VIDEO VORTEX Reader
RESPONSES
TO
YOUTUBE
EDITED BY
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INC READER #4

The Video Vortex Reader is the first collection of critical texts to deal with the rapidly emerging world of online video – from its explosive rise in 2005 with YouTube, to its future as a significant form of personal media.

After years of talk about digital convergence and crossmedia platforms we now witness the merger of the Internet and television at a pace no-one predicted. These contributions from scholars, artists and curators evolved from the first two *Video Vortex* conferences in Brussels and Amsterdam in 2007 which focused on responses to YouTube, and address key issues around independent production and distribution of online video content. What does this new distribution platform mean for artists and activists? What are the alternatives?

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ELIZABETH LOSH

Distributed networks for disseminating audio, video, image, and text files have generally become associated with a fragmented politics of personal liberty and rhizomatic modes of resistance to the hegemonic powers of the monolithic corporate state. As Siva Vaidhyanathan has argued in *The Anarchist and the Library*, decentralised mechanisms for distributing content through peer-to-peer modes of exchange tend to be opposed to oligarchic interests that govern through and for authorities that use 'moral panics' to retain control over the populace. [1] Yet, as Vaidhyanathan also points out, entrenched interests shape the operational constraints of computer systems and may use proprietary software to prohibit decentralised lateral transactions. Moreover, the consequences, effects, and residues of seemingly improvisational and amorphous informational networks frequently coalesce into the form of what Ned Rossiter has referred to as the 'specter' that continues to haunt the age of informationality: state sovereignty. [2]

In many ways, YouTube functions as a 'network' only to the extent that it emulates the quest for market share associated with traditional media monopolies, such as the Fox network controlled by Rupert Murdoch. Despite the fact that it seems to battle entertainment conglomerates nobly in American courtrooms on the side of liberalising copyright regulations, YouTube cannot be called a distributed network, based on its highly centralised business plan, structure of ownership, and corporate branding of product.

The information architecture of YouTube is one that foregrounds celebrity and spectacle by design, even as it deploys a rhetoric of 'response', 'comment', and 'community'. Typically, it offers its audience little more than what Guy Debord once called 'figmentary interlocutors' who distract attention from the unidirectional characteristics of the discourse, which is ultimately based on a politics of commodities. [3] There may be real human beings populating the audience constellations of YouTube, but they satisfy stock roles, such as griefer, self-promoter, parodist, pundit, and seconder of motions. In other words, YouTube is often

1. Siva Vaidhyanathan, *The Anarchist in the Library: How the Clash Between Freedom and Control Is Hacking the Real World and Crashing the System*, New York: Basic Books, 2004.
2. Ned Rossiter, 'Organized Networks and Nonrepresentative Democracy', *Reformatting Politics: Information Technology and Global Civil Society,* New York: Routledge, 2006, 19.
3. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, New York: Zone Books, 2006.

a cultural engine of popularity [4] instead of populism, in which the power laws by which it functions largely protect the status quo rather than challenge it. As the etymology of the word 'statistics' indicates, far from causing the state to wither away, YouTube's multiple schemes for numerical ranking of data ultimately legitimise the logic of Achenwall's *Staatswissenschaft* from which the discipline of modern statistics and its emphasis on metrics derives. [5]

The use of YouTube by official agencies pursuing e-government agendas for the United States and the United Kingdom demonstrates how state authority is represented in distributed digital video in modes that may mimic one-to-one communication and yet reinforce the one-to-many structure by which liberal representative democracies have traditionally functioned in the mass media era. The U.S. Department of Defense, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of State, the British Foreign & Commonwealth Office, and even the British royal family use their YouTube channels in ways that both appropriate and reify existing YouTube genres and display how YouTube's seemingly emergent and informally derived conventions frequently also borrow from the visual and indexical culture of the state. In the course of the so-called War on Terror, state-produced online video from these two nations is clearly intended to sharpen some messages and soften others about 'unpopular' international policies, but this tendency to use YouTube for institutional propaganda about security, sovereignty, and subjectivity could just as easily be replicated in other national contexts. Furthermore, many government-funded YouTube videos now serve as substitutes for numerically coded instructional booklets that were traditionally produced in print formats by official agencies on topics ranging from tax preparation to drivers' education. Thus, state-sanctioned YouTube potentially represents a multimedia extension of what is now a vast archive of online forms, which Jane Fountain has described as a key part of the Weberian bureaucracy of the 'virtual state'. [6]

It could be argued that government-produced YouTube videos are a special case that can not be taken as representative of the site's seemingly anti-authoritarian norms. But close examination of the cultures of production and reception surrounding government YouTube videos shows that user practices exhibit many of the same trends and features that are manifested on the amateur channels of individual members. In short, what Paul Virilio has described as the 'democratisation of voyeurism' in the post-September 11th environment [7] can just as easily be applied to the ethos of YouTube 'prosumer' as the ethos of the state.

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4.   See Alexandra Juhasz on popularity in *TOUR #3: POPULARITY! Who doesn't want to be prom queen?*, 2008. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-XuCRO1Ecw, and Henry Jenkins' admission that "participatory culture is not always progressive" in 'Nine Propositions Toward a Cultural Theory of YouTube', *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*. http://www.henryjenkins.org/2007/05/9_propositions_towards_a_cultu.html

5.   See also Ian Hacking, 'How Should We Do the History of Statistics?', *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

6.   Jane Fountain, *Building the Virtual State: Information Technology and Institutional Change*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001.

7.   Paul Virilio, *The Visual Crash*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002.

Surveillance and Sousveillance

Not all citizens are satisfied with how the state manages its authority over its inhabitants' mobility and how it envisions its supervisory role. In the United States, popular mainstream blogs frequently share traveller's horror stories about passengers being humiliated for attempting to transport innocuous carry-on items such as breast milk, snack pudding, geological samples, and sex aids. Blogs like Federated Media's Boing Boing have shared their writers' own negative experiences at airports and have also directed readers to other blogs that catalogue Transportation Security Administration abuses. [8] CNET's Surveillance State is actually written by longtime TSA-protestor and civil libertarian Chris Soghoian, who was once formally investigated by the Department of Homeland Security for creating an online Northwest Airlines boarding pass generator to draw attention to a large security loophole in airport check-in procedures.

To provide a forum for official public retorts to such negative user-generated content about mistreatment and incompetence involving individual screeners, as well as to counter arguments about flaws in the organisation's general procedures for handling passengers and baggage at airports, the frequently maligned agency created its own YouTube channel. Before the debut of the actual channel, the TSA began the process of video public diplomacy by opening a website called 'Myth Busters', which was intended to debunk what the TSA claimed to be 'urban legends', such as a tale of an eight-year-old child on the 'no-fly' watch list. [9]

TSA officials also used the Myth Busters site to refute critical passenger accounts, sometimes with video from TSA security cameras, [10] most famously in the case of a female passenger who was struggling to manage a stroller containing a toddler who had been holding a prohibited cup of liquid. Surveillance video showed camera views of the incident that ambiguously displayed the passenger's interactions with security staff during her attempts to pass through the checkpoint. Although the footage was intended to exonerate federal authorities, many noted that the supposedly exculpatory video showed the woman in a humiliating position down on her knees and that TSA personnel were unprofessionally milling about and socialising on the job. When subsequently published the TSA's official YouTube channel, viewers posted over six hundred mostly critical comments. Some of these comments generated a flurry of replies of their own, such as the posting from a passenger who described having a personal diary read by voyeuristic TSA personnel to which many sympathetic readers responded in outrage. [11]

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8.   Kathleen Schafer, 'TSAin't - Keeping America Safe from Photographers: So what's your story?', TSAin't: Keeping America Safe from Photographers weblog, 22 April, 2006, http://tsaintgood.blogspot.com/2006/04/so-whats-your-story.html

9.   The 'Myth Busters' title of the website came from the popular *MythBusters* show on American cable television in which the hosts perform science experiments to test the truth of lore from popular culture and thus affirm or deny both commonsense and counterintuitive propositions about physics, chemistry, and biology.

10.   Transportation Security Administration, 'TSA: Myth Busters Archive', http://www.tsa.gov/approach/mythbusters/index.shtm

11.   Transportation Security Administration, 'TSA Officers Hassle Female Passenger over Sippy Cup?', http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments&v=BkPevfpWDso&fromurl=/watch%3Fv%3DBkPevfpWDso

In contrast to the text comments, all four YouTube video responses to the surveillance footage of the mother with the stroller did not engage in the substantive debate about TSA conduct. Instead, they piggybacked on the number of views to further commercial agendas of promotion for both product and self. Response videos from ExpoTVKidsandBabies show a range of white, middle-class mothers providing reviews of sippy cups, booster seats, and other children's specialty products, an issue that only tangentially related to the TSA case through the logic of keywords and consumerism. However, response videos to other TSA YouTube videos generally avoid participating in such branding strategies, and – as they did with critical text comments – YouTube members use the 'vlog' editorial format to challenge the authority of the federal agency. For example, 'Happy Thanksgiving TSA Turkeys', which was posted in response to the 'TSA SimpliFLY Video', shows an enraged male respondent, 'crimefile,' calling these enforcers of state authority 'little Nazis'. [12]

Soon comments and video responses were disabled for these and the other official TSA videos on YouTube. But the agency continued to post new content, often to complement the text of their public relations blog, Evolution of Security, which still presented reader feedback on its pages. Unlike the 'zero comments' state of most bloggers and videographers who are private citizens, [13] U.S. government blogs and YouTube channels tend to receive extremely large numbers of responses to posted content. The authors of the Evolution blog, who present themselves as rank-and-file TSA employees rather than image-management professionals, have been known to express surprise and exasperation with the volume of their negative reader comments, as they do in the following justification for refusing to respond to some types of protest or complaint:

> The simple truth is that we're just about the only government agency engaging in this type of dialogue on security issues and policies and we're sincerely interested in rational debate and conversation...but we have neither the time nor the desire to respond to random, vitriol filled diatribes that don't serve passengers or other bloggers in any way. [14]

This declaration attests to both the site's exceptionalism, as it presents itself as a federal agency unusually willing to engage in 'dialogue on security issues and policies', and its conventionality, since the authors make clear that they will only play by the rules of Habermassian 'rational debate and conversation' and will refuse to engage with outliers who produce 'vitriol' that is irrelevant to the discourses of the assumed mainstream.

Furthermore, the statement acknowledges that TSA social media outlets actually have two distinct audiences: consumers of transportation services ('passengers') and media producers ('other bloggers') who may compete or collaborate with TSA content-creators. To provide visual material for both these audiences, TSA YouTube videos also present a number of examples of seemingly impromptu oratory in which costumed security agents serve as spokespersons for the architectures of control deployed at airports. Techniques of the security profession praised in official YouTube videos include ambient sound played to calm passengers, signage in which the information design primarily serves to manage foot traffic, official uniforms made more similar to clothing worn by law enforcement personnel, and routinised behaviours and gestures developed through role-playing training completed behind the scenes. Unlike professionally-produced Video News Releases or VNRs, TSA videos mimic the amateur filmmaking practices of other YouTube users. Since VNRs have been the subject of congressional hearings and defensive statements by the Public Relations Society of America because media activists argue that VNRs manipulate traditional television news coverage by taking advantage of the opportunism of individual broadcast stations that constantly search for inexpensive and easily accessible B-roll, this studied casualness and use of low-tech authoring and broadcast tools serves as a way to diffuse possible accusations about state-supported propaganda.

The concept of 'sousveillance', popularised by Steve Mann, holds that citizens can disrupt the surveilling powers of the authorities by using wearable cameras to document their daily interactions as political subjects. [15] Yet TSA videos deploy both the Foucauldian surveillance perspective of the panopticon, [16] and the view from below that would be seen by subject citizens. Although Mann argues that sousveillance reasserts citizens' rights to the commons by 'uncovering the panopticon and undercutting its primacy and privilege', [17] the individual's point of view shot from a wearable camera can also be appropriated by state authority to inculcate self-management techniques and to formalise what Foucault calls the 'ritualisation of the problem of personal conduct' in his work on 'governmentality'. [18] For example, 'TSA Diamond Self Select', which is shot in the Salt Lake City airport, is a ski-themed disquisition on self-selection processes, literacies of mobility, and the professionalisation of travel. The video encourages travellers to group themselves into one of the following three categories to maximise efficiency: 'black diamond' 'expert travelers', 'blue square' 'frequent flyers', and 'green circle' families or others needing additional time or special assistance. [19] The camera begins at passenger level in security lanes but slowly floats up to the overhead view and

12. Crimefile, 'Happy Thanksgiving TSA Turkeys',
    http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xDnLAPaxE0&watch_response
13. See Susan C. Herring, Lois Ann Scheidt, Sabrina Bonus, and Elijah Wright, 'Bridging the Gap: A
    Genre Analysis of Weblogs', *Proceedings 37th Annual* Hawaii International Conference on System
    Sciences (Big Island, HI, Jan. 5–8, 2004), and Geert Lovink, *Zero Comments: Blogging and Criti-
    cal Internet Culture*, New York: Routledge, 2008.
14. Christopher, EOS Blogteam, Transportation Security Administration, 'ID Update and a Word on
    the Blog', Evolution of Security weblog, 27 June, 2008,
    http://www.tsa.gov/blog/2008/06/id-update-and-word-on-blog.html

15. Steve Mann, Jason Nolan, and Barry Wellman, 'Sousveillance: Inventing and Using Wearable
    Computing Devices for Data Collection in Surveillance Environments', *Surveillance & Society* 1.3
    (2003): 331-355, http://wearcam.org/sousveillance.pdf.
16. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New
    York: Vintage, 1979.
17. Steve Mann, Jason Nolan, and Barry Wellman, 'Sousveillance: Inventing and Using Wearable
    Computing Devices for Data Collection in Surveillance Environments'.
18. Michel Foucault, 'Governmentality', trans. Colin Gordon, *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Govern-
    mentality*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.
19. Transportation Security Administration 'TSA Diamond Lane Self-Select', http://www.youtube.com/
    watch?v=PfkSzVRVt3o

adopts the surveiling gaze of a superior authority, thus underscoring the identification of the surveilled with their surveillers. The subsequently posted 'Walkthrough Checkpoint Evolution at BWI' maintains the amateurish shaky-lens view of a passenger being herded through lanes throughout the entire video, and the footage even includes the audible footsteps of the camera-bearer in its soundtrack to establish its authenticity as a representation of the physical presence of the obedient witness in airport lines. [20]

Unlike the security webcams featured in the work of artist Natalie Bookchin that convey an atmosphere of detachment and alienation, videos on the TSA YouTube channel have a pedagogical function intended to foster acceptance of the principles and practices associated with the security procedures adopted by the cultures of airport travel, whether seen from the above the checkpoint in the position identified with the enforcer or at floor-level from the viewpoint of those who could potentially find themselves hailed by the law. Of course, these strategies also provoke tactical responses, [21] and YouTube content on citizen channels includes passenger-produced videos that are created by ubiquitous recording devices where the rhetorical emphasis is on bearing witness, whistleblowing, and exploiting workarounds in videos such as 'TSA Agent inspects my bag', 'TSA Screening at LAX', 'What You Don't Want to See at Airport Security', and 'toddlers vs. tsa'.

In other words, government YouTube frequently takes on the form of social media rather than its function. Despite seeming to promote an ideology of openness and transparency, the TSA's multimedia portals often underscore the value of secrecy by justifying a rhetoric of obstruction. In 'Blogger Bob Screens the Apple MacBook Air', one of the writers of the TSA's *Evolution of Security* blog responds to other 'blog posts' that allege that Apple's new ultra-thin laptop technology is particularly likely to raise unjustified alarms at airport screening stations. [22] Despite the device's lack of bulk capable of hiding explosives, Bob explains that Apple's mechanical contents are 'very different to what we are accustomed to seeing'. However, Bob the TSA screener also refuses to show the YouTube audience exactly how the MacBook Air's 'inner workings are laid out differently' in discourse that conflates corporate trade secrets with national security in its references to 'sensitive security information'.

Although the computer screen display assumes a central position in the rational decision-making process of TSA agents manning contraband detectors, shots of such screens, which both display information and screen out prohibited goods, never appear in the official TSA videos. [23] An ability to see the screen display for oneself would be particularly meaningful to

stakeholders in the case of controversial whole-body scanning technologies, in which private body morphologies under clothing could be viewed by screeners in remote airport locations. However, the YouTube video about this technology shows an operator whose head is blocking the screen, as a spokesperson assures viewers that the image will be 'deleted forever' after viewing and that 'the system has no way to save, transmit, or print the image'. [24] In posted TSA videos, the viewer is constantly reminded of cinematic rather than computational conventions about vision and the gaze, and the possibility that technology mediates rather than reflects reality is never seriously acknowledged in the logic of their footage.

Testimony and Evidence

Of course, online digital video has become a prominent medium for exposing wrongdoing committed by the agents of the nation-state. However, such video shot by government personnel often serves as evidence rather than whistle-blowing testimony, because it is not created as a means of intentional communication with the public. Rather than diffuse or discourage victimisation, scandals, or disasters in the making, such video is often manufactured to document the content-creator's active participation in systems that capitalise on the authority of the state. For example, human rights advocate Sam Gregory points out that 'the most salient 'human rights' videos that have generated action recently have been shot by perpetrators'. [25] As evidence, Gregory lists 'torture videos by Egyptian police or the Malaysian Squatgate footage – or for that matter Abu Ghraib or the Saddam execution videos'. These videos were private communications to be disseminated only among brutalisers as trophy shots, but they may be later featured in news stories or subpoenaed as evidence, much as largely one-to-one electronic mail messages were only destined for those within the inner circles of incompetence, impotence, image maintenance, or conspiracy involved in scandals in the U.S. federal government.

After digital video and still images showing human rights abuses were accidentally shared with the public by guards at the Abu Ghraib prison, officials at the Department of Defense became concerned about how compromising combat and patrol footage shot by personnel in the U.S. armed forces could be widely disseminated on popular online video sites such as YouTube. [26] Even after the Abu Ghraib scandal, incriminating video posted on commercial video-sharing sites included shots that seemed to show American soldiers taunting Iraqi children with the promise of water bottles, laughing after the destruction of a mosque, and sadistically lobbing a live puppy off a cliff. Faced with a continuous series of public relations crises, the U.S. military's new OPSEC manual radically limited soldiers' access to social media sites. In a document that asserted that '80 percent of the adversary's intelligence needs' could be

20. Transportation Security Administration, 'Walk Through Checkpoint Evolution and BWI' http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPujbxF_2mw&feature=user

21. For more about the opposition of 'strategies' and 'tactics', see Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

22. Transportation Security Administration, 'Blogger Bob Screens the Apple MacBook Air', http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-3qZcmXFkQ0

23. For more on the logic of the screen, see Lev Manovich, 'The Interface', *The Language of New Media*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001, 96, where Manovich argues that the screen is not a 'neutral medium of presenting information' because it 'functions to filter, to *screen out*' and therefore serves an 'aggressive' purpose.

24. Transportation Security Administration, 'Millimeter Wave Portals: TSA Checkpoint Evolution', http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_lz819-77zY

25. Sam Gregory, 'DIY Video and Human Rights', The Hub: See It : Upload It : Share It : Take Action weblog, 13 February, 2008, http://humanrightsvideo.wordpress.com/2008/02/13/diy-video-and-human-rights

26. For an example of the use of soldiers' videos in Internet art and essayistic documentary work, see Jennifer Terry, 'Killer Entertainments', *Vectors Journal* 3.1 (Fall, 2007), http://www.vectorsjournal.org/index.php?page=7&projectId=86

satisfied by the contents of 'libraries or the Internet', military planners insisted that 'personal websites of individual soldiers (to include web logs or 'blogs')' are 'a potentially significant vulnerability'. [27] Although some official sources insisted that the subsequent move to block YouTube and MySpace to soldiers on active duty was merely intended to preserve network resources by limiting high-bandwidth applications, [28] commanders also admitted that such 'recreational' computer use had unspecified security risks. [29]

But military planners did not limit themselves to prohibiting the vernacular content-creation of troops on the ground; they also founded a state-sanctioned YouTube channel sponsored by 'Operation Iraqi Freedom' at which they promised to provide 'Combat action', 'Interesting, eye-catching footage', 'Interaction between Coalition troops and the Iraqi populace', and 'Teamwork between Coalition and Iraqi troops in the fight against terror'. [30] In addition, the channel offered its visitors guarantees about the authenticity of the material it presented and asserted that 'clips document action as it appeared to personnel on the ground and in the air as it was shot'. As the site claims, 'We will only edit video clips for time, security reasons, and/or overly disturbing or offensive images'. Yet the channel's managers also concede that content is vetted and that material that would be inappropriate would not be posted at all. Such excluded footage includes video with 'Profanity', 'Sexual content', 'Overly graphic, disturbing or offensive material', and 'Footage that mocks Coalition Forces, Iraqi Security Forces or the citizens of Iraq' – precisely the kinds of unflattering portrayals of U.S. soldiers that had seemed to be so damaging to the reputation of troops in Iraq.

Although there are no subtitles to explain the dialogue in Iraqi Arabic, translators often play a supporting role in videos such as 'Baghdad Firefight, March 2007' and 'Kidnap Victim Rescued, Baghdad, Jan. 2007'. The latter film is composed of a montage of scenes that recapitulates the trail of evidence leading to a captive hostage and concludes with the grateful family members discovering that their loved one has been liberated by U.S. soldiers; by the end of the video, the time of day has shifted to nighttime, and the scene of emotional catharsis is crudely illuminated by a roving flashlight. In these videos, the sound is often cacophonous and includes loud helicopter noise and digital squeals caused by recording and transmission technologies. Newer videos promote the operation's official website, where those in search of more content can view the daily 'Iraqi Freedom Minute' or read the 'Freedom Journal', [31] with the tag line 'SEE THE PHOTOS * READ THE STORIES'. In some videos, such as 'Iraqi Boy Scouts prepare for Jamboree', viewers use the comment area to discuss the military's

regulations limiting access to social media. [32] Those who object to the war have flagged a number of the videos as inappropriate for minors. Unlike the TSA YouTube channel, videos on MNF-IRAQ often show specific technologies of vision in the context of actual computer generated displays and present footage processed from black and white aerial targeting systems or green night vision scopes.

With over three million views, 'Battle on Haifa Street' may be the most popular video on this state-sanctioned Department of Defense YouTube channel, MNFIRAQ. Without voice-over or appended editorialising, the video depicts small groups of U.S. marksmen firing at enemy positions from a heavily damaged high-rise building on January 24, 2007. Although the YouTube viewer can not see through the scopes of their weapons, the camera sometimes cuts from the soldiers to their targets in the chaotic urban landscape that is visible through windows and curtains. As the soldiers fire, they also damage the building in which they are taking cover, and debris periodically rains down on them. The Haifa Street video received over two thousand comments. Although this army-produced video file received noticeably more positive comments in relative terms than responses to TSA video content, a number of viewers similarly objected to what they saw as stage-directed propaganda. Some served as detail-oriented 'spoilers' to point out inconsistencies in the footage and to note that the fusillade was destroying the dwellings of noncombatants and risking the lives of civilians. [33] Video responses to the 'Battle' included both pro-military thank-yous, tributes, and remixes and anti-military rap videos and films of veterans protesting the war.

This intimate soldier-centered vision of the conflict from high above street-level was not the only coverage of this series of battles, however. CBS journalist Lara Logan, who was embedded with American troops, had covered the story from the perspective of the sidewalk a few days earlier, but the network decided not to air her segment, 'Battle for Haifa Street'. [34] Rather than focus on the supposed heroism of U.S. soldiers assisting Iraqi troops in fortified positions, Logan noted that the area's civilians had accused the largely Shiite army of committing atrocities against the Sunni minority. Logan's footage showed evidence of torture and summary execution, and the video displayed corpses of both persecuted Sunnis and Shiites killed in retaliation. According to a network spokesperson, the issue was the violent depiction of a trauma culture that could not be assimilated by Americans, and 'the Executive Producer of the Evening News thought some of the images in it were a bit strong'. [35]

27. Operations Security (OPSEC) Manual, April 19, 2007,
    http://blog.wired.com/defense/files/army_reg_530_1_updated.pdf
28. Leo Shane III and T.D. Flack, 'DOD blocking YouTube, others', *Stars and Stripes* (May 13, 2007),
    http://www.stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=53421&archive=true
29. B.B. Bell, 'Restricted Access to Internet Entertainment Sites Across DoD Networks',
    http://www.usfk.mil/usfk/bell-sends/5_11_07_27%20-%2007%20Restricted%20Access%20
    to%20Internet%20Entertainment%20Sites%20Across%20DoD%20Networks.pdf
30. Multi-National Force Iraq YouTube Channel, http://www.youtube.com/user/MNFIRAQ
31. Operation Iraqi Freedom, http://www.mnf-iraq.com

32. Multi-National Force Iraq YouTube Channel, 'Iraqi Boy Scouts prepare for Jamboree',
    http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments&v=dH80g_Mkin0&fromurl=/
    watch%3Fv%3DdH80g_Mkin0
33. Multi-National Force Iraq YouTube Channel, 'Battle on Haifa Street, Baghdad, Iraq',
    http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nlNORX006-c
34. Lara Logan, CBS News, 'The Battle for Haifa Street',
    http://www.cbsnews.com/sections/i_video/main500251.shtml?id=2371456n
35. Rory O'Connor and Dave Olson, 'Helping Lara Logan', Media Channel weblog, 24 January, 2007,
    http://www.mediachannel.org/wordpress/2007/01/24/helping-lara-logan

Logan attempted independently to disseminate the video, which had been relegated to a relatively obscure position on the CBS website, by using the following mass e-mail appeal with the subject line 'help':

> The story below only appeared on our CBS website and was not aired on CBS. It is a story that is largely being ignored, even though this is taking place every single day in central Baghdad, two blocks from where our office is located. Our crew had to be pulled out because we got a call saying they were about to be killed, and on their way out, a civilian man was shot dead in front of them as they ran. I would be very grateful if any of you have a chance to watch this story and pass the link on to as many people you know as possible. It should be seen. And people should know about this. If anyone has time to send a comment to CBS – about the story – not about my request, then that would help highlight that people are interested and this is not too gruesome to air, but rather too important to ignore. Many, many thanks. [36]

Logan's pathos-filled plea for publicity appeared in a number of progressive blogs, where it generated many supportive reader comments. A few days later, CBS news ran another Logan piece, 'Battle for Haifa St. Continues', which promoted a sympathetic portrayal of U.S. forces by showing them apprehending an insurgent who had been in the process of rigging up an IED or Improvised Explosive Device. [37]

Soon, however, right-wing bloggers were picking up reports from Nibras Kazimi about an 'interesting controversy' involving Logan's footage. Kazimi argued that Logan's report improperly appropriated insurgent cell-phone footage without acknowledging that it was first released by the Al-Furqan Institute for Media Productions, under the title 'Some of the Casualties of the Heretics in Haifa Street After Sunday's Fighting'. [38] Kazimi claimed to have found some frame-by-frame matches between the CBS coverage and Al-Furqan's materials. Unlike the polished newsroom-style digital video produced by some Islamic fundamentalists, [39] CBS chose to incorporate quick-and-dirty street videography that showed the sectarian slayings. The Al-Furqan emphasis on local conflicts in the footage is also very different from the transnational messages that Lina Khatib has described, in which jihadist digital content reflects a cultural conversation about globalisation. [40] The Vice President of CBS declined to identify the source of Logan's video, citing the news network's

obligation to 'protect the source' in 'a matter of life and death', but he emphatically denied that it was from Al-Qaeda, as some pro-war bloggers had claimed. [41]

Months after the debate about CBS's reporting had died down, no sign of either controversy about the journalistic ethics of investigators and gatekeepers at CBS could be gleaned just from the Haifa Street YouTube video posted by the U.S. army, although chance aggregations of tags and search terms might cause evidence to appear in 'Related Videos' to the right of the main YouTube player window. Yet army videographers were clearly aware that the footage they had posted still lacked a definitive resolution and so they posted a 'Part 2' the following month that showed Tomahawk missile strikes, the demolition of large structures, and service people exclaiming 'cool', 'nice', 'good', and 'this is better than the first time'. [42]

Although CBS changed its reporting strategy to one of pro-military triumphalism, during the intervening period other news organisations became involved in documenting events on Haifa Street with their own dramatic digital video from reporters embedded with U.S. troops. Under the title 'Return to Haifa Street', *The New York Times* ran a suspenseful video segment narrated by reporter Damien Cave in which the patrol's leader is killed off screen by a sniper during the filming; afterwards his men shout profanities and then are described as 'alone, shocked, heartbroken'. [43] In this video, which was also later posted on YouTube, the Times incorporates footage from the U.S. Department of Defense, which was some of the same footage that would eventually appear on the military's official MNF-IRAQ YouTube channel. Unlike CBS, The New York Times in this case clearly indicates the source of the film with both voiceover and on-screen text. Although the reporter acknowledges that he was 'only with one unit', it is with some irony that he states that 'the military says it was a success, releasing this video to prove how well Iraqis and Americans performed', since later the reporter asserts that the army had left apartments 'open and empty, making it easy for people to return and possibly reignite the cycle of violence all over again'. As the reporter summarizes the history of short-lived U.S. occupation and policing in the area, 'the gains in every case were temporary.'

Both CBS and The New York Times produced what were essentially video remixes about Haifa Street that eventually wound up on YouTube. Both were structured by the familiar conventions of personal testimony, although the voices of the reporters handled the incorporation of video segments from outside sources very differently. In contrast, the MNF-IRAQ materials about Haifa Street were intended to function as evidence that could be used to support the continuing occupation of the country and the moral equations that justified the war. As such, these government YouTube videos were – by their very nature – incomplete in legalistic

36. Rory O'Connor and Dave Olson, 'Helping Lara Logan'.
37. Lara Logan, CBS News, 'Battle for Haifa St. Continues', http://www.cbsnews.com/sections/
     i_video/main500251.shtml?id=2396260n?source=search_video
38. Nibras Kazimi, 'Interesting Controversy Surrounding CBS's Lara Logan', Talisman Gate weblog,
     26 January, 2007,
     http://talismangate.blogspot.com/2007/01/interesting-controversy-surrounding.html
39. See International Crisis Group, 'In Their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency', http://www.
     crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3953&l=1
40. Lina Khatib, 'Communicating Islamic Fundamentalism as Global Citizenship', *Reformatting
     Politics: Information Technology and Global Civil Society*, New York: Routledge, 2005.

41. Brian Montopoli, 'Questions Surround Haifa Street Video', Public Eye weblog, 30 January, 2007,
     http://www.cbsnews.com/blogs/2007/01/30/publiceye/entry2414754.shtml?source=search_story
42. Multi-National Force Iraq YouTube Channel, 'Battle on Haifa Street, Baghdad, Part 2',
     http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2BDGItVOAwA
43. Damien Cave, 'Return to Haifa Street', The New York Times,
     http://video.on.nytimes.com/?fr_story=d4bc9a1d003c33c79e9844688dd816024b0e0555&scp=
     1&sq=return%20to%20haifa%20street&st=cse

terms, because they required the supplement of a persuasive argument and some rhetorical agency behind a specific case being made. [44]

Noisy Channels

In recent years, a new philosophy about 'public diplomacy' intended to reach citizens directly rather than send messages through government officials has drawn attention to YouTube and other online means for the global distribution of state-produced videos about policy and politics. British diplomats under the leadership of Secretary David Miliband, who actually posts content regularly on his own separate YouTube channel, [45] have pursued a much more sophisticated agenda in this area than their U.S. counterparts, although both countries use their YouTube channels for international audiences as repositories of stand-alone multimedia content and material to illustrate the text of officially sanctioned blogs. Under the heading 'Global Conversations', the YouTube Channel of the U. K. Foreign and Commonwealth Office uses the second-person address to describe itself as 'a place for ministers and officials to engage in a dialogue with you about international affairs'. [46] The channel shows the complex strategies of organisation commonly found in the profile pages created by experienced users of social media and techniques of manipulation common in what Ian Bogost has called 'the membership economy'. [47] On the UK Foreign Office channel a number of 'playlists' are maintained on topics such as 'Support the British economy' and 'Projecting British Islam' and links to several blogs and its Flickr page for photo sharing. Elsewhere, the British government provides links to high-resolution online video files, which television stations abroad are encouraged to incorporate into news broadcasts, thus saving the station money that would otherwise go to shoot or acquire the backdrop B-roll, footage that depicts English citizens, homes, street life, or multiethnic culture.

However, attention to background rather than foreground is common in what Henry Jenkins has described as online 'spoiler' communities who refuse to remain passive audience members and instead test the truth claims of the imagery they see. [48] Unfortunately for the American government, such practices have been applied by sceptical audiences to public diplomacy videos on YouTube produced by the U.S. Department of State. For example, in the comment area for 'Policy Podcast: Trafficking in Persons', two viewers ridicule the poor sound quality and inappropriately cluttered setting by suggesting that the State Department has been relegated to a 'shopping mall'. [49] In another video, 'Cal Ripken, Jr., Secretary Rice & Karen Hughes', those who comment on the video not only mock the staged setting but also

question Ripken's credentials from his former career as a professional athlete and express doubts about whether his record really deserves to confer upon this citizen-ambassador the status of sports legend. [50]

In Warren Weaver's introduction to Claude Shannon's 1949 edition of *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, Weaver explored the philosophical implications of Shannon's theory of the noisy channel. Weaver pointed out that 'all the emotional and psychological aspects of propaganda theory' may be highly relevant to what he called 'the effectiveness problem' and that 'the semantic problem' could be seen as analogous to 'the meaning to a Russian of a U.S. newsreel picture'. [51] In the context of the public diplomacy efforts being undertaken in our present era of government YouTube, Weaver's examples from the former Soviet Union suggest that channels of communication invariably have a valence of politics to consider. Weaver wasn't alone among Cold War information theorists in considering the possible ramifications of state-operated media. However, his contemporary Norbert Wiener worried less about a Communist threat to the homeostasis of cybernetic social systems and more about the powers of appropriation belonging to 'the Lords of Things as they Are' who Wiener said protect themselves 'by the laws of libel and the possession of the means of communication'. [52] Because YouTube is owned by Google, a corporation that dominates the search engine market and that has expanded its online market share elsewhere with integrated authentication for e-mail, blogging, document production, analysis of web traffic, and even the mapping of navigable physical space, Wiener's warning that the 'means of communication' could be constricted by 'the elimination of the less profitable means in favour of the more profitable' continues to resonate today. Wiener deplored the 'machinery of radio fan ratings, straw votes, opinion samplings, and other psychological investigations, with the common man as their object' and the 'statisticians, sociologists, and economists available to sell their services to these undertakings'. As the rationalising work of the state becomes adopted by YouTube and the pseudo-interactivity of YouTube becomes adopted by the state, Wiener's admonitions only become more pertinent over time.

44. See also the later work of Jacques Derrida about evidence and testimony in Maurice Blanchot and Jacques Derrida, *The Instant of My Death / Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg, Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000.
45. DavidMiliband Channel, http://www.youtube.com/user/DavidMiliband.
46. Foreign and Commonwealth Office, http://www.youtube.com/user/ukforeignoffice
47. Ian Bogost, 'Resisting the Membership Economy', Ian Bogost weblog, 9 June, 2008, http://www.bogost.com/blog/resisting_the_membership_econo.shtml
48. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old Media and New Media Collide*, New York City: New York University Press, 2006.
49. U.S. Department of State, 'Policy Podcast: Trafficking in Persons', http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jaqRkTvn_Ac

50. U.S. Department of State, Cal Ripken, Jr., Secretary Rice & Karen Hughes,' http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4LfZ5QHblBE
51. Warren Weaver, 'Recent Contributions to the Mathematical Theory of Communication', *The Mathematical Theory of Communication,* Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1949.
52. Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics of Control and Communication in the Animal and Machine*, Cambridge, M:, MIT Press, 1948.