They in fact named 23 specific third-party Internet platforms and services that they used, not including their own individual websites and other third-party services that they had previously used but now had fallen into disuse or ceased to exist.

Unsurprisingly YouTube featured prominently in the calculations of many of my informants, but attitudes towards it were mixed. While those that used YouTube primarily valued it for the potentially large audiences it could bring, informants from all three groups struggled with how it enforced copyright claims, although the fans as a group were the most concerned about this because of the nature of their videos. This meant that some informants had avoided using it at all, and others used it cautiously, such as visionOntv and Obsessive24. YouTube's perceived video length restriction was the other main reason why some informants didn't use it, or why it was used in a restricted way, although this was an issue for public access producers primarily because of the relatively long length of their typical television programmes. Conversely, less attention from rights owners and longer video lengths were the primary reasons cited for the use of Blip. For the other video hosting platforms, no overall themes emerged and the reasons given for their use or avoidance primarily depended on the specific circumstances of the individual producers. However, a concern with image and playback quality was a prominent issue for fans, and one reason many producers used multiple hosting services was to ensure their videos could be found in alternative places if they were removed from a particular service, or that service was shutdown.

Hosting platforms were typically used just for hosting, with little attention given by the producers to the social networking functionality they contained to engage with audiences. This interaction instead took place on other types of platforms that the producers thought more suitable for this purpose, and the videos were

connected to these platforms by hyperlinks, RSS feeds or by being embedded within them. Facebook was one such platform, and the primary reason given for its use was that it was perceived as the most commonly used social media platform. The fans however did not typically use Facebook to distribute their videos, but preferred to use the online journaling platforms LiveJournal and Dreamwidth. LiveJournal was well-established within the fan group as the main social media platform before the advent of Facebook, and they saw it as natural that their video distribution practices should be integrated into it once they decided to adopt the Internet for this purpose. Recent concerns about the stability of LiveJournal, and the perception that Dreamwidth was more sympathetic to the needs of fans, meant however that the group's members were running both platforms in parallel to provide redundancy.

Besides the proprietary third-party platforms so far discussed in this chapter, all three groups developed and used their own platforms, all of which were based on open-source software, although the groups had all experienced considerable difficulties in the development and use of those platforms. For DMA, their desire for a stable, non-commercial video distribution platform based on the OMP tool set was being frustrated by the perceived need to integrate it into their cable television play-out system, while CMCM were having difficulties using Miro Community in a rapidly changing technological environment because they lacked the resources to adapt it to all but minor changes. For the fans, their desire for a stable, fan-friendly platform that could act as a long-term archive was the primary motivation for their involvement in AO3's development. However, because AO3 was not able to host videos in its current form, as this

functionality was proving a challenge for developers, the group as a whole were delaying their adoption of it. VisionOntv were also frustrated in their ambition to get other video activists to use their platform, which was being developed primarily for that purpose, because it was proving difficult to use and because its development was being delayed by technical problems and the inability to get adequate and appropriate support for those problems.

From the literature, I had expected to find a much simpler engagement with the technology, and one that was dominated by YouTube. Instead, as we have seen, I often found complex assemblages that used a wide variety of technological components, selected for a broad range of reasons, which largely reflected the circumstances and objectives of the different producers. These findings therefore broaden and enrich our understanding of the methods producers use to distribute their videos, and the reasons they choose the specific technologies they do for this purpose.

Interaction with online audiences. My informants' degree of interaction with their audiences about their videos varied, as did their attitude towards this interaction, although their situations can be grouped roughly into three categories. There were those who had little interaction with their audiences, put little effort into cultivating any, and were not concerned by their lack of interaction. Frankie for example saw the online platforms he used primarily as "broadcasting stations" for his videos, and Deborah was more interested in offline interactions, with neither of these public access producers interested in forming an online community around their videos. The second category

comprised those who actively sought interaction, but received little of it and were disappointed by this fact. For example, visionOntv wanted to create conversations around the videos they distributed as a step toward creating communities of social change, but were unable to do this because the tools on their own site were inadequate for the task and they were reluctant to use corporate sites in this role.

All my informants other than the fan producers fell into these first two categories; the fans' situation was described by the third category that consisted of those who actively sought interaction and received it to a degree they were largely satisfied with. The fan group in general thought interacting online with their audience was very important: Luminosity, for example, described it as the "coin of the fannish realm". This interaction typically started on the journaling websites, where videos would often attract a number of comments, some of which were long and detailed. In some cases these conversations would be continued in private using other technologies, where they sometimes led to lasting friendships. While my fan informants were generally happy with this situation, some lamented the recent decline in the quality of comments, which they attributed to a general reluctance in the group to give constructive criticism because it risked causing offence.

Based on my understanding of the literature prior to entering into the field, I had expected to find much more audience interaction in general than I did, and I had also expected all my informants to have some interest in cultivating this interaction. That I did not find this I believe nuances our understanding of the

use of the Internet as a video distribution technology, and also suggests lines of future research. My research indicates that creating sustainable online interactions between producers and their audience is not always a straightforward task, and attempts at doing so are not always successful. Also, the desire to do so in the first place is dependent on the particular circumstances and objectives of the producers involved. That the fans had managed to achieve such an outcome is unsurprising since they already had a well-established online community into which their videos were introduced. How and why they established this in the first place is beyond the scope of this thesis as it relates to questions of online community formation in general. While I have provided in the ethnographies my informants' and my own assessments of why these attempts to create sustained interactions failed, I believe a further enquiry into online video is required to gain a fuller understanding of the situation. This enquiry would need to be grounded in the general literature of online community formation, at least to help understand the circumstances of the fans, include an empirical study of the audience to broaden perspective, and integrate the views of those not interested in such interaction to provide a fuller understanding of producer and audience motivations.

Entanglement of people and technologies. We can see from the discussion so far in this chapter that while some themes emerged from my research concerning my informants' adoption of the Internet, there were no overarching reasons, methods or categorisations: The reasons given, methods employed and categorisations of audience interactions typically reflected the specific objectives and circumstances of the group involved, and often simply those of

the individual informant. While I initially turned to assemblage theory during the early stages of my fieldwork as a way to understand the dynamic and complex entanglements of diverse people and technologies that presented themselves to me in the field, it also proved later to be a useful way of abstracting those entanglements from their context of specific people, technologies, objectives and circumstances. This allowed these different entanglements I encountered to be framed as assemblages, and analysed using the various concepts of assemblage theory largely independent of their specific contexts.

One overarching theme that emerged from this analysis was that not only was an often considerable amount of work required to construct these distribution assemblages, but that they were precarious and therefore typically also required a lot of on-going work to maintain their stability. With respect to constructing the assemblages, enrolment of the disparate collection of people and technologies often met with resistance, and these enrolment processes were therefore often time consuming and sometimes unsuccessful. Where they were unsuccessful other components had to be enrolled in their place, leading to repeated enrolment processes.

Maintaining the stability of their assemblages required my informants to be involved in on-going processes of territorialisation, coding and translation as they responded to day-to-day issues and changing circumstances. We also saw that it was not uncommon for the sheer burden of all these enrolment and stabilisation processes, coupled with the limited time, resources and technical skills my informants typically had, to result in them being left with assemblages

that were inadequate with regard to their objectives as video producers. In addition, even when they had adequate time, skill and resources, my informants sometimes found themselves powerless to prevent components of their assemblages from detaching unilaterally, or to prevent changes occurring in those components that meant the informant had to voluntarily detach them as part of a reterritorialisation process because they were no longer suitable. In fact, overall, rather than being dutiful and inert components, the technologies used were not only important actants in their own right, and sometimes powerful ones at that, but also precarious assemblages with their own interests. This source of instability unsurprisingly caused many of my informants anxiety, and played a significant role in shaping their enrolment and maintenance strategies. The extension of assemblage theory into the domain of human interaction with video distribution technologies undertaken in this thesis has therefore put into the foreground themes of work, resistance and precariousness that have not hitherto gained significant academic attention in this context.

The work and difficulty associated with forming and maintaining distribution assemblages, and their overall precariousness, was not a result I had anticipated from my research. Going into the field my understanding, based on the literature, was that this aspect of the producers' experience was reasonably unproblematic: Producers simply uploaded their videos to YouTube or another hosting site, which provided their audiences for them, and apart from being careful with respect to copyright, the situation was more or less a straightforward one. But from an Actor-Network Theory perspective at least, what I did in fact find was exactly the sort of result to be expected. Latour

states that ANT is the preferred approach over "standard sociology" in "situations where innovations proliferate, where group boundaries are uncertain, [and] when the range of entities to be taken into account fluctuates" (2005:11), and the situation I encountered in the field certainly fits with this description. In such situations, as we saw in Chapter 3, on an ANT account networks are about work, both in terms of enrolling components and the constant maintenance work required to keep the networks stable, and they are precarious because enrolment is precarious.

Reflections on approach and beyond. In using assemblage theory to analyse my fieldwork I have selected the elements of ANT and DeLanda's approach that I believed offered the most analytical power, and disregarded or at least downplayed the rest. For example, DeLanda's distinction concerning material versus discursive components is absent from the ethnographies, as I did not believe it added much to our understanding of the phenomena at hand. Similarly, my discussion of territorialisation focussed on the homogenising aspect of this process, and did not deal with the (physically) spatial aspect, as it did not seem relevant to the main elements of my fieldwork, which were located on the Internet. Also, another of DeLanda's concerns, how an assemblage's emergent capacities can acts on its component parts to constrain and enable them, was not explored as it did not seem important to the situations I encountered.

Perhaps, however, if I had absented the other elements of my descriptive and analytical framework, the literature on amateur video and ANT, I may have

needed to draw on other elements of DeLanda's theory to compensate. In

particular, if I had entered the field with DeLanda's theory in its entirety as my

sole framework, rather than using the literature on amateur video with elements

of ANT and DeLanda added later, I would have engaged with the field in a

different way and on more DeLandian terms. I would no doubt therefore have

been sensitised to different concepts, asked different questions, and

encountered the field in different ways. The gaps in my data-gathering

framework created by absenting the literature on amateur video and ANT would

most likely have forced me to rely on a broader range of DeLandian concepts

when in the field, and resulted in different ethnographies from the ones

presented here.

While the question of what would a purely DeLandian account, or for that matter

purely ANT account, look like is foreclosed for this particular study by the

choices I made, a systematic analysis comparing and contrasting the two

frameworks would be useful for future studies. In other words, while my ad hoc,

hybrid approach has been demonstrated to provide important insights into my

informants' use of this technology, would the two frameworks taken in their

entirety, and separately, have provided different or additional insights from my

hybrid approach or indeed from each other? Perhaps the answer to this

question first needs to compare and contrast these frameworks in detail at an

ontological level, to understand how they differ as theories of objects.[84]

Graham Harman (2007, 2010:176) has begun addressing this question, but it is

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[84] This way of thinking about ontology draws on Harman (2009:221).

one for philosophers rather than media scholars or sociologists so I will not pursue it here.

In using assemblage theory as my analytical framework, I have excluded other, potentially fruitful frameworks, such as those that foreground questions of power, agency, participation, and community, as I indicated in Chapter 1. We have seen throughout the ethnographies that these questions emerged in different ways for my informants, and that I interpreted them within an assemblage theory framework. For example, we saw that many of my informants struggled with corporate power, which manifested in different ways including YouTube's enforcement of copyright claims, LiveJournal's commercialisation and visionOntv's protracted problems getting support from Liferay because they did not pay a licence fee. These struggles with the corporate platforms were characterised by me as a resistance by those platforms to enrolment within my informants' distribution assemblages, as enrolments that required on-going maintenance work, or as translations that failed. An alternative way of seeing situations like these is through the lens of Internet users struggle with corporate power and capitalist logics, such as Fenton (2012:141) and Fuchs (2009) do, for example. These kinds of approaches to Internet video distribution are no doubt potentially fruitful lines of enquiry for future researchers, given the different ways questions of power have emerged in my research. I believe this is the case also for questions of agency, participation and community, although I will not pursue these here.

Also, while the ethnographies of the three groups I researched provided a range of insights into those groups, the question of the generalizability of those insights to other video producers remains, which is a type of question often asked of ethnographic work (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:32). While generalisation was not my goal here, it is nonetheless an interesting question. Rather than attempting to generalise the results, which are after all based on a limited number of very particular types of video producers with a specific historical trajectory, I believe that the results could instead be used to frame a quantitative study of a potentially much larger population of video producers. For example, the rich detail of video producers' experiences and attitudes coming out of my study could form the basis of a focussed questionnaire to investigate to what degree these are shared by other Internet video producers.

Finally, while the construction of my visual ethnography was framed by the theoretical discussion in Section 6 of the methodology chapter, it was indicated there that hypermedia visual ethnographies are a nascent area of academic representation, and therefore there is still much to be done in this area. In particular, while the literature gives some general examples of hypermedia visual ethnographies (Pink, 2011:218-221,223, Pink, 2007:202-210, Banks, 2001:164), it appears to be silent on examples of those that are of predominately online environments such as mine.[85] This suggests that there is still much to be learnt about how this form of representation can best present environments of the kind I studied in this thesis.

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[85] This apparent silence was also confirmed by Sarah Pink (2013, personal communication).

Making Connections. In the preceding three chapters we have seen that my

informants were involved in complex and contested interactions with many

different people and technologies for a variety of different reasons that largely

defied arrangement into tidy themes. Nonetheless, from one point of view at

least, the foregoing can be seen as a story about making connections.

Producers made and distributed videos on the Internet for no single reason, but

rather attempted to connect with audiences for a wide variety of reasons that

were specific to their own particular circumstances and individual objectives as

video makers. Also, producers connected people and technologies to make

distribution assemblages, although this was often a complex, contested and

precarious process. Finally, producers and audiences (both mutually and

severally) sometimes connected with each other through these videos turning

the distribution assemblages into social spaces, but sometimes this did not

occur, and in some cases it was not even an outcome desired by producers.

This thesis problematizes and enriches our understanding of how and why

these types of connections are made, adding to our understanding of this

emergent phenomenon.

Appendix: Home Video

One of the central concepts in the literature on home video is that of the "home mode", as defined by the anthropologist Richard Chalfen in the late 1980s:

> Communication is defined as "a social process, within a specific context, in which signs are produced and transmitted, perceived, and treated as messages from which meaning can be inferred". Snapshots, home movies, and home video are forms of home mode communication. The "home mode" is described as a pattern of interpersonal and small group communication centred around the home. (Chalfen, 1987:8) [86]

While mass modes include images that are part of public symbolic systems, and are distributed to large, anonymous audiences via such things as newspapers and features films, home mode images contain private information for circulation to a small audience personally known to the image-maker through such things as photo albums and videos shot on consumer camcorders. However, Chalfen emphasises his idea of "mode" is not medium specific: A feature film on a DVD played to a group of friends in the home DVD player is a mass mode activity, while a DVD of a family picnic played in the same player to the same audience is an activity in the home mode.

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[86] It should be noted here that some scholars consider the genre of home video or "home movies" to include videos that are not part of domestic life. For example, Norris Nicholson includes films made by a member of a delegation of the Rotherham Rotary Club documenting their trip to Chicago in the 1930s, and a charity fund-raising film for the social mission of a parish church in the 1940s (1997:204-6).

Chalfen argues that through home mode communication, people use the

photographs and home movies they produce as symbols to construct their

reality:

> The making of snapshots and home movies can be treated as the
> creation of a symbolic world - a world of symbolic representations that
> both reflects and promotes a particular look at life. (1987:162)

As Buckingham suggests:

> Chalfen sees this kind of amateur media-making as a means for
> individuals to construct their own visual history, and thereby also to feel
> that their lives are coherent and meaningful (Buckingham and Willett,
> 2009:25)

Zimmermann is critical of Chalfen's analysis, and some of the anthropologists

his work builds upon, for being "text bound and ahistorical" (1995a:xi). In

particular, she argues:

> These anthropologists … privilege amateur films and amateur
> filmmakers, betraying a text-centred approach mired in authorial
> innocence. Amateur film, however, is a socially and politically
> constructed discourse. How has Hollywood film, as represented by the
> photographic press, family press, and popular press, intersected with
> amateur filmmaking? Rather than probing home movies as mysterious,
> transcendent textual systems, this book analyzes discursive practices -
> … with specific relationships to politics, culture, economics, and social
> institutions - that continually reconstitute amateur film. (1995a:xii)

For instance, she examines the emphasis on pictorialism in popular magazine

articles from 1913 to 1923, which she says these magazines defined as "a

combination of natural composition techniques with the ability to evoke

emotional and interpretative responses in viewers" (1995a:40). She gives the

following example of one such article:

> A 1921 article "Filming Adventures in Beauty" in *Arts and Decoration*
> considered filming cities both visually distracting and too much a part of
> one's day-to-day existence to qualify as "art". The article hailed an
> amateur film called *Lyric of the Marshes* for its still photographic
> pictorialism, its natural settings, its absence of people, and its ability to
> invoke "cosmic truths" (1995a:40)

Zimmermann goes on to argue that this emphasis on pictorialism in articles

directed at filmmakers:

> Separated rationalized, industrial capitalism from the more spontaneous
> and natural middle-class family life and its hobbies. The dominant
> discourse on amateur filmmaking pictorialism discouraged amateurs
> away from investigations of labor, capitalism, or industry. Instead, it
> steered them towards more neutral, personalized, and subjective
> territory. (1995a:40)

This discourse on pictorialism later evolves into one on familialism in the 1950s,

where the press privileged a sentimental model of the bourgeois nuclear family

as the proper subject for home movies. Her conclusion, after tracing the

trajectory of discourses like these from 1897 to 1962, is that there was a:

> Systematic stripping of the democratic, participatory, and public potential
> of amateur film and its marginalization within the much more privatized,
> isolated, and denuded domains of the nuclear family … Amateur film is
> not simply an inert designation of inferior film practice and ideology but
> rather is a historical process of social control over representation …
> (1995a:xv)

While praising Zimmermann for correcting Chalfen's ahistoricism, James Moran

argues her thesis has two fundamental problems. Firstly, he says she offers no

real justification for the tacit assumption that there is a direct correspondence

between discourse and practice. Without developing either a theoretical case

for a causal link, or demonstrating it through empirical analysis of a significant

sample of films, he argues her conclusion that "home mode artifacts express

and serve the ideologies of the dominant social order" is not warranted (Moran,

2002:52). His second criticism is that Zimmermann commits her own form of

ahistoricism, drawing conclusions about the situation in 1995 (her time of

writing) based on analysis of a period that finished in 1962:

> Without providing a history of amateur practice during the years that
> intervene, Zimmermann transports her model into the eighties and
> nineties to critique contemporary home video practices as if the same

monolithic familial ideologies have been preserved intact three decades later. (2002:39)

Moran argues that the model of family life of the 1950s and 1960s that

Zimmermann bases her analysis on was in fact not preserved intact, but

underwent a radical transformation in the intervening years, thus undermining

Zimmermann's conclusions.[87]

Moran goes on to make a positive case for the home mode, where he sees it as

a "distinctive amateur practice with significant and valuable cultural functions",

rather than a reflection of ideological false consciousness:

> At the most fundamental level, *the home mode provides an authentic, active mode of media production for representing everyday life*. Because home mode practitioners are personally involved behind and in front of the camera, and deeply invested during exhibition, they exercise a vital role in all aspects of production and reception, perhaps more so than any other media practice available to them. (2002:59)

Other functions of the home mode, and its artefacts, are:

> To construct a liminal space in which practitioners may explore and negotiate the competing demands of their [public and private] identities … to provide a material articulation of generational continuity over time … it constructs an image of home as a cognitive and affective foundation situating our place in the world … it provides a narrative format for communicating family legends and personal stories. (2002:60-61)

Moran bases his analysis on an interpretation of Bourdieu's theory of practice,

where the structure of social relations actors find themselves within ("field"), and

the habitual cultural practices they internalise as they function within this

structure ("habitus"), serve to validate new practices as they are presented to

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[87] Van Dijck also supports this critique of Zimmermann. See, for example (2005:27ff).

the social class in question.[88] With reference to Zimmermann's analysis of familial ideological discourse, Moran states:

> However reactionary or innovative the messages that these discourses communicate, their effects will be incorporated, modified, or rejected by habits already made. Thus the ideologies of practice advocated by advertising and training manuals will be adopted only if they find social effectivity within the life worlds of the subjects they might hope to interpelate. (2002:54)

He argues therefore that individuals appropriated photography as part of home mode communication, not because they were duped by the discourse of the dominant ideology, but because:

> The photographic image … came to fulfil functions that existed before its appearance, namely the solemnization and immortalization of an important area of collective life. (2002:55, quoting Bourdieu)

Similarly, filmmaking was appropriated for home mode communication as it fulfilled the pre-existing functions cited above.

A recent small empirical study of home mode video makers by Maria Pini (2009) supports the general thrust of both Chalfen and Moran in affirming its value and its role in identity construction. Buckingham, Willett and Pini draw similar conclusions based on a larger, although partly overlapping, empirical study[89] where they argue the home mode has an important role in "… affirming shared cultural values, establishing a sense of one's place in the world, dealing with the complex emotions that surround the passing of time, and constructing and defining one's own identity" (2011:147). While they also accept that this is a

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[88] Some might argue that this is a liberal interpretation of Bourdieu since it allows for new practices to be introduced.

[89] While this study was conducted in the Internet and YouTube era, it appears that online video in fact played almost no part in the activities of their research informants. (Buckingham et al., 2011:149)

"broadly ideological process" they do not consider it as "inherently or necessarily conservative", contrary to Zimmerman (Buckingham et al., 2011:146,147).

However Buckingham is critical of Moran on methodological grounds, as Moran's empirical work avoids specific examples of home video or its makers (Buckingham, 2009:28). In addition, Buckingham, Pini and Willet's (2009) analysis of the popular literature on amateur filmmaking seems to steer a theoretical and methodological course between Moran and Zimmermann. While seemingly endorsing Bourdieu's theory of practice as a relevant theoretical construction for the analysis of amateur video, they focus exclusively on discourse and its role in shaping a "field" and the power relations within it.

Because participatory video has been such a neglected area of research, as mentioned earlier, there is insufficient empirical evidence to draw definitive conclusions about the prominence and uses of the different forms it took before the Internet. However, the scholars discussed above who engage that question have assumed that (for better or worse) the home mode was the dominant form, at least since the 1950s in the US.

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