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# **After the Break**

*Television Theory Today*

Edited by Marijke de Valck and Jan Teurlings

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# YouTube beyond technology and cultural form

*José van Dijck*

## 1. Introduction

In his seminal work *Television: Technology and cultural form* (1974), Raymond Williams described television as a medium to be understood in its various dimensions: as a technology ('broadcasting'), as a social practice ('watching television') and as a cultural form ('programmes'). Williams deployed this multiple view of television to scaffold two broader concepts: the concept of 'flow' – an endless stream of concatenated programmes that glued the viewer to the screen – and the concept of 'mobile privatization' – referring to the way in which mass media makes mobility an endeavour that can be pursued in the privacy of one's own home, allowing people to see what happens in the world without having to leave their living room. Williams' theory has long been held up as a model of nuanced thinking: his perspective accounted for television's technology, in both its institutional and commercial manifestations, for its social use, regarding viewers as both active and passive subjects, and he connected these two aspects to the specific forms of audiovisual content. Albeit implicitly, Williams also tied in these developments to television's regulatory, hence political, context, as he compared American commercial television to British public broadcasting service (the BBC).

Williams, in 1974, could have never predicted the emergence of a novel 'tube' thirty years later. When YouTube was introduced in 2005, the media landscape was still dominated by television. The new platform that allowed people to share their self-produced videos online, was conceived in a Silicon Valley garage by Chad Hurley and his friends. Even if the technology was not as revolutionary as broadcast television was in the early 1950s, YouTube rapidly developed into the biggest user-generated content (UGC) platform available on the web 2.0. Five years after its start, YouTube, now a subsidiary of Google Inc., is the third most popular internet site in the world, boasting two billion videos a day and attracting 'nearly double the prime-time audience of all three major US television networks combined'.<sup>1</sup> Millions of users contribute and watch self-made videos, short TV-clips, music trailers, compilations, etc. on a daily basis. In a very short time, YouTube has become a significant presence in the global media landscape.

Evidently, Raymond Williams' theory far predates YouTube's emergence, and yet his basic model for understanding a novel media phenomenon is still useful today as a starting point. Looking through Williams' theoretical prism, YouTube will be defined in this chapter as a technology, a social practice, and a cultural

form; over the past five years, many terms have been launched to describe these aspects, but there has been no systematic attempt to define this new platform vis-à-vis television. First, I want to define YouTube's new technology as 'homecasting', and specify this concept in relation to broadcasting – a system historically cemented in centralized production, simultaneous programming, and individualized mass reception – and narrowcasting – aiming media messages at specific segments of the public. Next, I will discuss YouTube as a social practice, namely 'video-sharing'. The activities of uploading, watching and sharing videos online both expand and alter our rapport with the medium of television, while the systems of broadcasting and homecasting remain intimately intertwined. Third, I will explore the dominant cultural form engendered by YouTube: 'snippets', as I will call this form, refers both to the limited length of an average YouTube video and to the typical self-produced video content. A systematic distinct terminology helps name the *cultural* value of user-generated content – a strategy badly needed if we want to affect the dominant legal-economic paradigm in which most political and ideological debates concerning video-sharing's legitimacy are grounded.

It is precisely at this point where we have to upgrade and expand Williams's model to make it better suited for the web 2.0 era. The new media ecology is a rapidly changing media landscape where user-generated content platforms shake up the balance still dominated by the 'device formerly known as television' (Uricchio 2004). When considering platforms such as YouTube, we need to take into account that new platforms do not simply fit the old economic and legal logic because their technologies, social practices and cultural forms are vaguely defined, let alone accepted as valid parameters. New claimants seem to be trapped in the same vocabularies, showing the ultimate interdependency of television and YouTube. So, in order to critically analyze the full implications of this new platform, we have to expand Williams' model by fully integrating a legal-economic perspective in addition to the proven factors.

## 2. YouTube as technology: homecasting

When adopting new technological systems, it is not enough to establish a new institutional practice; it takes time for a technology to evolve in conjunction with its social use and cultural form while it simultaneously tries to nestle itself into a scheme of vested economic interests. It is important to keep this kind of complexity when defining a novel technology. Since 'YouTubing' never caught on as a brand-turned-verb the way 'Googling' did, I will introduce the concept of homecasting as a means to understand the platform's function in relation to already existing institutional practices such as broadcasting. YouTube is not, in any way, the equivalent or even a derivative of television. If anything, homecasting is derived from 'home video'. The neologism denotes the use of video-sharing websites to download and upload self-produced or preproduced audiovisual content via personal computers *from the home* and *to anybody's home* (that is, networked private spaces). The term homecasting betrays its kinship to broadcasting, on the one hand, and to home video, on the other. Like 'webcasting', the term indicates

the technological convergence of TV and PC in the homes of individual users (Ledoux Book and Barnett 2006; Ha, Dick and Ryu 2003), yet the word ‘home’ has more social and cultural connotations than the word ‘web’.

Homecasting technologies are not the same as peer-to-peer technologies, but they are similar in at least one respect to the technologies of narrowcasting and microcasting: YouTube has a central server that holds the content collected by its users. In recent decades, the centralized point of television programming power has been complemented by the decentralized distribution of audiovisual content by production companies targeting specific niche audiences. Narrowcasting, as this phenomenon is called, was made possible by the proliferation of hundreds of cable outlets engendering the fragmentation of audiences and leading to socially splintered mediascapes (Smith-Shomade 2004). The explosion of digital channels in the early years of the new millennium added the possibility of personal viewing schedules and content targeted at specific consumer profiles of preferred lifestyles and cultural tastes. Lisa Parks (2004, 135) introduced the term ‘flexible microcasting’ to refer to this phenomenon as a ‘set of industrial and technological practices that work to isolate the individual cultural tastes of viewers/consumers in order to refine direct marketing in television – that is, the process of delivering specific audiences to advertisers’. Narrowcasting and microcasting are defined in terms of reaching specific targeted audiences for specific audiovisual contents, a feature they have in common with homecasting.

However, the differences between broadcasting and narrowcasting – and, in its wake, ‘microcasting’ – on the one hand, and homecasting on the other, are more significant than their similarities. Couched in the rhetoric of technology, homecasting means two-way communication via the internet – a form of transmission in which both parties involved transmit information – as opposed to the one-way distribution of audiovisual content involved in broadcasting and narrowcasting. Platforms like YouTube, GoogleVideo, MySpace, Revver and Metacafe do not produce any content of their own, but only accommodate the distribution of content produced by their users. As connoted by YouTube’s former logo ‘Your Digital Video Repository’ – which later gave way to the ‘Broadcast Yourself’ logo – the platform is a ‘container’ or an archive rather than a (broad)caster whose principle function is to send audiovisual content (Gehl 2009). While broadcasting and narrowcasting refer exclusively to the one-way direction of media messages sent, homecasting refers primarily, though not exclusively, to the way in which users can upload audiovisual messages to the site. Of course, not all uploaded content is homemade: much content on video-sharing sites consists of prerecorded works first broadcast on television.

In contrast to broadcasting, which is confined to a centralized space and a central agency that controls the supply and deliverance of signals, the internet connotes a space for purposeful activity where reception and production of signals occurs from numerous individual terminals in the network. The absence of a centralized sender and the potential for two-way signalling constitutes the most profound difference with conventional broadcast or narrowcast organizations. Families, political activists, and garage bands are equally capable of streaming their messages across the internet, be it person-to-person or worldwide. How-

ever, the distributed nature of homecast networks does not imply *absence* of control. As Galloway (2004: 7) states, control in distributed systems is defined by protocols – computer protocols which ‘govern how specific technologies are agreed to, adopted, implemented, and ultimately used by people around the world’. Unlike broadcast networks, homecast platforms such as YouTube or GoogleVideo do not decide what viewers get to see at what time (a continuous flow of programmed content), but watching videos is based on viewers’ decisions, facilitated by search engines and ranking algorithms. Through these automated systems, millions of videos can be searched and found; YouTube’s interface design and organization determines to a large extent the popularity of specific videos. In other words, YouTube controls video-sharing traffic not by means of programming schedules but by means of metadata, search engines, ranking and profiling systems, which are all employed by users. On the one hand, homecasting systems like YouTube are video archives through which users tag, select, distribute and retrieve audio-visual content ‘as they flow through any other library or collection’ (Gehl 2009: 45). On the other hand, homecasting systems are social media platforms, where the technological features provided by the website (channels, comments, featured videos, rankings) allow users to form communities and connect to each other on the basis of connective algorithms.

In both its manifestations as video repository and social network, YouTube’s technological system should be defined not in contrast with but in relation to (mainstream) broadcast technologies. Despite early technology gurus’ prophesying the decline and eventual demise of broadcasting (Gilder 1994; Miller and Allen 1995), television has never changed its distinct technological and organizational base. Projections of a ‘post-broadcasting age’ tend to reduce ‘broadcasting’ to a technological system that is bound to affect social use. The phrase symbolizes the danger of subscribing to a simple replacement theory of consecutive media constellations, yet homecasting will never replace broadcasting, just as broadcasting never disappeared when narrowcasting gained popularity. By contrast, Jostein Gripsrud (2004) convincingly demonstrates the continued importance of broadcasting in its function to serve regional and national communities, even in a five-hundred-channel environment. Along the same lines, the distribution of user-generated content via sites such as YouTube will not further expedite television’s obsolescence. If anything, the two systems are inextricably intertwined in the process of defining *each other’s* distinct function; this interdependency becomes most manifest when we regard technological changes in conjunction to social use, cultural form and the economic infrastructure which gives rise to broadcasting’s and homecasting’s co-evolution.

### **3. YouTube as social practice: video-sharing**

‘Video-sharing’ appears to be the most appropriate container-label for the social activity triggered by YouTube, yet it is essential to acknowledge a multiple number of activities subjugated by this term. ‘Video-sharing’ also means quoting, favouriting, commenting, responding, posting, downloading, viewing, archiving

and curating videos on this platform – activities that are all equally fundamental to the site’s prolific usage, even if not *all* users engage in *all* these activities. In terms of usage, YouTube appears to be more akin to the social practice of making and distributing home videos than to the practice of (producing and) watching television programs and yet, both practices are intimately related.<sup>2</sup> For decades, people have spent their leisure time filming family life and showing off the results to selected neighbours or relatives. And long before the emergence of video-sharing sites, homemade audiovisual products were also distributed to anonymous television audiences, for instance through popular programmes such as *America’s Funniest Home Videos* (AFHV), whose format has been franchised to many countries since the 1980s.

Watching television and video-sharing, the social uses associated with broadcasting and homecasting, even if distinctly different, are also mutually inclusive. Whereas ‘watching television’ conventionally signifies the medium’s function to make essential information, knowledge and cultural experiences available to broad audiences, ‘video-sharing’ commonly relates to particular individuals wanting to exchange their audiovisually recorded experiences with a designated audience – by selecting a few individuals or a community of interested viewers. On YouTube, uploading activity either caters to specific audience groups – communities who have expressed common interests (equalling the intentions of narrowcasting) – or is geared toward the widest possible audience (equalling the intentions of broadcasting). YouTube’s interface defaults users’ inclination to open up their personal lives to the virtual universe and YouTube-users massively deploy the platform’s distribution channels to open up their private content to the everyone who is interested. To bend a familiar cliché: if television broadcasts open up a window onto the world, homecast video-sharing deploys the looking-glass to have the world stare right back into the living room.

In terms of social attribution, watching TV is generally associated with the formation of national and regional identities, while also engendering viewers’ identification with ethnic, lifestyle or special interest communities. Notably different from TV’s habitual uses, video-sharing sites like YouTube capitalize on personal expression and identity formation by means of individuals posting their own creative content on the web. ‘Broadcast yourself’, YouTube’s evocative logo, emphasizes the marriage between private information and public staging. However, identity building and individual expression do not take place outside the sphere of broadcast media: in fact, there is no space outside the world of media, but that mediated world is an integral part of everyday life, inundating the minds of people with numerous modes of identification. Not only have people’s homemade audiovisual products, over the past decades, become integrated in the professional worlds of broadcast media (such as AFHV), but conventional media constantly provide models for people to shape their own expressive needs – exemplified, for instance, by the many videos of teenagers imitating their pop idols on YouTube. This double-bind of mediated dependency is part of a more general trend toward the public mediation of private life – a trend to which John Thompson (1995: 215) alerted us ten years *before* the emergence of YouTube. Video-sharing often appears to be a unique means for individual’s ambitions to



become part of the professional media world of stars and fame; young singers are ‘discovered’ through YouTube, but massively plugged through conventional media. Broadcast and video-sharing platforms are becoming increasingly interlocked and their entanglement requires intensified scrutiny (Thompson 2005).

In yet another respect of social use, the relation between watching television and using YouTube is distinctly different yet closely interconnected. The notion of ‘video-sharing’ emphasizes the inherently reciprocal nature of the site’s usage. Due to its function as a social network, YouTube, much like Facebook and MySpace, is geared towards the formation of communities and information exchange – a social platform rather than a mass medium. From this assumption, we would expect YouTube’s users to be actively engaged participants, rather than the passive couch potatoes we have come to associate with television audiences. But just as the myth of the passive television consumer was dismantled by cultural studies theorists in the 1980s and 1990s (Ang 1991), the classification of the active YouTube user as someone who constantly uploads content, comments on featured videos and helps ranking videos is similarly in need of demystification. The large majority of users on YouTube consist of occasional viewers who have never uploaded a single video or never commented on a posted video (Van Dijk 2009). As Cheng, Dale & Liu (2008) observe ‘this indicates that users are more willing to watch videos rather than to log in to rate and make comments’. In a sense, the majority of YouTube viewers are not very different from television viewers in that they lean back to consume audiovisual content on their screens, except that they have to click on a mouse to select the videos they want to see. Most users come to YouTube contents by means of referrals – either from other internet platforms (blogs, friends, news sites) or from automated referral systems on the YouTube homepage, but the active role of the *majority* of users are actually quite limited.

Just as television stations are eager to capture viewers’ attention by programming a ‘flow of content’, as Raymond Williams typified the produced concatenation of television programmes, video-sharing sites are keen to keep their users glued to the screen. If YouTube was initially seen as television’s potential competitor in becoming the audience’s favourite pastime, five years after its emergence video-sharing still lags far behind in terms of the attention economy. Compared to the five hours a day Americans spend watching television, people spend fifteen minutes watching videos online (Stross 2010). Short videos averaging between three to four minutes in length are unlikely to hold interest when watched in long sequences. A typical user watches six videos a day and a typical sequence of videos is unlikely to hold the attention span of viewers as the short length of each video presents too many opportunities to leave the ‘flow’. With regards to YouTube, we could call the sequence of videos a ‘staccato flow’, indicating the self-selected short videos sequenced by user’s clicks.

Not surprisingly, YouTube’s owners worry about the platform’s economic viability if video-sharing as a social practice cannot compete with that other important leisure activity – watching TV. In order to boost video-sharing as a common social practice, platforms are launched to accommodate the large majority of rather ‘passive’ YouTube users. NowMov, a recent San Francisco start-up, offers a staccato flow experience by using Twitter feeds to determine which YouTube

videos are appearing with the greatest frequency in Tweets, and by automatically sending them to their users. The seamless flow of most-tweeted about videos provides an endless leanback experience, taking the selection effort out of the YouTube-activity. In addition, Google recently announced they will introduce 'YouTube Leanback', an attempt similar to NowMov's to take the dangerous decision points out of the staccato flow; the company will also introduce 'Google TV', an attempt to win over the living room as a strategic terrain for the parent company by directly enlisting hardware manufacturers and cable service providers in adopting Google-supplied technology to navigate television content and online video (Stross 2010).

In sum, YouTube's platform owner is competing with television on the latter's terms, as the attention economy for users is entirely defined by the broadcast industry's economic paradigm. With regards to its users and usage, YouTube appears to be distinctly different from television and yet the first cannot be seen separately from the latter. Video-sharing, the social practice promoted by this UGC-platform, evolves in close connection to the common activity of watching television, even if the two leisure experiences, at first sight, seemed to have little in common. This paradox is further enhanced if we look at YouTube's cultural forms.

#### 4. YouTube as cultural form: snippets

Even though Raymond Williams launched the flow as television's most characteristic cultural form, it is in fact the programme that counts as the true legal definition of television's unique product. Television programmes have always been tradeable and consumable goods that were produced for specific markets and were preferably also sold to other (national, regional) markets. Cultural forms, including TV programmes, are considered end products and are hence protected by laws regulating ownership and copyrights. The new types of content produced and distributed by video-sharing sites like YouTube are different. First of all, the preferred cultural form engendered by this platform is *short*: its maximum allowed length is ten minutes, while a YouTube upload averages three minutes.<sup>3</sup> Second, video-sharing sites favour various general categories of content: original creations, transformative derivatives, and copied or 'ripped' content. From the articulation of these terms it occurs that one form of content is preying on another while obeying a succinct hierarchy: users can only 'quote' and 'derive' from television programmes. A corollary to this argument is that television programmes can never be derivatives of 'original content' created by individual users. However, this is pertinently untrue: television programmes have always also been 'derivatives' of users' creations – think, for instance, of AFHV – and YouTube movies are increasingly integrated into mainstream television (e.g. the news, TV shows).

Therefore, it is important to specify and label the type of content produced through YouTube on *its own terms* if we want to understand its preferred genre as an autonomous *cultural* form rather than as a derivative, and if we want to

catalogue the *cultural* dynamics by which user agency is encouraged or inhibited. So what would be an appropriate term to label YouTube's preferred cultural form? 'Fragment' and 'clip' are inadequate words to describe the kind of content contributed to video-sharing sites. Evidently, we can find many examples of clips and fragments posted on UGC-websites, but 'video clips' refers to ready-made cultural forms (usually music-videos) and 'fragments' fallaciously suggests that all uploads are cut from pre-existing content. The word 'snippet' seems best to characterize the new cultural form promoted by homecasting channels. In contrast to traditional TV programmes, snippets are of limited length, ranging from several seconds to ten minutes, but the bulk of postings average between three and six minutes.<sup>4</sup> 'Snippet' covers the limited length of most uploads, whether they imitate the begin-middle-end form of a polished audiovisual production or an unfinished piece (Burgess and Green 2009: 49). Although most snippets are one-time contributions, they may be accessed serially, for instance, when the same uploader posts a line of thematically connected videos. But arguably the most crucial feature of snippets is their status as *resources* rather than as products; they are meant for recycling in addition to storing, collecting, and sharing. Snippets, by common agreement, are posted on video-sharing sites to be shared, reused, reproduced, commented upon, or tinkered with. Their status as recyclable and unfinished products is thus an inherent characteristic of snippets, as also exemplified by music sampling in relation to recorded music.

The hybrid status of snippets seriously challenges the governing legal-economic order in which this new cultural form is trying to find its place. The first problem hinges on the fact that 'programmes' and 'snippets' represent two seemingly incommensurate legal schemes. Whereas programmes are copyrighted and owned by corporations, no one can claim ownership of snippets posted on video-sharing sites which issue their use under a creative common licence, such as the original YouTube site did. Indeed, YouTube's terms of use contain explicit warnings against the illegal copying of broadcast content, but the same terms explicitly encourage video-sharers to regard *all* feeds as potential input – recyclable resources in the life cycles of creative culture.<sup>5</sup> The site's self-description says it 'hosts user-generated videos [and] includes network and professional content'. Strangely enough, YouTube sets the standards for a new type of cultural form – the snippet – while also inevitably inducing the appropriation of content produced under an adverse regulatory regime. The right to 'own' seems squarely at odds with the 'right to appropriate' audiovisual content. The stakes in this debate are high: the broadcast industry (Viacom, Disney) have been waging battles against YouTube to protect their 'legal property' as the only possible *type* of property in the audiovisual content market, by articulating the stakes of this debate in industrial-legal terms (Lessig 2008). Even fragments as short as two seconds cannot be 'recycled' in any other context without paying royalties to the copyright holder. But few contenders in this battle point at the other side of this coin: mainstream broadcast corporations are eager to include (free) snippets aired on YouTube in their own programmes, in order to attract new audiences to popularize their content.

The second hurdle for YouTube to create a legitimate type of content is not

legal but economic in nature, as it concerns the commercial-institutional context in which Google operates and trades its new cultural forms. Initially, in 2005, YouTube started out as a community-based website filled by volunteer users and operated on a non-profit basis. Since YouTube's takeover by Google, in 2006, the social practice of exchanging videos has gradually but notably changed from being community-based to being commercially based. Google's business strategy has been fought by the media moguls dominating the television branch, as they first did not know whether to see YouTube-Google as friend or foe: either to go after them and use their historic prowess in electronic media distribution to impose their rules on this newcomer, or side with them in creating new business and marketing models that help homecasting channels to create buzz for television programmes or films. What is clear, though, is that both broadcasters and homecasters like Google are after the same bounty: attention from advertisers and users. Not surprisingly, we may witness a growing interest on either side to closing deals for the mutual use of content and thus forego or settle expensive legal battles.

Over the past five years, established broadcast organizations have renegotiated their relationship with the new kids on the block, such as rapidly growing media mogul Google, not because they like this development per se, but because it is crystal clear that user-generated content (that is, self-produced video) is a value-adding product attracting the interest of advertisers.<sup>6</sup> Whereas broadcasters fashion channels to target specific audiences with programmes and commercials, homecasters enable groups of voluntary, active users to form their own 'communities' – users with like-minded tastes and lifestyles – a commercial asset whose value has not escaped the attention of advertising agencies. If NBC, ABC, CBS and PBS can be considered the construction companies of the media world, YouTube and MySpace are likely to become the Home Depots of the television industry. And even if they will fight each other's turf over copyright and intellectual property rights of snippets, they will not only reset power relationships in the mediascape, but also refurbish the meanings of commerce and commons, of individual and group identity (O'Brien and Fitzgerald 2006). As Burgess and Green (2009: 35) aptly sum up: 'What the copyright wars illustrate particularly well is the difficult dual identity that YouTube, Inc maintains. YouTube needs to be understood as both as a business – where the arguments of Viacom et al. might be legitimate – and as a cultural resource co-created by its users – where these arguments strain for credibility'.

Why is it important to define 'snippets' if this new cultural form is bound to operate under the same old legal-economic aegis as conventional programmes? There is an important reason for identifying distinct cultural forms, in addition to the technology of homecasting and the social practice of video-sharing. Naming and defining distinctive technologies, social practices and cultural forms is a deliberate strategy to assign distinct user agency in an increasingly complex media landscape. Extending the comparison between YouTube and Home Depot, it may be unthinkable for an organization of broadcasters to legally frustrate or thwart the activities of homecasters, just as it is unimaginable to conceive of a lobby of construction companies trying to prohibit home owners from remodelling,

renovating or even completely demolishing and rebuilding the house they once bought from these companies. To be sure, consumers who take a short clip from recorded television content or from the DVD they already paid for, and use it as a resource in their own creative product, are still liable to be prosecuted as a result of copyright laws that increasingly deny users the right to cite or rephrase parts of intellectual end products such as programmes, clips, or films. YouTube and GoogleVideo, who are currently defending their new cultural forms are forced to do so in a legal-economic paradigm set by the established broadcast industry. While the broadcast industry is preying after a new bounty (user-generated content), they fiercely protect the turf that legally limits their own cultural form (programmes) as the *only* standard in the business. They have a vested interest in warding off competing forms, because they need to point out that all alternatives are mere derivatives of the only legitimate cultural form. So the definition of a new socio-cultural paradigm implies an insistence on a different ideological (or normative) stance, which may help facilitate a change in the dominant economic framework in which this debate is grounded.

Over the past five years, heated debates about the validity of the dominant paradigm set by the broadcast industry have led to some changes, such as the Creative Commons movement (Lessig 2008). In this debate, homecasters need to strike a delicate balance between the claims of users as rightful creators and tinkerers of content, and the proprietary claims of broadcasters as legal owners of some of the content that is tinkered with. Therefore, it is crucial to not define the current debate on content exclusively in terms of legal ownership of programmes or fragments, but to launch a new terminology that helps rephrase the discussion in culturally relevant terms. Theorizing the terms *homecasting*, *video-sharing* and *snippets* – as legitimate equivalents of *broadcasting*, *watching TV* and *programmes* – may provide a level playing field where socio-cultural values stand on equal footing with economic ones.

## 5. Conclusion

Raymond Williams' multi-layered prism, used to assess television as a complex of technology, social practice and cultural form, still turns out to provide a solid basis for evaluating television as a technology and cultural form. However, the emergence and development of a new phenomenon like YouTube requires a necessary update and expansion of his theoretical view to include the legal-economic context of a changing media landscape. Without such an inclusive approach, we miss out on critical aspects of the platform's meaning.

In the first five years of its existence, YouTube has itself evolved from an amateur-run platform for user-generated content to a substantial commercial player, closing deals with broadcast conglomerates and major media players. Arguably, YouTube has to adapt to the dominant legal-economic paradigm in which it evolves, because its content is intrinsically intertwined with mainstream television productions. On the other hand, YouTube's new gold is preyed on by established media owners. Self-produced audiovisual content, uploaded to popular

sites like YouTube, are eagerly integrated in the commercialized business model of broadcasting services. Indeed, television and home videos never belonged to entirely different spheres, but their firm interlocking in the web 2.0 economy positions 'home' in on the spotlights of global cameras, dispersed through video-sharing sites, social networking sites and search ranking systems. As Henry Jenkins has argued, the ultimate convergence of PC and TV aims at a technological fluidity of systems that lets audiovisual content flow across multiple channels, resulting in 'ever more complex relations between top-down corporate media and bottom-up participatory culture' (Jenkins 2006: 243).

The paradoxical convergence of collaborative culture and commodity culture – of television broadcasting and YouTube homecasting – is applauded by entrepreneurs who welcome the 'collaborization' of commodity culture (Tapscott and Williams 2006) and reproved by media critics as the commodification of collaborative culture (Van Dijck and Nieborg 2009). The future implications of vertically integrated industries – combining content producers *and* search industries *and* advertising agencies *and* information aggregators – are typically the focus of political economists theorizing the macro-economics of the media industries, who are also updating their approach to include the new digital industries (Schiller 2007). And yet, political economy approaches generally tend to include technology instrumentally rather than integrate it analytically, and they more often than not completely gloss over the specific role of users and especially of cultural forms. My argument in this article, to introduce a new vocabulary to name and define YouTube's generic technology, social practice and cultural form, is a step towards the creation of a more transparent media logic in which new platforms are not analyzed *exclusively* in terms of economics, but where a legal-economic perspective is functionally paired off with an integrated techno-socio-cultural viewpoint.

In sum, what is needed for future media theory is a media approach that combines technology, social practice and cultural form – the way Williams integrated these aspects of culture – with a critical legal-economic perspective on media change. Media theorists and cultural critics need to pay more attention to the growing significance of user-generated content in a new media ecology (Croteau 2006), but they cannot simply accept the conventional models of the broadcast era. The case of YouTube is used here to exemplify the need for a theoretical framework that encompasses all five factors involved in the shaping of new media platforms. We can no longer afford a singular perspective on these related and interconnected phenomena. Perhaps this upgraded and expanded Williams 2.0 approach will help to construct a multi-layered analytical search light to scrutinize emerging phenomena in the culture of connectivity.

## Notes

1. See a press release of May 16, 2010: [www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jK-4s19GfUTCKAkVGhDzpJ1ACZm9Q](http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jK-4s19GfUTCKAkVGhDzpJ1ACZm9Q). The Alexa ranking (No. 3 worldwide, after Google and Facebook) was measured in May 2010.
2. As Burgess and Green (2009: 43) in their magnificent book on YouTube have shown, more

than half of YouTube's content consist of user-created content, while 42% comes from traditional (mainstream) media sources. Video-making and watching television are related activities, comparable to, for instance, sampling music and recorded music.

3. To be more precise: an average YouTube video lasts 2 minutes and 46 seconds. These numbers were found in 2008: <http://mediatedcultures.net/ksudigg/?p=163>.
4. According to Cheng, Dale and Liu (2008), who conducted a systematic and in-depth measurement study on the statistics of 77 million videos uploaded on YouTube, almost 98% of all video lengths are within 600 seconds, and the average length is between 3 and 4 minutes.
5. See YouTube's terms of use: [www.youtube.com/t/terms](http://www.youtube.com/t/terms).
6. In March of 2007, big players such as NBC Universal and News Corporation launched a new company to pool all their video content and like other players in the field (Viacom, Warner Brothers) they filed law suits to stop Google from allowing 'illegal postings' on YouTube and GoogleVideo.

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