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YouTube as archive
Who will curate this digital *Wunderkammer?*

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A B S T R A C T ● At first glance, the ease with which individuals can access and contribute to YouTube sets it in direct opposition to large corporate media outlets with their top-down mode of dissemination. However, I argue that, despite these seemingly democratic features, YouTube is better understood not as opposed to traditional corporate media but in the same genealogy as previous archival technologies and techniques. In archives, all content is flattened and has equal weight, so it is up to a curatorial authority to present content to audiences. While YouTube promises to democratize media, its lack of a centralized 'curator of display' actually sets the stage for large media companies and entrepreneurs to step into the curatorial role and decide how each object in YouTube's archives will be presented to users. The role of the curator of display is, as of this writing, unresolved. This article thus draws on political economic and historical critiques of collections and archives in order to connect the emergent technologies in YouTube with earlier attempts to organize and present information, objects and images. ●

K E Y W O R D S ● archives ● blogs ● curators ● labor ● mediators ● tagsonomy ● YouTube

Old tube versus YouTopia

Much of the press coverage of Google's independent subsidiary YouTube carries headlines such as 'Friend or Foe?' (Holson, 2007) and 'Threat and a Tool' (Noguchi and Goo, 2006). *PR Newswire* reported that YouTube users are less

likely to watch television and a 16 October 2006 cover story in *Broadcasting and Cable* (Becker et al., 2006) discussed 'five major arenas' where YouTube will 'shake up the TV industry'. Writing in *The Times* (London), Dominic O'Connell refers to YouTube users as 'pirates' (2007). In other words, the news and trade press has often simply presented YouTube (and streaming Internet video in general) as a potential threat to traditional broadcast media, at least in capitalist economies. Broadcast media, the narrative goes, must find a way to adapt to YouTube and other Internet video sites, or it will die. And of course, the older media is seen as 'fighting back' by forming competitive new Internet video sites, such as Joost, AOL Video and Yahoo! Video.

This vision of new media versus old is an understandable framing. Often in the teleology of news reporting, particularly in American reporting on technology, every new form of media and technology is presented as replacing past media, perhaps influenced by economist Joseph Schumpeter's (1994) theory of 'creative destruction' whereby the old firms are constantly overwhelmed by their newer, more agile young competitors.[1] In the popular press, both businesses and technology are portrayed as constantly evolving, with the winners expanding and the losers driven out and made obsolete. This process is often celebrated as the inevitable and unequivocally beneficial progress of capitalism.

And, of course, some are excited by this challenge to broadcast media; many scholars have trumpeted YouTube's democratic, participatory nature. These works often draw, indirectly or explicitly, on the more utopian concepts in Castells (2000) or Benkler (2006). For example, Stephen Coleman (2006) argues that YouTube and other social networking sites enable greater participation in the democratic process. Similarly, James Trier (2007) discusses the pedagogical power of YouTube as a disruptor of the teacher/student hierarchy. Axel Bruns (2007) has coined the term 'produsage' for the open creative process so evident in websites such as YouTube, Wikipedia and Flickr. All of these scholars are defining what 'Web 2.0' looks like and does.

The prediction that YouTube (and computer/Internet-based video in general) might replace or irreparably alter broadcast television could very well come to pass. It may very well turn out to be a revolutionary, participatory and democratic form of media. However, a strong case can also be made that YouTube will undergo an evolution much like preceding media technologies, especially as they have developed in capitalism. This case is made on an alternative way of thinking about YouTube, and subsequently a different prediction or possible outcome, one that could come to pass if a particular subset of actors shaping this technology behave in the way I believe they will. In other words, this is my attempt to trouble the current discourse on YouTube. Jenkins (2004: 34) has described the contradiction inherent in new media technologies: on the one side is the user who is able 'to archive, annotate, appropriate and recirculate media content in powerful new ways', and on the other is the decreasing number of conglomerated media corporations which produce much of that popular content. This contradiction, and its 'convergence', readily apparent in YouTube, is decidedly anti-democratic.

The approach I take is similar to that of Josh Greenberg (2008), who studied the evolution of VCR technology and found that it is often not the users nor the large companies that drive technological change but the intermediaries – the distributors and other entrepreneurial middlemen – whom he calls the 'mediators' of a technology. These mediators often get lost in the dominant discourses of technology, where grand battles are among users and producers, and among competitive media outlets. Instead, it is the mediators, those actors in the middle between users and corporations, who are shaping YouTube.

YouTube as archive

My prediction is based on a close examination of the technical structure of YouTube, the legal agreements that enable it, its political economy and the actors who work with it, which includes the people uploading the videos to the bloggers and television networks that link to them. Given these contingencies, I argue that YouTube is an archive awaiting curators. It is, as of now, a sort of digital *Wunderkammer* (often translated as 'closet of wonders'), a place where many of the artifacts of digital empire sit on shelves, waiting either to overwhelm a visitor or to be utilized by savvy new entrepreneurs.

Clearly, YouTube is an archive. YouTube is not a peer-to-peer sharing program which links individual computers together in an ad hoc network; there are central servers which hold the video content that users have uploaded. The users encounter content on these central servers at the same web address, www.youtube.com, but can do so from anywhere there is high-speed access to the Internet. As media and communications scholar Nick Couldry (2003) might put it, YouTube has a mythical 'center', and web users, Couldry's 'ordinary people', go to that center to get content and produce it. However, it is not a broadcaster. YouTube does not produce any content of its own, only the frame in which content appears; all of the content is provided by third parties and is either intended for use on YouTube or is recycled from existing media content. In a way, pilgrims to YouTube's 'center' are also producers at that center, much like those who visit local history museums might have some of their possessions placed in those museums someday.

The most adequate way to interrogate this object is as an archive, a sort of digital *Wunderkammer*. This has several advantages over thinking of YouTube as merely a threat to broadcast media, or even as another node in the network. Considering YouTube as an archive helps explain the different terms of space and time in Internet video. Again, instead of contrasting this with television or film, we could discuss YouTube in terms of flows of people, much as they flow through any other library or collection. Although these are not precisely the same as archives, studies of museum exhibitions have shown that, despite the best efforts of those who build the exhibitions, people rarely spend much time on each object, and the paths that people take vary wildly (Hein, 1998; Serrell, 1997). The same is true of archives: some people might

spend significant time reading or examining particular objects; others may fly through, gathering what material they need and moving on; some might get lost and overwhelmed; and some might just use the archive as a meeting place.

YouTube as archive also sheds light on the role of the objects collected on YouTube's servers. Scholars of archives argue that the archive is a place where information is purposely separated from use value or exchange value, creating possibilities for different exchanges. For example, Allan Sekula (2004: 183) argues that 'in an archive, the possibility of meaning is "liberated" from the actual contingencies of use'. Similarly, Geoffrey Bowker (2005: 18) notes that 'what is stored in the archive is not facts, but disaggregated classifications that can at will be reassembled to take the form of facts about the world'. Bowker calls the current memory episteme 'potential memory', whereby narratives are created post hoc from ordered, taxonomically organized objects which are scattered across many physical storage sites. Like other archives, the media objects in YouTube are often separated from their original uses. In its original context, *The Daily Show* is a vehicle by which Comedy Central/Viacom can sell audiences to advertisers. In YouTube, however, this initial exchange-value is no longer active; the classification of this object is liberated from Viacom's original intent. A clip from *The Daily Show* becomes precisely what Bowker is describing: a disaggregated classification awaiting reassembly into something new. It is a *potential* cultural memory stored in the memory banks of YouTube's servers, and in capitalism, a *potential* new exchange-value, if used for commercial purposes.

Finally, what both Sekula and Bowker are describing involves two key steps: the storage of objects and their eventual display (what Bowker refers to as 'reassembly'). These two roles reveal what is troubling about YouTube as archive and are the main object of this article: the labor involved in creating and maintaining this archive, and how this labor is exploited by those who mine the archive in order to display objects. While both Sekula and Bowker focus on slightly different aspects of the archive, the key congruency between them is the notion that agents are required to gather and classify objects, and that other agents are needed to reassemble them into 'facts about the world'. Simply put, archival work implies two jobs: storage and display. In the case of YouTube, the former is largely done at no charge by the users of YouTube. They are, essentially, the curators of storage and classification. The latter, however, can be done for significant profit by bloggers, entrepreneurs and large media companies. These are curators of display and exhibition. They are what Greenberg would call the mediators of YouTube.

Labor in the archive: the curators of storage

Professionalized archives typically complete several tasks when they accept and store artifacts: accessioning (finding and accepting appropriate materials for the archive), classifying and safe storage.[2] Of these three, the YouTube

service only provides the storage, placing the media objects on its servers. When it comes to accessioning and classifying, the users of YouTube are the true curators of this archive. Without user participation in building YouTube's archive, a site like YouTube would not exist. YouTube is currently structured to accept just about any media object from users, as long as it is less than 10 minutes long.[3] Users, therefore, upload any media object that they find important, often regardless of copyright rules. Unless YouTube's programers find a way to filter out copyrighted material or other content they do not want,[4] the duty of acceptance of objects is largely user-driven. A video clip or media object that never gets uploaded to YouTube is, in effect, rejected by users as not important enough for the archive. Once a video is uploaded, the user who did this work maintains the right to remove it, as well. Of course, YouTube's administrators will remove videos when they fear lawsuits. However, even today, most of the work of acceptance and rejection is done by the users who initially post the videos. A case in point would be the slow resurgence of *The Daily Show* and *Colbert Report* clips on YouTube, despite the recent Viacom lawsuit.

Moreover, the users are also extremely powerful curators in the process of categorization and classification. Each and every object in YouTube is titled, described and 'tagged'. Users supply all three. The title and description of the video are important to the search algorithms, as are the 'tags'. Tagging is a method of attributing key words to each video, which allows for their taxonomical organization.

The most important aspect of titling, describing and tagging objects stored in YouTube is that these processes are user driven and do not rely on a predetermined vocabulary (Marlow et al., 2006). The users, not the administrators, supply the tags for each video. For example, if I uploaded a video that featured a man playing an electric guitar, I might title it 'Me playing my Stratocaster', describe it as 'I am trying to play a Stevie Ray Vaughn song' and tag it with 'guitar, solo, electric, SRV, blues'. Any user who searches for any one of those phrases or terms would come to my video, along with all the others that have related terms. It is in the best interest of any user who uploads a video to choose accurate and search-friendly titles, tags and descriptions, because in YouTube's search algorithms, these terms carry more weight than other factors; neither the popularity of the video nor of the user who uploaded it pushes a video up in the search. These elements are extremely important in the curatorial process, and the users are the ones who decide which are used.

Finally, it takes time, equipment and money to participate in YouTube as a curator of storage. Users are required to have computers, video editing software and broadband Internet access. Despite the fact that YouTube and other websites are free to use, the sheer cost of maintaining a computer is staggering (Raphael, 2001). Moreover, what is often called 'human capital' is required. Users must have incredibly complex technical skills to participate in adding objects to this archive. Of course, they must invest significant time into doing this work, as well. I do not hesitate to call this time-investment labor.

If YouTube's function ended as a media storage site, or to use my metaphor, a digital *Wunderkammer*, it would serve two purposes: as a site for 'broadcasting yourself', to use YouTube's motto, and as a place where media artifacts, which are prosthetic cultural memories, could be gathered and preserved (see Landsberg, 2004). 'Ordinary' users (to paraphrase Nick Couldry) could make their personal videos and save these prosthetic memories for later. They could also tackle issues that remain taboo in broadcast and mainstream media. Collectively, users could also decide what broadcast media objects should be saved. If YouTube's function were limited to this, it could be argued that YouTube would serve a democratic, public good, in much the same way as Wikipedia, since it would be a place where the collective intelligence of large groups of people would determine what media objects are preserved and, through the comment function, how they are interpreted. Here, we see why many scholars have championed YouTube and other Web 2.0 sites as democratic and progressive. YouTube does provide a social space for users to share media and experiences; the best example of this is the LonelyGirl15 phenomenon, where a small crew of filmmakers, writers and actors created a popular video series, which was supplemented with the commentary, engagement and parodies of the viewers.

However, YouTube's functionality does not end at storage and individual retrieval of media objects, nor does it end with internal community building. Its technology allows for mass display and exhibition of these objects outside of the archive. This tension between democratic storage and display for profit is the most troubling aspect of YouTube.

Curators of display

Initially, it would appear that the display of objects in YouTube is also driven by the user, who can search for videos or approach them via the 'channels' feature. YouTube offers a robust search engine which works on titles and tags. The 'channels' feature offers navigation by category. The categories include 'Directors', 'Musicians' and 'Sponsor'. Users of YouTube can subscribe to other users, receiving alerts when these users upload new content. As a viewer moves through the site, YouTube's software automatically presents 'related videos', which are inviting to a viewer as she clicks through the website. Search engines, particularly Google.com, also drive display; they work mainly on the tags and video titles supplied by the users. It could therefore be argued that, for the most part, users do all the curatorial work which is typically done in archives: gathering, editing, uploading, classification, as well as retrieval and exhibition. The most popular videos receive thousands of hits, which supports this argument.

However, even this mode of display is analogous to browsing the archive shelves. Like objects sitting on shelves, the videos one encounters within the YouTube browser are decontextualized, chaotic and flattened. Despite the ratings systems, each media object in YouTube has equal weight. Recall

Sekula's argument that 'meaning is "liberated" from the actual contingencies of use' in an archive. 'This liberation is also a loss, an *abstraction* from the complexity and richness of use, a loss of context' (2004: 183, emphasis in original). This decontextualization destroys meanings and elides the archived objects' previous existence and power as use-values (or exchange-value). The arrangement of videos into categories, directors and channels does alleviate this to a degree, but the sheer amount of content available on YouTube guarantees that many videos will be overlooked.

This liberation is an integral part of the claim to power of the curators of display: if all the objects in the archive have equal weight (since they are now liberated from their original uses) then some authority must evaluate them and present them to the public. Following Foucault, Sekula notes: 'clearly archives are not neutral; they embody the power inherent in accumulation, collection, and hoarding as well as the *power inherent in the command of the lexicon and rules of language*' (2004: 184, my emphasis). The curators of display arrange the archived objects in exhibitions, which creates new 'facts' (to use Bowker's word) from the archived objects. Bowker concurs with Sekula: 'How do we gain … empire over the present? Information integration has a lot to do with it – the ability to collect data from numerous disparate resources, *collocate it … and then use it to plan the future*' (2005: 227, my emphasis). Like Derrida (1996) and Foucault (1972), Sekula and Bowker argue that power comes not from the mere collection of objects, but from arranging archival objects into 'facts' about or cultural memories of the world.

While meaning-making might happen at the individual level as users browse YouTube's archive of digital artifacts, it stands to reason that those in the best position to make meaning on a mass scale from the objects stored in an archive are those who are already in a position to create and distribute mass media content. These curators of display are also most able to doubly exploit the YouTube archive: in one sense, they are able to create meaning and 'facts' from the digital archive by contextualizing, interpreting and curating displays of videos culled from YouTube; in the other sense, they are prepared to benefit from the unpaid labor of all those YouTube users who have gathered, edited, uploaded and tagged videos. These curators of display are entrepreneurial small media (such as independent blogs) and emergent media companies (new entrepreneurial corporate formations). Broadcast media have also begun to utilize the unpaid labor of the users of YouTube, but their stance towards YouTube is more ambiguous. Finally, as the owner of YouTube, Google is a major curator of this archive, presenting videos on the YouTube homepage. Much like the mediators described in Josh Greenberg's history of the VCR, these mediators are positioned in the space between the users of YouTube and those large media companies that might feel threatened by the users' willful disregard of copyright laws. Moreover, these mediators work between users of YouTube and mass audiences. As they negotiate these middle grounds, they are refining 'Internet video' into another capitalist institution, just as professionalized curators refined *Wunderkammers* into the modern museum in the 18th century.

Bloggers as curator of display

Since YouTube's technology allows anyone to host a video on her site, many bloggers are becoming major curators to this archive. This allows for political, news or sports blogs to enhance their content (and advertising revenues) with video content without creating, editing and storing the content themselves. Many of these blogs are relatively small, inexpensive and independent affairs, run by only a handful of people. Nevertheless, the popularity of blogs with even the smallest of staffs indicates their power as curators of YouTube's archive.

The diversity of blog content is not surprising, but it is impressive. There are military blogs (*Black Five*); sports blogs (*Need 4 Sheed*, *Detroit Bad Boys*, *Ball Don't Lie*); news and political blogs (*Framed*, *Informed Voters*, *America Blog*, *Shakesville*); health (*Living with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome*, *Women 4 Hope*); music and popular culture blogs (*Confessions of a Jersey Goddess*, *Clicky Click Music Blog*), to name but a few. All of these use YouTube videos, often framing them with pictures and text.

Unlike what occurs within YouTube itself, these videos are not flattened objects, devoid of contextualization. Unlike the *Wunderkammer*, or even modern archives, the result is not overwhelmed, lost or wandering visitors; one does not move from a music video to a webcam confessional to a reckless teenage stunt. Instead, all of the objects are framed and exhibited. These are curated exhibitions, with central organizing principles and clearly articulated purposes. As curators of display, these bloggers do a particular job: they provide the same captioning, commentary and context that visitors to a museum exhibit get. Obviously, the visitor can take whatever path she pleases through these blogs, but the exhibit has a cohesiveness that the archive does not.

In fact, these curators are doing visitors a service. While the technical requirements for hosting a YouTube video are not demanding for anyone skilled enough to create a blog, the work of finding and presenting YouTube videos is very labor-intensive. Catherine Morgan (2007), who writes several blogs including *Informed Voters*, speaks about the work involved:

> Finding both pictures and videos is very time consuming, I sometimes spend more time trying to find a picture or video that will best accompany my post, as I do on the post itself. I don't have a problem navigating within YouTube, only that I may navigate for a while to find a video that is just right.

Jim Trumm (2007), who runs the political blog *Framed*, discusses several search strategies:

> I usually find [videos] on other blogs.… I have occasionally found them in two other ways.… When I find a video I like, I will click on the name of the person who created it to see if he or she has done other things I might like. The other way is by a search on YouTube; for example, the last music video I posted was They Might Be Giants covering Phil Ochs. I found that because I was thinking that Phil Ochs' music is quite relevant to what's

going on today, so I put his name into the search engine, played a couple videos, and eventually found one I liked.

Just like a scholar doing archival research to present ideas or exhibitions to the public, these bloggers act as curators to YouTube's archive. They scour the archive in search of the object that will fit the particular narrative they are constructing.

Hybrid sites: *Iraqslogger, Talking Points Memo* and *Yahoo! Sports*

The curatorial mediators that I find most compelling, theoretically rich, but ultimately troubling are so-called 'new media' ventures such as *Iraqslogger* and *Talking Points Memo*. *Iraqslogger* represents a very powerful curator for this archive. According to their website, their goal is to be the 'world's pre- mier Iraq-focused Web site. The free 24/7 up-to-the-minute news service pro- vides an unrivaled combination of exclusive and third party reporting and analysis on Iraq.'[5] To that end, they report on stories often left out in more traditional media outlets; simply put, they devote all of their space to their one subject, a luxury that television news or newspapers cannot afford. They conduct polls of the Iraqi population, study international coverage of the war, and connect military events to local and national Iraqi political events.

This entrepreneurial venture counts as part of its capital videos on YouTube. *Iraqslogger* uses many YouTube videos in their reporting. The most common use is in a section titled 'Viral Video', which features footage culled from YouTube and other video sites. These videos are not news reports per se, but are part of *Iraqslogger*'s coverage of the cultural impact of the war. They include political cartoons and home videos, either of American soldiers or Iraqi civilians. Less common are videos that supplement or drive hard news, but these videos appear in about one out of every ten stories. Usually these hard news videos are militia propaganda, American soldiers in action, or other now all too familiar scenes from the war, and are supplemented with a news story.

Similarly, *Talking Points Memo* and its sister site *TPM Muckracker* use YouTube videos to supplement their text and new media coverage of Washington DC politics. Their videos are typically clips from CSPAN, again framed with commentary and text. Like *Iragslogger*, *Talking Points Memo* is a venture looking to capitalize upon the often unpaid labor of the users of YouTube. In fact, given all that *Iraqslogger* and *Talking Points Memo* have done to use the free labor of YouTube users, it is surprising that there aren't more sites like them. The recent copyright issues and the Viacom lawsuit are most likely factors in this; perhaps the risk of lawsuit or the uncertainty as to YouTube's future are making would-be website builders nervous. However, Boczkowski's (2004) study of digital newspapers might have another, culturally based answer: news companies and their emulators have

considered their role as gatekeepers and verifiers of information as inviolable, and they often prefer not to rely on outside sources of material, including home videos and consumer's comments.[6] Regardless, given the massive amount (US $1.64 billion worth, to put a number on it) of unpaid labor, and therefore surplus value, available on YouTube, more sites such as these midsized companies are in our future, despite any ethical concerns about where their source material comes from.

Somewhere between these two emergent, entrepreneurial websites and the next category, large broadcast media, lie entities such as Yahoo!. Yahoo!, a search engine and web portal, is one of Google's (and therefore YouTube's) biggest competitors. Yahoo! also offers a video service, available at http://video.yahoo.com. This video service is nearly identical to YouTube in terms of navigation, search, commenting functionality and the ability to embed videos in exterior websites. A detailed, side-by-side comparison of the two services is not the aim of this article, but suffice it to say that YouTube has most likely defined what a 'video website' looks like and how it functions, and Yahoo! Video is competing on those grounds, largely by imitating the layout of the current leading Internet video company.

Yahoo! also offers news and entertainment content, presented in the form of blogs. Like the more independent blogs mentioned, Yahoo! blogs utilize text, pictures and videos to create, to use my metaphor again, curated exhibits. These exhibits, like the other blogs and other hybrid sites, provide this content in order to deliver audiences to advertisers. And, like the other sites, Yahoo! blogs make extensive use of YouTube videos. For example, the blog *Ball Don't Lie* focuses on the National Basketball Association (NBA). A recent post, 'Whaddayouthink: Should Shaq be suspended for flagrant on Amir?'[7] repeats the same process I have described: the blog writer, J.E. Skeets, searches YouTube or other video sites to find a video, and then provides captioning and commentary. This particular video is a clip from a Detroit Pistons–Phoenix Suns game which took place on 24 February 2008 and was broadcast on the American Broadcasting Company (ABC). The clip was posted to YouTube by user Babywade16, who, from all available information, is not associated with the NBA, ABC, YouTube or Yahoo!. Babywade16 provides a title, caption and tags for the video clip. The clip is of a hard foul – a violation of the rules prohibiting contact between a defender and an opponent who is playing offense – committed by Phoenix Suns center Shaquille O'Neal on a young Detroit player, Amir Johnson. Johnson is knocked to the court while attempting to dunk the basketball. As the title implies, Skeets asks his readers to decide whether or not O'Neal should be suspended for committing this hard foul. But before the reader can scroll down to the video, or to the comments section, Skeets provides context: 'One thing to keep in mind before watching this video: the Pistons got away with some pretty good hits on the Suns right before Shaq fouled Amir Johnson. The referees weren't blowing the whistles. That's your mini-set-up.' By searching YouTube, embedding the clip, and providing the context, Skeets has simultaneously exploited the free labor of YouTube

user Babywade16 while delivering an audience to those companies that adver-
tise on his blog, as well as to Yahoo! itself. This is common practice on *The
Ball Don't Lie*: there is a recurring post titled 'YouTube of the Day',[8] despite
the fact that Yahoo! offers its own video service.

Large broadcast media

Traditional broadcasters and media companies have been ambivalent about
YouTube. They certainly have not been monolithic. Of course, one approach
they have taken is to hinder the users' ability to post copyrighted material.
The Viacom lawsuit is the notable example of this. This approach has led
YouTube to explore anti-piracy software, such as licensed music detection
software, as well as software that allows media producers to track clips
placed on YouTube and therefore decide whether or not to remove them.[9]
Other approaches that broadcasters have taken include cobranding and col-
laboration, such as CBS's decision to post clips from *Late Night with David
Letterman* and NCAA March Madness basketball, as well as Al Jazeera
English's uploading of clips onto YouTube. In either case, broadcasters have
not exploited the unpaid labor of the YouTube users, even though there is a
wealth of media content that has been gathered, edited, uploaded and classi-
fied by those users.[10] They have sought to add content to YouTube's archive,
even risking allowing others to use it in the manner I have described here.

   However, an ironic example highlights a potential future trend in how
large media companies will curate this archive. Despite the lawsuit, a Viacom
company has been actively pulling videos from YouTube and using them as
content in broadcasts and online. *The Best Week Ever*, a VH1 pop culture
television show, regularly features YouTube videos (as well as videos from
other services) on its blog, www.thebestweekever.tv. For example, in a 10
December 2007 blog post, blogger Stereogum describes a new music video
from Amy Winehouse. This description is a caption for an embedded
YouTube video, which is the complete uncut music video 'Love Is a Losing
Game'. Stereogum notes that, rather than being new footage, the video is
simply stock clips of Winehouse culled from some of her other appearances
on camera. This implies that Winehouse had little to do with creating new
content for the video. Given Winehouse's notorious drug use and the popu-
lar conception of her as creeping closer to death from overdose, Stereogum
quips, 'You almost get the sense someone's trying to show her all that's worth
sticking around for.'[11] The artist's perceived fragility and impermanence is
contrasted with the cultural memories captured in the video. Although
Winehouse refuses to allow herself to be filmed for new content, the archive
of her previous footage is mined to create a new music video. Even after
Winehouse dies, she will be remembered due to these media objects.

   Clicking on the link back to YouTube, we see that this video is another in
a long line of unauthorized uploads. It was collected, edited and uploaded by

YouTube user Clept0manic. Clept0maniac's collection of videos include several of Winehouse. Each is titled and tagged with the names of the songs, the Winehouse album and the word 'rehab'. I can only speculate on the reasons why this user uploaded this video to the archive,[12] but the death drive, the desire for authority and the pleasure principle which Derrida (1996) describes are all evident in Clept0maniac's participation in the archive. Perhaps this Winehouse fan is reacting to the impermanence of not only the artist but the digital objects which capture the artist's performance. This fear of the artist's death, and that of her digital media record, is dialectically locked into the little death every musician (or better yet, every record company) must suffer as their works are pirated. Or perhaps this user is simply engaged in the pleasure of being a music connoisseur, an authority on music, as well as the pleasure of having her pseudonym associated with the media object now stored in the archive.

In any case, the videos which Clept0maniac has collected remain in the archive, waiting for curators such as Viacom's VH1 to place them in an exhibit, contextualize them and sell advertising space around them. At the time of this writing, the apparent approach to sell advertising space around a Winehouse video is to mock her drug use, but in the future it might well be to re-evaluate her as an important musician. In either scenario, Clept0maniac's desire to preserve and share her favorite artist is subsumed to the short-term profit desires of broadcast media companies, which dictate pulling the video object from the archive shelves, reassembling it alongside captions to create new, exchangeable 'facts' about what the cultural meaning of Winehouse's music, and of Winehouse herself, is. In short, although Viacom is suing Google for damages incurred due to the illegal uploading of copyrighted content, Viacom's subsidiary VH1 is well aware of the incredible value of the labor of the users of YouTube; it has provided the network with content, free of charge, which can be reassembled in myriad ways to suit the needs of the broadcaster.

Google/YouTube and advertisers

The editors of YouTube also have a major impact on what videos get seen. Their role in curating display is seen directly on the main YouTube page, www.youtube.com, where four main menus of videos are available: 'Videos being watched right now', 'Promoted videos', 'Featured videos' and a large single video still which has no title but is clearly an advertisement. The editors of YouTube have significant control over content on this main page, acting as curators to the archive they own. This is the space where the editors of YouTube can capture some of the attention of the viewers before they enter the YouTube archive. The advertisement and 'Featured videos' are their main avenues to assert their authority over the archive. According to YouTube's press materials:

Videos that appear in the 'Featured Videos' section on the home page are chosen through a variety of sources. While users can send videos to the YouTube editorial team for consideration, they also can rate and share videos to help make them popular on the site. Our editorial team reviews the videos users have made popular and features the most entertaining and compelling content on the home page.[13]

These featured videos are relatively stable, maintaining their position on the homepage even after the browser is refreshed. The advertisement is the most stable, remaining there for several hours. These videos are placed on the homepage to do precisely what the fact sheet says: provide a compelling homepage, and offer a user a reason to click through. The other two menus, 'Videos being watched right now' and 'Promoted videos', cycle through quickly. 'Promoted videos' changes each time the browser is refreshed and 'Videos being watched right now' changes every few seconds, presumably as users around the world watch videos. 'Promoted videos' reflect those videos which are popular, frequently viewed or added to users' favorites.

With these menus, the editors and administrators of YouTube have mixed the chaotic with the controlled. The 'Videos being watched right now' and 'Promoted videos' confirms the popularity and the free-flowing style of this archive. These two menus imply that the YouTube administrators have little control over the appearance of the homepage, but the advertisement and 'Featured videos' menu show that they have also stepped into the curatorial role, selecting videos from the archive, featuring them and then selling the space around them to advertisers. This space on the homepage is often supplemented with banners and YouTube's new 'InVideo' advertising, which overlays a small advertisement on top of certain videos as the user watches.[14] Clearly, YouTube's administrators have not ignored the potential profits to be gleaned from curating this archive.

Given the tremendous growth of advertising revenue to be gained on the Internet, the struggles over copyright and use of these media objects between agents such as independent bloggers, entrepreneurial media sites, traditional broadcasters and Google will most likely shape the future of Internet video. Whoever emerges as the dominant curator of this digital *Wunderkammer* will control this revenue.

Conclusion: collective intelligence, collective risk

YouTube highlights a particular desire in the digital age. The sheer amount of digital and media content is staggering. As Marlene Manoff (2004, 2007) has argued, this has posed serious problems for those interested in preserving culture: how do we decide what digital cultural artifacts are saved? How do we classify them? How do archives and libraries deal with the volatile changes in software and hardware? YouTube_as_archive, the metaphor I am

outlining here, provides some potential solutions to these challenges. Theories of collective intelligence and collective creativity hold that large groups of people can, through the aggregation of their actions, make highly useful decisions and bring to bear massive intellectual power to projects such as software design (Linux; Open Office; Gnu Image Manipulation Program), news reporting (Indymedia), 'tagsonomical' information organization (Flickr and YouTube), and knowledge preservation (Wikipedia) (Benkler, 2006; Bruns, 2007; Levy, 1997; Marlow et al., 2006). YouTube is among these collective projects, with millions of videos collected from millions of users and culled from such diverse sources as government propaganda films to commercials to music videos to home videos. YouTube could be a model upon which serious digital archival work could be based. 'Tagsonomy' could potentially solve the problems of overworked librarians and archivists who cannot keep up with digital media. Clearly, there is a drive among many people to preserve and store the digital culture they deem valuable, a drive that the same theorists of collective intelligence are currently struggling to understand.

However, given its for-profit structure, YouTube also reflects what I call 'collective risk'. Its storage function provides the service which might be deemed democratic, but as I have shown here, its display function allows for entrepreneurs and corporations to effectively exploit the labor of all of those who have uploaded and classified videos in good faith. As Terranova (2000) argues, even in the so-called 'digital economy', labor still matters, and much of it has been heretofore performed for free. Building on this, I will add that much more than labor has been supplied freely by users of YouTube. For those who mine this archive, profitability also arises from the fact that the risks of media production are being collectively distributed among the users. Each user must undergo significant capital costs in order to participate in YouTube: computers, broadband Internet connections, video and software are all required. These costs are in addition to the long-standing costs involved in spending significant time laboring over creating any object. Traditionally, of course, broadcasters had to bear these costs, and therefore the risks, in order to create content which could deliver audiences to advertisers. A motion picture company or broadcaster would assume any loss from a movie or television show that fails to attract audiences. In contrast, YouTube, like other Web 2.0 sites, have allowed for the risk of media production, classification, and archiving to be collectively borne among users. This is in addition to the *seemingly* democratic and collective project of actually building and adding to the archive.

Appendix: websites

America Blog – http://americablog.blogspot.com
Ball Don't Lie – http://sports.yahoo.com/nba/blog/nba_experts
Black Five – http://www.blackfive.net

Clicky Click Music Blog – http://jbreitling.blogspot.com/
Confessions of a Jersey Goddess – http://jerseygoddess.blogspot.com
Detroit Bad Boys – http://www.detroitbadboys.com
Framed – http://www.framed.typepad.com
Informed Voters – http://informedvoters.wordpress.com
Iraqslogger – http://www.iraqslogger.com
Living with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome – http://www.livingwithcfs.wordpress.com
Need 4 Sheed – http://www.need4sheed.com
Shakesville – http://www.shakesville.com
Talking Points Memo – http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com
The Best Week Ever – http://www.bestweekever.tv
TPM Muckracker – http://tpmmuckracker.com
Women 4 Hope – http://www.women4hope.wordpress.com

Notes

1 In particular, see 'The Process of Creative Destruction' in Schumpeter's *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (1994).
2 Another key curatorial task is legal disposal of artifacts. Archive curators spend significant time working on establishing and maintaining legal ownership of the objects in their collections. This might include keeping records of donations, informing heirs about items in the collection and so on. In the case of YouTube, this is a major issue: the Viacom lawsuit is about precisely the legal status of many of the objects in YouTube's archive. Since this issue is unresolved as of this writing, I will not address it in detail in this article. However, given the structure of YouTube, and the popularity of user-created videos, I believe that my argument would still stand even if the Viacom suit brought an end to the storage of third-party copyrighted videos on YouTube's servers.
3 There is an exception to the 10-minute rule. 'Director accounts' allow for users to post longer videos as long as they adhere to stricter rules about copyright.
4 And of course, they are working to do exactly that. YouTube/Google has actively sought to develop technologies that can recognize copyrighted music in user videos and prevent these videos from being uploaded. In addition, this technology also allows for copyright holders to monitor how often their content is played in YouTube, thus allowing media companies to monitor the so-called viral nature of their content. This particular aspect of YouTube needs to be examined carefully as the website develops.
5 See http://www.iraqslogger.com/index.php/category/8/AboutUs. Note that as of this writing, Iraqslogger is shifting to a subscription-based service, so it will no longer be free of charge to the public. However, the site still capitalizes on YouTube videos.
6 In particular, see the concluding chapter of Boczkowski's *Digitizing the News* (2004).

7   See http://sports.yahoo.com/nba/blog/nba_experts/post/Whaddayouthink-Should-Shaq-be-suspended-for-fla?urn=nba,68505

8   See http://sports.yahoo.com/nba/blog/nba_experts/post/Zach-Randolph-thinks-he-s-a-guard?urn=nba,68500 for a recent example. To address the reason why Yahoo! might be tolerant of YouTube videos being posted on a Yahoo! blog, I would offer the thesis that Yahoo! might want to drive traffic to its site and away from Google/YouTube by any means possible.

9   See http://www.google.com/support/youtube/bin/answer.py?answer=83766&topic=13656

10 However, as the 2007 Writer's Guild strike against production companies suggests, those who have labored over the writing of any of this content are concerned about the results of their labor being entered into the archive, in perpetuity, and without compensation.

11 See http://www.bestweekever.tv/2007/12/10/new-amy-winehouse-video-love-is-a-losing-game/

12 This is a call to action: it is clear that detailed survey and/or ethnographic study of YouTube users is necessary in order to better understand the complex collective social actions required to build such a site. I join Benkler (2006), Jenkins (2004) and Bruns (2007) in an attempt to theorize about what these collective actions mean and what avenues are open to us because of them, but like them I can only speculate about the desires of these users.

13 See http://youtube.com/t/fact_sheet

14 For an explanation of how the 'InVideo' advertising system works, see http://www.google.com/youtube/advertise/HalloweenCaseStudy.pdf

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