A NEW STAGE FOR MUSIC: YOUTUBE AND THE AMATEUR MUSICIAN

by

Andrew Muir
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Name:	**Andrew Muir**
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Examining Committee:

Chair: Dr. John Maxwell, Assistant Professor
Publishing

Dr. Richard Smith
Senior Supervisor
Professor, School of Communication

Dr. Peter Chow-White
Supervisor
Assistant Professor, School of Communication

Dr. Gordon Gow
Examiner
Associate Professor
Communication and Technology
University of Alberta

Date Defended/Approved: _July 15 /c 9_

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ABSTRACT

The video-sharing website "YouTube" is a new televisual medium that is fundamentally different from commercial broadcast television. Because it can be used by ordinary individuals to transmit video to multiple points, it has facilitated a burgeoning culture of amateur broadcasters. Of the many forms of expression facilitated by this new medium, the musical performance has been among the more popular. This thesis explores how this emerging culture of amateur musicians perceives itself and its role in the greater scheme of mass media and self-expression. Ultimately, the research demonstrates that amateur musicians perceive YouTube as a venue for personally fulfilling and socially uplifting cultural interaction.

For Shalane.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1   The Desk-chair Stadium

First, an explanation: the motivation behind this thesis begins with a personal experience. In May, 2008, while listening to a piece of music written and recorded by a popular artist, I picked up a guitar and casually played along. By listening carefully and drawing on past musical experience, I eventually figured out how the song was played. This was not unusual; for years I had taken pleasure in teaching myself to play music. The unusual moment came when, for reasons I cannot precisely recall, I decided that I should record a video of myself teaching the song to others, and upload that video onto the internet for other musicians to see.

I discovered that, when I began recording the video, I was not exactly sure how to address the webcam. Was I speaking to a single person, or a larger audience? Was I giving instructions to a beginner, or an expert? Would the video be watched exclusively by strangers, or would my friends and family see the video? Without reflecting on these questions too deeply, I recorded the video and uploaded it to YouTube, the world's largest and most popular video sharing website. The experience was altogether enjoyable, and I felt as though I had contributed, at least in some small way, to the wealth of content on YouTube. I considered the possibility that only one person might ever find the video useful; I

also considered the curious fact that one person's appreciation would be enough to make me feel a sense of personal fulfilment.

At the time of this writing, the video has been online for just over one year, and has been viewed 30,967 times (it is interesting to note that this number indicates how many users watched the video in full, and does not include those who stopped watching it). I noticed several weeks after originally uploading the video that it was much more popular than I had originally anticipated. Users left positive comments and wrote personal messages thanking me for the video and encouraging me to contribute further. Aside from being humbled by the experience, I was baffled by the fact that so many users had found the video useful. I monitored the number of views occasionally over the following months. By the time it had climbed to 21,000, (the seating capacity of Vancouver's General Motors Place), I tried to imagine myself sitting in the middle of a stadium teaching chord progressions. I found, however, that I could not picture it – something about that image was wrong.

Indeed, I found it difficult to compare YouTube's performer-audience interaction to that of any other medium. In many ways, this kind of interaction defied traditional conceptions of what a performance *is*. Consider the fact that, despite my video's high number of viewers, each person who watched the video did so using a personal computer, and therefore probably watched it alone. Consider also that, unlike most forms of personal interaction, I did not know who I was communicating with, and received no immediate feedback from them; aside from basic demographics, I was unaware of who my audience was. This kind of

communication – direct yet indirect, personal yet impersonal, private yet public – seemed altogether unique in the world of mass communication.

YouTube is, like many new internet applications, an enigma for media scholars. It is clear, at least, that the internet has dramatically transformed how people communicate on a daily basis; less clear, however, are the broader social transformations that follow. In the late 1990s, for example, it might have been reasonable to deduce, given the circumstances of the time, that Napster and other file-sharing programs would fundamentally compromise the record industry's ability to do business (See: Menn, 2003). Time has shown, however, that such seemingly straightforward assessments are not necessarily correct – often there are unforeseeable complexities inherent to our relationship with the internet.

At the time of this writing, in 2009, the internet continues to evolve, as every year new applications find their way into popular consciousness, and into people's daily routines. Many people now distinguish between two phases of internet development, the more recent of which is characterized by purportedly new forms of interactivity and user-participation – it has been popularly dubbed 'Web 2.0'. YouTube is just one of dozens of applications that are considered to be part of this new conceptualization of the web. Ultimately, this project is an exploration of this emerging culture of participation and its implications to media and society more broadly.

1.2   Amateurism Online

Like many new ideas concerning media, the idea of Web 2.0 is subject to much debate. It could be argued, for example, that blogs and other forms of user-generated commentary are *democratizing* because they circumvent the apparatus of commercial media, and facilitate dialogue. However, it could also be argued that blogs, which do not necessarily adhere to any institutionalized journalistic standards and practices, may propagate false information or provide superficial analyses, thus *undermining* democracy (Rosen, 2005). The debate is certainly not limited to journalism, however. One may enter the debate on the subject of education; the same questions of legitimacy and professionalism seem to apply. For example, does the increasing availability of subjective and unedited information on websites such as Wikipedia constitute a de-centralization of knowledge, or does it simply amount to an untenable rabble of hearsay and conjecture? Both positions could be considered reasonable, and indeed, both may be correct to a degree – they are not mutually exclusive theories. These examples demonstrate that there is a range of interpretations regarding the nature of so-called 'amateur' or 'unprofessional' content on the web. This project is an intervention into that debate.

I have chosen to approach this debate not focusing on journalism or education, but on artistic and cultural expression – specifically musical expression. There is, I would argue, a curious parallel between amateur journalism and amateur music: neither has had much (if any) presence in commercial broadcast – not since the early days of radio, in the relatively brief

period of time before the airwaves were allocated to commercial broadcasters, have such forms of amateurism had any kind of footing in mass media (Rowland, 2006:152). Music is of interest because it is another means by which ordinary individuals have begun expressing themselves through mass media.

The issue of amateur music online has already been addressed in several books and magazines, most notably in Andrew Keen's polemic *The Cult of the Amateur* (2007). His position is clear: internet amateurism threatens 'legitimate' cultural institutions and, in general, degrades cultural expression. "YouTube", he argues, "eclipses even the blogs in the inanity and absurdity of its content" (2007:5). He argues that, due to the various forms of musical exchange conducted over the internet, "the entire music industry, which has brought us classic recordings of everyone from the Beatles, Pink Floyd, and the Clash to Luciano Pavarotti and Maria Callas, is being strangled" (2007:107). His position clearly implies that he considers the music industry a fundamental mechanism in the production of worthy musical records. In a world without professional cultural institutions, he argues, "there is no way for a band to become the next supergroup" (2007:111).

His point, though strongly opinionated, should be noted. Indeed, it is a fitting starting point for my counter-argument, for it is precisely the assumptions that underlie his argument that I will contest in this thesis. Whether the presence of amateur music will result in a collapse of the music industry is undeterminable within the scope of this project – I would argue that, at this point in time, one can only make informed speculations about the future of the culture industries.

Rather than make the bold argument that amateurism will come to overthrow professionalism in music, I argue that this new space for amateurism in mass media has a kind of *consciousness raising* effect – that it trumps the long-held and deeply embedded assumption that legitimacy in musical expression is necessarily dependent upon affiliations with established commercial institutions. The existence of amateur music in the mass media, I argue, disaffirms the argument that only professionally produced music is culturally relevant. More specifically, I argue that YouTube's website has helped to foster a culture of musicians whose artistic contributions are not motivated by fame or profit, but by their sense of personal satisfaction and their desire to interact with other people.

More broadly, this project speaks to certain theoretical traditions in the field of communications. Manuel Castells has argued that computer networks and the advent of on-line communities have, in effect, "reinvented society" (2001:60). How does YouTube, a medium based on the internet but similar in appearance to the television, factor into his argument? Are we witnessing the emergence of a new medium of televisual networking? If so, will its culture also be based on the kinds of meritocratic values that Castells claims the internet was founded on?

1.3   Summary of Approach

This thesis is divided into five chapters, each one approaching the topic of amateur music and new media from a different angle. The literature review is

necessarily broad, ranging from the anthropology of music to so-called 'digital ethnography'.

The second chapter probes the sociology of music, focusing specifically on the role music plays in mediating human relationships. Drawing from Dasilva et al's *Sociology of Music* (1984), this chapter provides a short history of the 'musical composer', and argues that conventional conceptualizations of musical roles (what it means to be a listener, a performer, a composer) are informed by the mass media's portrayal of popular music and the popular songwriter.

Drawing substantially from Wade Rowland's approach to media history, the third chapter discusses the emergence of the internet and Web 2.0 as a broad narrative reaching as far back as the electric telegraph. The chapter also discusses the ideological narratives that have often emerged because of technological change, referring specifically to Vincent Mosco's *The Digital Sublime* (2004). This chapter argues more broadly that the various 'incarnations' of media facilitated by electronic networks have tended, historically, to become intuitive and accessible to ordinary people.

The fourth chapter focuses specifically on the emergence of YouTube arguing that its video-sharing website is a fundamental departure from apparently similar forms of broadcast such as the television. Borrowing the term 'homecaster' from cultural theorist Jose van Dijck, this chapter frames YouTube as a new 'televisual medium' – one that has provides a unique venue for many kinds of personal expression.

The final chapter presents the findings of an online survey designed to determine the attitudes amateur musicians have towards YouTube. The survey was distributed to 14 individuals who contribute music to YouTube. Respondents provided comments that detail their perceptions of the website and their involvement with it. The research is exploratory, designed to illuminate some aspects of new media that may warrant further investigation. The results indicate that many amateur musicians contribute to YouTube out of a desire for personal fulfilment. This, I ultimately argue, suggests a profound change in the way people think about their role in our system of media.

CHAPTER 2: MUSIC AND SOCIETY: COMMERCIAL BROADCAST AND THE AGE OF THE SPOTLIGHT

2.1 The Social Nature of Music

It is impossible to know how long human beings have been making music; there is simply not enough evidence. We can be relatively certain, in any case, that music has been of central importance in human societies for many thousands of years. Why do we make music? Some biologists have hypothesized that music began as an early courtship mechanism; others have speculated that it had advantages during the domestication of animals (Wallin et al, 2000:10). We may never know the true origins of human music, but there are scientists who maintain that "no account of human evolution is complete without an understanding of how music and dance rituals evolved" – it is *that* fundamental to our nature (Wallin et al, 2000:4). I mention the biological heritage of music only to introduce a simple point: music is, by its very nature, a *social phenomenon*. It has mediated all kinds of human relationships and activities – "everything from hunting and herding to storytelling and playing; from washing and eating to praying and meditating; and from courting and marrying to healing and burying" (Wallin et al, 2000:4). It is a phenomenon of special interest to many sociologists for precisely this reason – it "appeals to people everywhere and has been at the heart of all human societies" (Dasilva et al, 1984:vii). Sometimes the social function of music is explicit, as is the case in many musical gatherings and

rituals. Other times, however, it is implicit, encompassing "the interaction between individual and individual, the individual and the group, the individual and the institution, between art and communication" (Silbermann, 1963:4). Music is not only social; it is social in a *multitude* of ways.

Today, the word *music* encompasses an even broader range of concepts, ideas, traditions and practices (Silbermann, 1963). To some, listening to music may be deeply personal; to others, it may be a way of feeling like part of a group. Music can move an individual, but it can also unite many individuals in a moment. There is much more to the social nature of music than the immediate experience of listening. Music is *cultural* as well, meaning that it is experienced not only in immediate social circumstances, but also within much broader social contexts. The reason for this is simple: music, much like literature, has the ability outlast the generation that produced it. Just as one can, in a sense, 'interact' with Oscar Wilde by reading *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, so too can one 'interact' with Tchaikovsky by listening to *The Nutcracker*. As Dasilva et al put it, "anything which occurs as an interaction among persons is social" (1984:12). Of course there could be years, even centuries, between the moment that a piece of music is composed and the moment it is interpreted by a listener or a performer, which means that music is capable of mediating human relationships across time – even generations.

How a piece of music is interpreted depends very much on cultural context. *The Nutcracker*, for example, probably evokes different cultural connotations today than it did in 1891. Furthermore, Tchaikovsky`s composition

of that particular piece was a reaction to his understanding of musical standards and patterns in his own time. As Dasilva et al explain, "composers do not throw dots on paper, performers do not emit sounds, and listeners do not merely have their eardrums vibrate; there are systems of music which serve as reference points for musical composition, performance, and listening." (Dasilva et al, 1984:12). In other words, all musicians, whether they are composers, performers, listeners, are all involved in the ongoing evolution of music.

It has been said that it is impossible for any individual musician to compose a truly original piece because "no composition is created in a vacuum; it imitates, extends, violates, or reacts against some pattern which has preceded it" (Dasilva et al, 1984:12). Rock & Roll music in the mid-20th century, for example, only expressed radicalism and defiance insofar as it challenged the status quo of acceptable musical styles at the time. Music observes the same cycles of fashion and convention as any other form of artistic expression. The idea of musical culture, then, is "not referring to some static state of affairs which is thinglike but rather something as tentative" (Dasilva et al, 1984:13). Musical cultures are determined by the variety of interactions between individuals with different musical and social roles.

In their book *The Sociology of Music*, Dasilva et al distinguish between three 'roles' relating to music today: the composer, the performer and the listener. These three categories are not only musical roles, but *social roles* (Dasilva et al, 1984:35). Even when a musician performs a piece of music without the presence of a listener, he or she is still socially engaged with the

individual who composed that piece, however indirectly. Moreover, even if the piece is original, composed *ad lib* by the performer, the performance is still not a socially isolated action – the composition will necessarily borrow from musical conventions and customs that are learned through interaction with past performers and composers. The relationships, therefore, between composers, performers, and listeners, are not as discrete as the categories imply – they are each a part of a complex framework of social interaction.

I have chosen to introduce these categories because they will help to make sense of how musicians relate to each other today. The central goal of this thesis is to explore how new media are changing how individuals relate to each other. I propose that, by looking at how new media have affected the relationships between composers, performers and listeners in the world of music, we might learn something about the effects of new media more broadly.

2.2 The Idea of the Composer

One can easily imagine that, for as long as there has been music, there has necessarily been people performing and listening to music. However, what about the third category: that of the 'composer'? Interestingly, the concept of a musical composer has not always existed, and does not exist everywhere on Earth; indeed, in the grand scheme of human history, it is a relatively new phenomenon. The idea of a musical composer "exists as a role separate from other musical roles only in the West. In other societies music has either not separated itself from folk culture or has not developed a notational system that

can be relatively specific with respect to the tone patterns to be produced"
(Dasilva et al, 1984:35). Before the concept of a 'composer', musical pieces had
no clear authorship. These included "lullabies, work songs, ritual chants, and
other musical phenomena which develop as part of the common lifeway of a
traditional community" (Dasilva et al, 1984:35). In such cases, the music of a
given culture is passed down to younger generations like any other form of
knowledge: orally. For musical authorship to even exist there needs to be some
degree of uniformity in instrumentation and notation – some recognition of
standards by which music can be reproduced. Dasilva et al argue that the role
that we call 'composer' only emerged once a "complex division of labor"
necessitated it (Dasilva et al, 1984:35). In other words, the musical 'composer' is
less a natural consequence of music, and more a consequence of broader social
and economic circumstances. Just as increasing social complexity produced
specialized artisans such as blacksmiths, so too did allow for the eventual
emergence of the 'songwriter' in more advanced societies.

Thus, the very concept of a composer is not necessarily as fundamental to
the experience of music as we sometimes think it to be. What is composition,
after all, but an individual claim to a particular measure of music as a kind of
intellectual *property*. It is unlikely that any early human societies had such
notions of musical property; it is more likely that, for the overwhelming majority of
human history, musical traditions evolved freely as each new generation
contributed, in its own unique way, to its own musical culture. If the idea of a

musical composer *cannot* be inherent to music, then it must be a product of something else.

2.3   Music in the Age of Capitalism

The question ought to be posed: how did standards ever come to exist in music? Much of the institutionalization of music *itself* has occurred only as an accessory to other forms of social organization. Music is often an integral part of religious rituals, for example. In fact, it was a French abbot who first devised a systematic progression of notes from A to G (Dasilva et al, 1984:81). Even the lined staff and the *do re mi* system, both foundational standards of musical conceptualization and notation in western societies, were invented by religious authorities as a way of coordinating musical congregations (Dasilva et al, 1984:81). Max Weber describes the history of a particular musical instrument, the organ, as process of "technical musical rationalization", and argues that "in a period without any market, the monastery organization was the only possible base on which it could prosper" (Weber, 1958:114). Because of its ability to "break the spell of the objective mentality and to induce the onset of worship mentalities", music was an integral part of worship rituals for many centuries, and remains so today (Dasilva et al, 1984:81).

The point here, however, is not necessarily that the church helped to establish standards in systems of musical representation; rather, the church, aside from being an institution of faith, was actually a kind of *musical* institution – that is to say, it configured relationships between composers, performers, and

listeners in a particular way, and towards a particular end. Christian hymns were often anonymous, and required the congregation to participate in singing the music – there was therefore no clear distinction between composer, performer, and listener. In this case, the end was not the enjoyment of music *per se*, but the inculcation of communal faith and the confirmation of spiritual solidarity. The fact that music was instrumentalized in this way does not mean that music has any inherent inclinations towards religiosity. This example only demonstrates that different social institutions may produce different kinds of musical relationships, and that these relationships are determined, at least in part, by the broader social order.

Let us consider another kind of musical institution. Today, in many of the most developed parts of the world, music is considered a profession, and is managed largely by capitalist institutions. Recorded music is treated as a commodity, and is managed by "an oligopolistic multibillion dollar mass culture industry" (Scherzinger, 2006:155). Today, the music industry is a powerful global phenomenon; in fact, recorded music is "the most concentrated global media market today", with only a handful of major-labels dominating the industry (Scherzinger, 2006:152).

This means that, today, music is mediated by much more than just musical instruments. Popular music reaches the masses primarily through a complex system of distribution that involves many individual agents, most of whom are less concerned with the social or artistic value of music, and more with its value as an exchangeable commodity. In short, music has become a

business, and the connection between music and the *business* of music runs very deep. When one thinks of what it means to be a 'successful musician', one thinks of record sales, merchandise and fame. The problem with musical fame, however, according to Silbermann (1963), is that it tends to "stand the social pyramid on its head" (25). In other words, a relatively small number of individuals have a disproportionately large amount of power and influence on musical culture. In the history of 19th and 20th century music, there is no shortage of "anecdotes, myths and romantic auras" (25) concerning famous individuals, written by historians who tend to "glean the extraordinary from little stories about great men" (27).

Some have argued that the age of commercial broadcast has had profound impacts on how people understand their relationship to music and to musicians. Because the rationale underlying any capitalist market inevitably produces tendencies towards centralization, efficiency, and bureaucratic administration, works of art and culture become standardized – musical structures, in particular, are reduced to "atomized quotations" (Scherzinger, 2006:134), or as Theodore Adorno put it, a "children's language" whose "vocabulary consists exclusively of fragments and distortions of the artistic language of music" (Adorno, 1991:51). Musical phrases become the accessories of musical arrangers whose motives are not the creation of art for the sake of art, but the reproduction of market-tested musical formulas that maximize profitability. The role of the listener changes fundamentally as he or she "regresses" into a state of childish inattentiveness (Adorno, 1991).

Many of Adorno's observations of mass culture were made in the mid-twentieth century, yet ring true even today. Martin Scherzinger notes that "media cross-ownership and joint ventures tend to reduce competition, lower risk, and increase profits. This, in turn, forces musical production to succumb to the advertising, marketing, styling, and engineering techniques of increasingly uniform and narrow profit-driven criteria" (Scherzinger, 2006:152). He provides an apt description of how the music business has made music into an instrument of capitalism:

> "As radio stations and record companies merge, for instance, they diversify their holdings by rationalizing their portfolio of labels, genres, and artists by dividing them into discrete strategic business units. This renders visible the cost and the profit of each genre division, which, in turn, determines the allocation of finances between and within them. Far from opening to genuine complexities and resonances of musical expression, the diversity of the culture industry amounts to a matrix of detached indicators used to stabilize, predict, and contain musical production. Concomitantly, from the perspective of the industry, the dynamics of consumption are reduced to the logic of the bottom line" (ibid:155).

Thus, the institutionalization of music in capitalist societies has tended to reinforce the idea that music is a commodity – something with exchange value, a product scientifically tailored to suit market demands. The whole system hinges upon the idea that composers may claim phrases of music as a kind of property.

In such a society, the composer, performer, and the listener tend to have distinctly separate social roles. The composer, as the author of a piece of music, is entitled to claim that music as his or her intellectual property, but may concede certain rights to another (as is often the case with popular songwriters). Mass media such as radio and television tend to spotlight the act of performance, so

talented performers are often a focal point of attention – some have achieved extraordinary levels of fame. Moreover, as Adorno explains, "the listener is converted, along his line of least resistance, into the acquiescent purchaser" – a passive consumer of musical products (Adorno, 1991:29).

Thus, the development of mass media throughout the 20th century has profoundly altered the social experience of music. This does not mean that the music produced in the 20th century is inferior in quality by any regard (though some will argue the point). It simply means that, whereas musical engagement was once a relatively immersive social experience shared by members of one's family or community, much of it is now global in scale, disconnected by time and space, and mediated almost exclusively by record technology. Local musical cultures still exist, but the emphasis *in the mass media* is squarely on those rare and talented individuals who are fortunate enough to have become famous professionals. There is little room in the system of commercial broadcast media for the musical amateur.

CHAPTER 3: THE INCARNATIONS OF NETWORK MEDIA: THE PATH TO YOUTUBE AND COLLABORATIVE MEDIA

3.1 The Road Behind

The internet is commonly thought of as a relatively new invention, emerging roughly in the early 1990s, and becoming increasingly popular since then. Indeed, the Internet as we experience it today – as mediated by interactive browsers of text, images, and audio – has only existed for a relatively short period of time. However, the development of what we now call "the internet" stretches further back than is commonly thought. A review of the history of the internet will provide context to the discussion of the internet today, and to highlight some important trends in the history of electronic communication.

Situating the precise 'starting-point' in the development of any technological phenomenon is arguably impossible because technological innovation tends to be predicated on already available technology. In tracing the history of any technology, one could conceivably regress to the dawn of agriculture, or language itself, in search of possible 'starting-points'. For the purposes of this project, however, I believe it would be prudent to begin the story of the internet with the electric telegraph. This approach is borrowed from Wade Rowland's book *Spirit of the Web*, in which he recounts the history of electronic communication as a single narrative. In fact, the telegraph was the first

communications device to transmit data over large distances virtually at the speed of light (Rowland, 2006:61). I will argue that this scientific breakthrough is a fitting 'starting-point' for the history of the Internet. Indeed, the electric telegraph was a portent of the internet in a number of significant ways.

One piece of evidence that suggests that the electric telegraph prefigured the coming age of computer communication is the method by which information was *encoded* for the telegraph. Each letter of the alphabet was assigned some combination of two possible pulses – either a dot or a dash. This kind of protocol, which became popularly known as 'Morse Code', was accepted by many telegraph operators, and became a major coding language for the telegraph system. Because this code operated on the principle of an "on/off" distinction, the electric telegraph was, in effect, the world's first *digital* network (Rowland, 2006:65). Despite today's absence of mechanical relays, and the development of more sophisticated 'packet-switching technology', today's networks operate according to similar coding principles. The expanding telegraph network produced several other technological innovations that paved the way for digital computers (Rowland, 2006:74). Among these innovations were the undersea cables that first connected Britain to the Americas, encircled the globe, and thus created a web of electronic communication that was *worldwide*.

This early era of electronic communication has enough similarities to the current World Wide Web that the electric telegraph is sometimes referred to today as 'The Victorian Internet' (Standage, 1998). Surprisingly, many contemporary issues relating to computer-mediated communication can be

traced back to the 19th century. For example, proponents of the telegraph praised its ability to create a community of "shared experience" (Standage, 1998:162), politicians and diplomats toasted it's "peacemaking potential" (90), and intrepid businessmen capitalized on the opportunities for profit emerging from "new business practices" (210). Meanwhile, sceptics expressed concern that it would foster "fraud, theft and deception" (106), produce "information overload" (210), and "dramatically alter the balance of power between providers and publishers of information" (149). One could argue that the social impacts of the telegraph are still being felt today, at least indirectly. Indeed, the range of attitudes regarding the World Wide Web has persisted as well. The most important changes to happen between then and now were, thus, largely technological in nature, and had the effect of making communication over electronic networks more accessible and easy to use.

One of the great leaps forward for electronic communication, for example, was the invention of the telephone; but in many ways, the telephone was merely an improvement on the telegraph. In fact, in the early stages of its development, the telephone was often called the 'talking telegraph' (Rowland, 2006:108). The telephone system was not built from scratch; rather, it built gradually upon the pre-existing infrastructure of telegraphic cables and relay stations. The only major technical difference between the two was their interfaces; whereas the telegraph required people to consciously encode and interpret messages, the telephone received analogue sounds, transmitted that information electronically, and then replayed those sounds on the receiving end. In effect, the telephone

produced a convincing replication of the human voice, making the technology much more accessible and intuitive. Ivan Illich argues that the telephone distinguished itself from other electronic media because of its "convivial" nature; it could "be easily used, by anybody, as often or as seldom as desired, for the accomplishment of a purpose chosen by the user" (Illich, 1973:23). Whereas the telegraph required that a trained and licensed operator mediate messages, the telephone could be used privately, by anyone. This allowed this 'worldwide web' of electronic communication to begin colonizing domestic spaces, and was an important step, ultimately, in the development of a 'household' internet. To borrow a term coined by Web 2.0 enthusiasts, the invention of the telephone was the first in a long series of steps towards the "disintermediation" of electronic communication (Keen, 2007:15).

3.2   Computers and Modems: Speaking the Same Language

The latter part of the 20th century produced several technological projects relevant to the development of the World Wide Web, most notably the digital computer after World War II (Rowland, 2006). At the time, computers were relatively obscure – certainly not the ubiquitous consumer products that they are today. The ENIAC (Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer), developed by the American military and designed to calculate artillery trajectory tables (Rowland, 2006:292), was a large and cumbersome apparatus. Though crude by current standards, the ENIAC served as a prototype for future developments in computer technology. The complex interactions between vacuum tubes,

switches, and cables was governed by fundamental processes which, despite having increased considerably in complexity, are *basically* the same today.

The digital computer and the telecommunications network developed along separate evolutionary paths. However, because they were both electronic and in some sense 'spoke the same language', their paths crossed in the 1950s during another military project called SAGE. At the time, there was a perceived threat of Soviet airstrikes on American targets, so the American military enlisted the help of MIT computer scientists in order to develop a computer network that would "enable radar stations to communicate" (Rowland, 2006:300). In order to do this, they engineered a device that "translated the computer's digital information into analogue form for transmission through the telephone system" (Rowland, 2006:300) – they called it a modulator/demodulator (modem).

In the decades following these military projects, digital computers increased in computing power, and decreased in size at a rapid rate. This time, the most significant changes were not necessarily technological. The 1960s was a decade characterized, in America, by countercultural movements and social unrest. The digital computer at the time was not widely perceived as a source of liberation – rather, as "an explicit extension of the traditional social control mechanisms fostered by the institutions responsible for the computer's development" (Rowland, 2006:331). In other words, the computer was perceived as a tool designed for, and therefore in service of, the American military-industrial complex. In these early days, the computer did not seem outwardly contributory to the ideology of social revolution. There was, however, an emerging subculture

of computer enthusiasts – mostly young male university students – who believed "that computers ought to be placed in the service of change in society" (Rowland, 2006:331), and whose history "follows a trail from the computer labs of Harvard, MIT, and Cornell in the 1960s to the halls of Redmond, Washington, the home of Microsoft, in the 1990s" (Thomas, 2002:4). It was their spirit of ambition and optimism, combined with their technical ability and rebellious attitude, which instigated the digital computer's transformation from an unwieldy contraption into a *personal* tool – one that could be used for positive social ends. According to Manuel Castells, the computer industry originates from this "techno-meritocratic culture of scientific and technological excellence, emerging essentially from big science and the academic world (2001:60).

The 1970s and 80s were formative decades for the personal computer industry. What began as a subculture of tech-savvy 'geeks' evolved into multi-million dollar industry as it became apparent that there was a growing market for computers in both domestic and commercial spheres. Software guru Bill Gates describes this early PC market as being driven by "a feedback cycle" – "thousands of software applications appeared, and untold numbers of companies began making add-in, or 'accessory,' cards that extended the hardware capabilities of the PC" (Gates, 1995:55). Alliances between hardware and software developers emerged, turning the PC industry into a power struggle between "competing standards" (56). However, the consumer demand for functionality and compatibility ultimately helped to cultivate an oligarchy within

the PC industry, with companies like Microsoft, IBM, Intel, and Apple emerging regnant.

Throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, personal computers became increasingly accessible to the public. Innovations in computer interfaces such as the GUI (Graphic User Interface) and the mouse made home-computing more dynamic and intuitive. PCs not only supported practical applications such as spreadsheets and word processors, but applications designed to stimulate and nurture human creativity. It is likely that the PC's success as a household appliance is attributable to its unprecedented versatility and functionality as a tool for creative expression. By the mid 1990s, personal computers had captured the public's imagination and become a common household appliance. At the time, however, few people would have suspected that the personal computer would become a tool for *communication*. In order for that to happen, personal computers would need to be connected through a physical network.

3.3   A Network of Networks

In the 1990s, the separate histories of computing and telecommunication converged as the telecommunications infrastructure gradually evolved into a physical computer network system. Considered by many to be the predecessor of the modern web, the ARPAnet was developed by the Department of Defence in 1967 both as an experiment in computer networking and as a tool for national defence (Rowland, 2006:354). This original network (which was a military project and therefore largely inaccessible to communities of computer scientists)

eventually gave rise to spinoffs or 'metanetworks' such as CSNET, Bitnet, and Usenet which "consisted of several different physical networks logically designed to serve one community" (Gallo & Hancock, 2002:57). The early web is sometimes described as 'a network of networks' for this reason; it began as a patchwork of smaller networks, each ultimately constituting a larger single network. One might think that such networks, being highly technical and apparently impersonal, would only have been used to facilitate formal exchanges of information. However, it turned out that people used the technology for distinctly *informal* purposes, sending interpersonal messages and discussing topics of mutual interest. This impromptu and anonymous forum for communication proved quite popular, and is the quintessential cultural basis of the web, even today. The web therefore has a certain grassroots quality to it – a non-hierarchal structure which has, from the beginning, given it a unique ideological footing – at the very least, a disinclination to centralized authority. This makes the web distinctly different from other electronic media such as broadcast radio and television, which are not point-to-point interactive media. According to Castells, networks are not necessarily a new phenomenon in human society, our economy has more recently become "organized around networks" (Castells, 2004:153).

By the 1990s, this 'network of networks' had been consolidated into a single structure that became popularly known as 'The Internet.' Protocols and standards such as HTML were adopted, search engines and browsers were developed in order to help the public navigate the unprecedented availability of

information, and the internet grew in a manner that would best be described as 'organic.' In reviewing this particular narrative of the development of the electronic 'web,' a theme becomes apparent: every new *incarnation* of electronic media on this network, from the telegraph, to the telephone, to the internet, has made point-to-point communication more practical and accessible for ordinary people. The earliest electronic network, the telegraph, was limited by the need for operators and mediators; its language was mystifying and required specialized knowledge to decipher. Subsequent developments have gradually eliminated these encumbrances by translating these codes into something that can be accessed more intuitively.

3.4   The Myth of Cyberspace

The 1990s was a decade of tremendous excitement about the Internet, particularly in the world of financial investment. In 1995, the rapid growth of the internet had created much financial speculation which resulted in an influx of venture capital into companies that are today known as 'the dotcoms' – start-ups that promised to capitalize on the business opportunities of the 'Internet Revolution.' In the same year, CEO of Microsoft Bill Gates published a book titled *The Road Ahead* in which he described the excitement as "an urgent atmosphere of optimism" (Gates, 1995:259). Professionals and industry experts extolled the internet, charging their revolutionary rhetoric with impressive phrases like "friction-free capitalism" (ibid:180) and "post-information age" (Negroponte,

1995:163). As sociologist Vincent Mosco explains: "many internet experts and gurus came to the conclusion that history had changed fundamentally" (2004:4).

This attitude is evident in much of the early writing produced by industry pundits. In his introduction to *The Road Ahead* Bill Gates described the emerging internet as "the early days of a revolution in communications that will be long-lived and widespread" (Gates, 1995:xii). Nicholas Negroponte, Director of MIT's Media Lab, foretold a society determined less by the physical encumbrances of space, and more by the exchange and manipulation of digital "bits" (1995:7):

> "We will socialize in digital neighbourhoods in which physical space will be irrelevant and time will play a different role. Twenty years from now, when you look out a window, what you see may be five thousand miles and six time zones away. When you watch an hour of television, it may have been delivered to your home in one second. Reading about Patagonia can include the sensory of experience of going there" (ibid).

Such were the promises of the 'information highway' – a world of digital computers and interactive multimedia that would fundamentally alter our relationship to the world, and to each other.

So intoxicating was this optimism, that when the 'dotcom bubble' burst in the year 2000, it was compared to the "collapse of the railroad industry in the last quarter of the nineteenth century" (Mosco, 2004:5). It became apparent that the frenzy of investment was overzealous, based more on idealistic delusions and irresponsible risk-taking than on sound business strategies – it was, in short, a "gross overinvestment" (Odlyzko, 2003:13). What force could have generated such groundless faith in such an uncertain market? Vincent Mosco argues in his book *The Digital Sublime* that the dotcom bubble was the manifestation of a

pervading myth of cyberspace – the idea that the internet would be a panacea for the world's problems, that "smaller, faster, cheaper, and better computer and communication technologies would help to realize, with little effort, those seemingly impossible dreams of democracy and community" (2004:30).

This form of myth, Mosco argues, was not without precedent. In fact, the entire history of electronic communication has been coloured by such myths. The telephone, for example, "would lead to an acceleration of democracy in politics and social life since we are all equal" (2004:127). And the electric telegraph, bellwether of a new age of enlightenment, "would end the divisions among classes and races that the industrial age brought about by bringing a new cohesion and harmony to society" (ibid:120) – the telegraph was even referred to as "the Highway of Thought" (Standage, 1998:viii). The 1980's term 'Information Highway' echoes that idea.

Mosco notes that myths surrounding electronic media tend to anticipate "the end of history, the end of geography, and the end of politics" (2004:13). At the same time, they rouse a sense of determinism or predestination as people begin to assume that technological progress "can be extrapolated over years to tell us not only where the machine is heading but also where it is taking us" (ibid:14). Cyberspace, therefore, is simply "the latest icon of the technological and electronic sublime, praised for its epochal and transcendent characteristics and demonized for the depth of evil it can conjure" (ibid:24). As Manueal Castells points out:

> "Sometimes this has been in the form of futurological prophecies based on the simplistic extrapolation of social consequences from

the technological wonders emerging from science and engineering; at other times, it appears as critical dystopias, denouncing supposedly alienating effects of the Internet before even practicing it" (2001:3).

I mention these mythic accounts of electronic media for two simple reasons: it is important, for a project such as this, to ensure that the analysis is not coloured by such idealism and grandeur. Second, Mosco's 'mythic status' of technology determines its social impact; he argues that it is when technology begins to *lose* its mythic status that its power becomes apparent:

> "Radio, like its predecessors the telegraph and the telephone, and like communication media that followed (including broadcast and cable television), entered the realm of the commonplace and the banal. They no longer inspire great visions of social transformation. They are no longer sublime. Yet who among us would disagree that the telephone, radio, and television (even cable television) are powerful forces in society and in the world? The irony, it appears, is that, as these once-new technologies lost their lustre, gave up the promises of contributing to world peace, and withdrew into the woodwork, they gained a power that continues to resonate in the world." (ibid:2).

In other words, while emergent technological phenomena are often ushered into existence with unfounded hype and utopianism, it is their acceptance into the world of the *mundane* that ultimately affirms their influence.

3.5   The Second Coming: Web 2.0

The term 'Web 2.0' clearly implies two things: the idea that the development of the internet can be divided into two separate phases, and that the latter of these is an updated or refined 'version' of the first; in other words, it implies that the internet is a 'work-in-progress'. There is no clear technological or chronological border between these developmental phases, but the second tends

to be generally characterized by an increase in 'user-participation.' The reason for this is clear: whereas the early internet required that one have special knowledge of HTML in order to contribute content to the internet, Web 2.0's popular social media applications such as MySpace, Facebook, YouTube and Flickr provide the ability to do so with relative ease. Today, users are able to publish videos, images, writing or music to the internet with little effort, resulting in a "culture of contribution" that is purported to be new and unique (Jones, 2005:231). The movement towards this kind of 'participatory web' has earned the title 'Web 2.0.'

The term itself was first used by a company called O'Reilly Media (founded by open source pioneer Tim O'Reilly) to describe a new business strategy in which the Internet would be viewed as a "platform" for a variety of media applications (O'Reilly, 2005). While O'Reilly recognizes that Web 2.0 has no technical boundaries, he maintains that there are practical differences between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0. He illustrates the difference between them using the examples of two companies, Netscape and Google:

> "Netscape framed 'the web as platform' in terms of the old software paradigm: their flagship product was the web browser, a desktop application, and their strategy was to use their dominance in the browser market to establish a market for high-priced server products. Control over standards for displaying content and applications in the browser would, in theory, give Netscape the kind of market power enjoyed by Microsoft in the PC market" (O'Reilly, 2005).

Netscape's web browser, though initially successful, receded from popularity. When Microsoft began bundling its own web browser with copies of their "Windows" software, Netscape's business strategy was fundamentally

undermined. Whether or not Microsoft acted ethically is still a matter of heated contention, but the fact remains: the vision of the web browser as a paid product was short-sighted, and short-lived. This, he argues, was characteristic of the phase of the internet's development we might now call 'Web 1.0'.

Google's business model, O'Reilly argues, is fundamentally different from Netscape's, and demonstrates a dramatic departure from earlier practices in the software industry:

> "Google, by contrast, began its life as a native web application, never sold or packaged, but delivered as a service, with customers paying, directly or indirectly, for the use of that service. None of the trappings of the old software industry are present. No scheduled software releases, just continuous improvement. No licensing or sale, just usage" (O'Reilly, 2005).

The difference between the two companies is clear: Netscape sold a product, and Google provided a service. The emphasis on the web as a "platform" is fundamental to the definition of Web 2.0.

In order to understand what is meant by the word 'platform', one need look no further than the most successful companies on the internet today for examples. Most of them do not actually provide content, but services that allow individual users to provide *their own* content. Ebay, for example, does not sell products; they are entirely in the business of facilitating "transactions" between buyers and sellers (Jones, 2008:1). Wikipedia does not pay scholars to write articles; it facilitates an environment in which individuals can volunteer knowledge. YouTube and Flickr do not hire photographers and filmmakers; they merely provide the platform upon which users may upload their own content. It is this phenomenon of 'user-generated content' that defines Web 2.0 – what

O'Reilly calls a "profound change in the dynamics of content creation" (O'Reilly, 2005).

Another defining feature of Web 2.0 is the way information is organized, indexed and retrieved. Consider, for example, how users find information on the internet. Most of the early search engines simply catalogued the frequency of the search terms on a given webpage in order to rank its relevance to a user's query. Google's search engine operates quite differently; its ranking of relevant websites depends on "the entire link structure of the web" (Google, 2009). Every time a user clicks on a link to a particular website, Google registers that link as a kind of "vote". Websites with the most "votes" are ranked accordingly in a list of search results. Thus, Google's search patterns are predicated on the decisions and preferences of every user on the internet. This has been dubbed 'collective intelligence':

> "As users add new content, and new sites, it is bound in to the structure of the web by other users discovering the content and linking to it. Much as synapses form in the brain, with associations becoming stronger through repetition or intensity, the web of connections grows organically as an output of the collective activity of all web users" (O'Reilly, 2005).

O'Reilly's view of the evolving internet as a "global brain" (2005) is shared by many, including Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the World Wide Web. He describes the development of the web as "interplay between heuristic and strictly logical systems" (Berners-Lee, 1999:190). Computers, he argues, tend to organize information into "rigid hierarchies and matrices", unlike the human mind, which "has the special ability to link random bits of data" (Berners-Lee, 1999:3). Thus the next logical step for the web, according to people like O'Reilly and

Berners-Lee, is the development a system which would allow computers, in some sense, to *understand* information – Berners-Lee calls this 'The Semantic Web'. Others have even begun using these trends to predict the characteristic features of 'Web 3.0'.

The phenomenon of 'tagging' is an appropriate example of how the current web makes use of semantic markers in the organization and retrieval of information. 'Tagging' is a form of metadata – "information about information" (Berners-Lee, 1999:181). When a user of any web-based community 'tags' an image, a blog-entry or a video, in effect they are contributing to a kind of invisible taxonomical structure. This has given rise to something called 'folksonomies' – the "user-generated organization" and "user-generated distribution" of web content (Wesch, 2008). A given YouTube video, for example, may be 'tagged' with key words such as "music", "guitar", "lesson" and "blues". These tags have the effect of grouping that particular video with all other videos sharing those labels. The overall effect of this kind of grouping is a dynamic conceptual map – a kind of 'Semantic Web'.

I mention the characteristic features of 'Web 2.0' not to speculate about the future of the internet; rather, to demonstrate that YouTube's video platform, with its unprecedented usability and its volumes of user-generated content, is *not* out of the ordinary. Indeed, I would argue that YouTube is, by itself, neither subversive nor revolutionary. In fact, it is just one part of a bigger project – a much broader re-conceptualization of the web, and of media more generally – one that has not only been *accepted* by users, but *created* by them.

3.6   We Are the Web? The Debate over Amateur Content

On January 31st, 2007, a professor of Cultural Anthropology at Kansas State University named Michael Wesch produced a short home-made video for his class, and posted it to YouTube. The video, entitled "The Machine is Us/ing Us" was a compilation of screenshots and text meant to illustrate the transformative social effects of Web 2.0. Wesch also sent the video to a small number of his colleagues and friends. The video proved quite popular and, ironically, became 'viral' – it was forwarded so many times by so many individuals, that it spread through the internet like an infectious disease. The message of the video is simple and provocative: *We are the web.*

Michael Wesch's position on Web 2.0 was made clear in a presentation he gave to the Library of Congress in 2008 entitled "An Anthropological Introduction to YouTube". For him, Web 2.0 is all about "new forms of expression, new forms of community, and new forms of identity" (Wesch, 2008). Echoing past estimations of the internet, Wesch describes Web 2.0 as a network of "global connections transcending space and time", a "celebration of new and unimaginable possibility" and "new forms of empowerment" (Wesch, 2008). He argues that user-generated content is only a small part of a bigger picture – being an anthropologist, he argues that the important thing is how people are connecting to each other.

Consider, for example, a Web 2.0 application called "Delicious", a simple a website that allows users to "store [their] favourite websites on the web" (Jones,

2008:170). It is also a tool for 'social bookmarking', or 'tagging'. The effect of this kind of website and others like it, Wesch argues, is an interconnected system of user-generated databases and rating systems which allow users to filter through, and ultimately distribute, web-based content. Factor in media-rich websites like YouTube and Flickr and you get what Wesch calls an "integrated mediascape" – and "at the center of this mediascape is us" (Wesch, 2008). The point, according to Wesch, is not merely that individuals are uploading content to the web, but that content is ranked, categorized, and distributed by users as well. This, he argues, is the essence of Web 2.0 – a broad reconfiguration of the internet that places individual users in control not only of content, but of distribution.

There are others, however, who do not share Wesch's glowing appraisal of Web 2.0. In his aforementioned book *The Cult of the Amateur*, polemicist Andrew Keen describes a starkly contrasting vision of user-generated content. In his view, "democratization, despite its lofty idealization, is undermining truth, souring civil discourse, and belittling expertise, experience, and talent" (Keen, 2007:15). Keen differs from Wesch on one fundamental point; whereas Wesch interprets user-generated content as a legitimate form of artistic and cultural expression, Keen interprets it as cheap, debased, and "intellectually corrosive" (Keen, 2007:186). According to Keen, Web 2.0 is a world of triviality, misinformation, and cultural degeneration.

One of Keen's main arguments is that the existence of user-generated content poses a direct threat to traditional media institutions by undermining their business practices:

"Old media is facing extinction. But if so, what will take its place? Apparently, it will be Silicon Valley's hot new search engines, social media sites, and video portals. Every new page on MySpace, every new blog post, every new YouTube video adds up to another potential source of advertising revenue lost to mainstream media" (Keen, 2007:9).

He argues that if user-generated content supplants mainstream content, the cultural industries will suffer debilitating financial setbacks, thus "threatening the very future of our cultural institutions" (Keen, 2007:15). He considers this an "assault" on traditional media which "have helped to foster and create our news, our music, our literature, our television shows, and our movies" (Keen, 2007:7).

However, Keen bases his argument on certain unjustified assumptions. His opinion of user-generated content, for example, is that it is *inherently inferior* to mainstream content. While this may be a valid opinion, it is certainly not a fact. Whether or not content is entertaining, uplifting, or educational, is ultimately a matter of personal perspective. It would seem premature to reject user-generated content outright based on such subjective valuations of its worth. Aside from assuming that user-generated content is necessarily inferior, Keen also makes assumptions about the role of cultural institutions in the cultivation of talent:

"Nurturing talent requires work, capital, expertise, investment. It requires the complex infrastructure of traditional media – the scouts, the agents, the editors, the publicists, the technicians, the marketers. Talent is built by the intermediaries" (Keen, 2007:31).

His argument assumes that talented individuals would be incapable of expressing themselves without a commercial broadcast industry. It is precisely this kind of assumption, I argue, that is in need of re-examination.

3.7 Observable Trends

Taking into account the history of the web, a few trends become evident. First, from a technological point of view, it seems as though the trend in the history of electronic networks is one of 'disintermediation' – the gradual phasing out of the kinds of encumbrances, technological or otherwise, that may prevent individuals from directly accessing and utilizing communication technology. This trend, of course, is not apparent among all electronic media, such as television and radio. Only electronic *networks*, such as the telegraph, the telephone and the internet, clearly demonstrate this trend.

Second, every new 'incarnation' of media on these networks tends to be greeted both by fanciful conjecture, and foreboding doubt. Mythic accounts of technology can be traced, at the very least, to the electric telegraph, and likely beyond. However, the trend also demonstrates that technological phenomena, once accepted into the woodwork of society and regarded as ordinary, reveal their true social impact. For all the grandeur and folly of the early internet hype, there remains the undeniable reality that the internet has profoundly altered human communication. The 'dotcom bubble' may have burst, but the internet itself has survived, and people continue to contribute to its development.

Today, these trends remain apparent. The apparatuses that facilitate electronic communication continue to become more intuitive and practical. The network itself is being configured in such a way that places ordinary people squarely in control of its content. Storytellers and prophets make promises of democratic realization and social revolution. Meanwhile, cynics and disbelievers

warn of the end of discourse and the decline of tradition – all of this, at the behest

of the latest invention. Rather than argue that YouTube and Web 2.0 represent a

new revolution or broad social transformation, I argue that revolution and broad

social transformation are, themselves, immanent consequences of the 'World

Wide Web', and always have been.

CHAPTER 4: YOUTUBE, 'HOMECASTING', AND THE DEPARTURE FROM TELEVISION

4.1 The New Televisual Medium

In the previous chapter, I focused on the history of the internet, and argued that the internet is increasingly thought of as a platform for emergent forms of interactive media. One of these media, the popular video portal YouTube, is the specific subject of this chapter. In particular, I would like to discuss how YouTube itself fits into the broader scheme of media and society. While chapter two discusses the emergence of YouTube in the context of telecommunications, this chapter discusses the emergence of YouTube in the context of broadcast media.

YouTube's name and logo seem to imply, at least metaphorically, that there are some similarities between it and the medium of television. Upon first consideration, it is easy to see why the metaphor of the television might be appropriate for conceptualizing internet video. The television, after all, has been the quintessential 'televisual' medium for over half a century. Both media share certain physical and experiential similarities; content is transmitted over distances, displayed on a screen and 'watched' by audiences. However, upon deeper reflection, it becomes apparent that the similarities between the two media are mostly superficial; in many ways, they are fundamentally different. In this chapter, I hope to highlight and emphasize those differences, and argue that YouTube's emerging new video formats, as a *cultural form*, are new and unique.

4.2 The Case of YouTube Fame

In 2002, a fourteen-year old boy recorded a home video in which he imitated the actions of the popular Star Wars films. Using a golf-ball retriever as a makeshift 'light-sabre', the boy awkwardly twirled his overweight body as if engaged in combat alongside his science-fiction heroes. The boy's friends, who found the video quite comical, then decided to digitize the video and share it with their classmates using peer-to-peer file-sharing software. In doing so, they became unwitting accomplices in the creation of a global phenomenon that today is affectionately known as the 'Star Wars Kid.' As of November 2006, it has been estimated that the video has been viewed a total of 900 million times, making it the most popular video in the history of the Internet (BBC, 2006). If such estimates are true, the "Star Wars Kid" is among the most widely observed events to occur in all of human history. It is a curious fact.

In the short time since YouTube was introduced, it has been integrated into popular culture; what began as an internet phenomenon has become a much bigger *cultural* phenomenon. The latest estimates of YouTube's popularity report "70 thousand uploads and 100 million views a day" (Rosenbaum, 2008:166), and according to YouTube's website, "people are watching hundreds of millions of videos a day on YouTube and uploading hundreds of thousands of videos daily" (YouTube Fact Sheet, 2009). When a particular video creates enough attention, it is featured in the news, discussed beside water-coolers, and generally spreads throughout interpersonal networks. Consider an example: in September 2007, a

self-proclaimed Britney Spears fanatic recorded a video of himself tearfully lamenting the pop-star's unfavourable media attention, and posted the video on YouTube. Without any advertising, marketing, or other institutional promotion, the video was viewed two million times within twenty-four days of being uploaded (Adalian, 2008). Such are the unprecedented levels of exposure afforded to the everyday internet-user, and such is the promise of YouTube; an individual can 'broadcast him/herself' to a mass audience, apparently without going through the apparatus of traditional media institutions.

Today, there are dozens of similar videos that have earned a special place in popular consciousness, each with its own unique catch or memorable moment. Famous examples include "Chocolate Rain", "Miss Teen USA South Carolina", "Dramatic Look Gopher", and "Sneezing Panda." Today, somebody is just as likely to ask if you have seen "Laughing Baby" as they are to ask if you have seen latest episode of a popular television program. These popular videos have resulted in a kind of *internet celebrity* that is new and unusual, and those who become famous on YouTube often crossover into more traditional media. Occasionally, a YouTube contributor seems to *break away* from YouTube and apparently 'go mainstream'. Such was the case with Esmee Denters, an 18 year-old Dutch singer whose YouTube videos climbed into the tens of millions in 2007 (McCarthy, 2007). Her talent caught the attention of the major American record label Interscope, a branch of Universal Music Group. She was quickly signed to the label, and went from recording amateur home videos in October of 2006, to opening for the one of the world's most recognized pop singers in packed

stadiums across Europe in June of 2007. Her story is an example of how YouTube may be perceived by record producers as "a source for emerging talent" (McCarthy, 2007).

I feel it important to mention these YouTube stars in order to make a *distinction* between them, and the subject of this paper. I would like to make clear that I am *not* arguing that YouTube provides a tool for musicians to become famous or successful. It is lamentable, I would argue, that the YouTube stars who 'make it' to the daytime talk shows and award ceremonies are the ones who represent YouTube's culture of musicians in the mainstream media. It is reasonable to assume, after all, that the majority of YouTube's users will never achieve such levels of fame. Thus, despite the fact that YouTube has the capacity to bring fame to a handful of individuals, the truth is that most of YouTube's users are *not* represented in the mainstream media; they are practically invisible – an underrepresented *majority*. Esmee Denter's story is remarkable, but it is important to remember that it is and extremely special case, and is in no way reflective of most people's experience with YouTube. The important point is this: though the unsung amateurs are invisible in commercial broadcast, they account for the large majority of content on YouTube itself.

4.3   Homecasting and the Next Generation of Televisual Content

Cultural theorist Jose van Dijck, in his article *Television 2.0: YouTube and the Emergence of Homecasting*, explores how YouTube relates to different media, particularly the medium of television. Fame is, of course, one of the ways

that these two media may crossover; combined with television, YouTube seems to provide a kind "seamless space for 'upward mobility' in terms of recognition by, successively, few, many and mass audiences" (2007:8). Thus, he believes that YouTube "expands and alters our rapport with the medium of television" (2007:1), and is "tightly interwoven with broadcasting" (2007:8) This subtle but important insight has led van Dijck coin the term 'homecasting', which he defines by comparing it to broadcasting:

> "Broadcasting conventionally signifies the central institution located within the public sphere, whose task is to make essential information, knowledge and cultural experiences, available to all members of society. Homecasting accommodates the individual in the private sphere who feels the urge to make his or her opinions, insights and experiences available to everyone out there" (7).

In other words, 'homecasting' is a simple term meant to describe the act of 'broadcasting from one's home', something that the television-set was never developed to be able to do. In a way, YouTube can be thought of as a kind of 'two-way television'. Today, millions of people have the means to produce televisual content and distribute it to mass audiences. However, that was not always the case. So how and why did the phenomenon of 'homecasting' emerge?

It could be argued that the movement towards a more interactive and 'participatory' kind of televisual medium has been taking place for decades. Technological innovations such as cable, the VCR, and the remote control dramatically affected how television was experienced in the home – they "not only expanded the range of options for viewers, but also empowered them to interrupt the flow of set programming by means of zapping and timeshifting" (9).

Furthermore, some programming in the 1990s began to involve viewers as "voluntary participants" in the show, often determining the outcomes of so-called 'reality television' programs (9). Such 'participation', however, seems relatively superficial when compared to the kind of creative agency that is typically involved in 'homecasting' today.

In order to *independently* produce televisual content, people need to have access to the tools that enable producers to record, edit and distribute televisual content. For decades, ordinary people simply did not have access to the kind of equipment necessary for producing high-quality video because it was specialized and expensive. Home movies, recorded onto analogue videotape, were visibly unprofessional, and rarely intended for any sort of broadcast; as their name implied, they were intended primarily for exhibition only in the home. As van Dijck notes, however, ordinary individuals have "gradually entered a new domain of audiovisual production and distribution – a domain previously inaccessible to amateurs, due to prohibitive costs of equipment and dissemination via analogue television channels" (9). Due in large part to the demand for consumer products such as personal computers and digital cameras, the tools for producing high-quality video have become relatively commonplace. In the case of camera technology, this means that editing videos has become relatively easy and affordable. Today, tools for recording and editing digital video are relatively familiar, and allow ordinary people to produce televisual content which, in some cases, is of indistinguishable quality from that which is on broadcast television.

It is worth noting that, despite the fact that YouTube seems altogether new and revolutionary, and despite the fact that YouTube's platform is socially-driven and community-based, it is not necessarily immune to the kinds of commercialization that have intervened in the development of other such media. The radio, after all, once provided a free and open platform for amateur broadcast until the radio spectrum was allocated to commercial interests in 1924 (Rowland, 2007:178). According to Wade Rowland, individuals who broadcasted radio from the home were "perceived as an undisciplined rabble of amateur operators", and pushed to the limits of the radio spectrum (Rowland, 2007:175). Ironically, it was an amateur radio enthusiast, Frank Conrad, who stumbled upon the commercial potential of radio when he began making deals with record stores, giving on-air mention to those stores that provided him with recorded music (Rowland, 2007:184). It is not difficult to imagine how YouTube may eventually capitulate to similar commercial imperatives (indeed, there already exist a number of avenues for advertising on YouTube). Aside from being one of the flagship websites of Web 2.0, after all, YouTube is also a profit-driven company, and therefore just as invested in financial endeavours as any other capitalist institution. It has achieved phenomenal financial success since its inception, and in 2006 was acquired by Internet powerhouse Google for $1.65 billion dollars American (BBC News, 2006).

It is also important to note that the emergence of 'homecasting' does not necessarily signal the end of broadcast, nor does it imply that 'homecasting' is the next logical phase of broadcast. Despite all the possible ways that YouTube

or other internet video portals may succumb to commercial demands, the fact remains that 'homecasting' is an altogether new and unique phenomenon in human communication; individuals have never had access to a point-to-point televisual medium – until now.

4.4   Televisual Dialogue?

Among the more scathing analyses of the medium of television is Neil Postman's polemic book "Amusing Ourselves to Death" (1985). In it, he argues that broadcast television inherently predisposes itself to shallow entertainment rather than critical engagement. The effect of television, he argues, is the atomization, de-contextualization and trivialization of public issues. Postman refers only briefly to computers in his book as "a vastly overrated technology" (161). He believed that computer technology would be "of great value to large-scale organizations", but solve "very little of importance to most people" (161). However, it is unlikely that, in the mid-1980s, he could have foreseen the popularity of the Internet, let alone that it could one day foster a network of amateur 'television' producers. In light of new circumstances, it could be argued that the computer might provide solutions to many of the problems Postman described.

Indeed, Postman seems to have been aware that the television would evolve in the future. Postman puts it quite plainly nearing the end of his book:

> "The problem, in any case, does not reside in *what* people watch.
> The problem is in *that* we watch. The solution must be found in *how*
> we watch. For I believe it may fairly be said that we have yet to learn
> what television is" (160).

It is likely that, by this statement, Postman was arguing that the public should be more critically engaged with the media, and more critical of television more specifically. Part of the solution, according to him, entailed finding "a means through which it might be possible for Americans to begin talking back to their television sets" (160). He did not mean it in the literal sense, but in the metaphoric sense; he hoped viewers might one day engage in some kind of *dialogue* with the television – that 'how' we watch television might change.

Much of Postman's critique of the television is done by comparison to the written word, which Postman believed to be more conducive to deliberation, debate and critical thought. Written language, he argued, had its own epistemology separate from that of spoken language:

> "What could be stranger than the silence one encounters when addressing a question to a text? What could be more metaphysically puzzling than addressing an unseen audience, as every writer of books must do? And correcting oneself because one knows that an unknown reader will disapprove or misunderstand?" (13).

The mere act of *addressing people who are not there*, Postman argued, made the medium of writing radically different, epistemologically speaking, from the spoken word. Could a similar comparison be made of television and YouTube? Consider Michael Wesch's comments on the act of addressing a webcam:

> "Now look carefully at a webcam. That's there. That's somewhere else. That's everybody. On the other side of that little glass lens is almost everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you have ever heard of, and even those you have never heard of. In more specific terms, it is everyone who has or will have access to the internet - billions of potential viewers, and your future self among them. Some have called it at once the biggest and the smallest stage – the most public space in the world, entered from the privacy of our own homes" (Wesch, 2008).

This example is not meant to imply that YouTube will have the same impact on human knowledge as the development of written language. Rather, the example is only meant to demonstrate that YouTube, with its capacity for dialogical interaction, does not necessarily foster audience passivity in the same the television did. This lends further evidence to the argument that YouTube is a cultural form altogether different from television.

4.5   The Emancipation of the Viewer

Despite YouTube's metaphoric association with broadcast television, the process by which YouTube's content is produced is rooted in radically different institutional practices. Whereas traditional broadcast has been "historically cemented in centralized production, simultaneous programming, and mass reception" (van Dijck, 2007:2), homecasting has been able to "remove the (central) distributor entirely from the process" (6). Thus, homecasting is a model for the production and distribution of media that is *fundamentally different* from that of traditional broadcast. It is difficult to speculate what the long-term consequences will be, but according to van Dijck, homecasting is "already challenging the broadcast industry's institutional structure and its technological and economic infrastructure" (4).

Peer-to-peer media have long been perceived as threats to the culture industries. The emergence of musical file-sharing in the late 1990s led many to believe that record companies would have their business practices fundamentally undermined (Menn, 2003). But there is an important distinction to be made

between file-sharing and 'homecasting': the latter is original content, not pirated content. Arguably, there is no breach of intellectual property law involved in producing original user-generated content. However, some users *do* use YouTube as a platform for illegally exhibiting pirated material. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between *two kinds* of YouTube uploaders. In his research on the YouTube community, John Paolillo makes a distinction between users who produce original content, and those who "essentially 'forward' information to the YouTube audience at large, performing a filtering function" (Paolillo, 2008:2). In other words, if a user uploads images that are taken directly from the mainstream media, that user technically is *not* 'homecasting' (though some might add a third category of users who 'mash-up' media images as a kind of personal expression – the point is debatable).

The important point about homecasting is not that it is some kind of 'user-generated television program' or that it is a new tool for illegal file sharing, but that it is an altogether new "cultural form", one that not only "subverts the legal and economic model imposed by broadcasting", but "engender[s] a new social practice that is distinct from the conventional agencies of viewers, audiences, or consumers" (Van Dijck, 2007;3). Homecast content often defies classification, and typically cannot be categorized using broadcast's terminology. For example, user-generated videos are not necessarily 'shows' or 'programs', nor are they merely 'home videos'. Furthermore, there are blurring lines between categories such as 'audience' and 'viewer'. Because YouTube is an interactive social network rather than a unilateral television set, homecasting tends to facilitate

dialogical relationships between audiences and viewers in a way that television did not. According to van Dijck, this transition from a one-way televisual medium to a two-way televisual medium is a step towards what he calls a "worldwide emancipation of consumers and viewers" (18).

4.6 A New Kind of Stage

The main point of this chapter is as follows: YouTube, as a medium distinctly different from those of traditional broadcast, provides a new and unique *cultural form* – a new kind of stage on which to play. YouTube's popularity clearly demonstrates that millions of ordinary people are genuinely interested in exploring this new medium. It seems self evident that musicians of every kind are drawn to YouTube, but how much do we know about the motives of those musicians, and how others perceive their music? Perhaps more to the point, how does this new cultural form alter people's perceptions about the role of music in society and in their own lives?

By discussing YouTube in the context of television, I have demonstrated what an important departure from traditional media YouTube really represents. Whereas broadcast television necessarily separates the performer and the listener, YouTube has allowed for a rethinking of that relationship, and has provided a stage upon which musicians can 'play together.' Whereas television music networks such as MuchMusic and MTV have focused almost exclusively on promoting successful professional musicians, YouTube has exposed the world of amateurs, whose aspirations may be no more than to learn to play a

song, or to share a song with their friends. A more methodical exploration of this world is presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: VOICES OF THE AMATEURS: RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1   Description of Field Research and Methodology

The preceding chapters, presented as separate narratives of music, electronic networks, and the participatory web, have been designed to provide context to the subject of what is ultimately the subject of this thesis: YouTube's amateur musicians. The second chapter demonstrated that composers, performers, and listeners are kinds of social roles, and that all the musical relationships that occur between them, are social by their very nature. The third chapter reviewed the theoretical underpinnings of electronic networks, and the ways that they have altered human relationships by making point-to-point communication more accessible to ordinary people; it also described the emerging conceptualization of the internet as a culture of participation. The fourth chapter contrasted the emerging phenomenon of internet video to the much older tradition of broadcast – in particular, broadcast television – arguing that internet video is structurally dissimilar to traditional modes of televisual communication. In this, the final chapter, I bring these arguments together in order to formulate a coherent hypothesis about amateur music and new media.

The common point among the previous chapters is as follows: simply stated, electronic networks are capable of connecting individuals to other individuals, and connecting groups to other groups (Reed, 2001). That may seem

obvious, but it is nonetheless profound. We are only now beginning to witness the emergence of a medium that is point-to-point, but also mediated by more than text or audio – it is increasingly mediated by video, an intuitive sensory experience that is much closer to that of 'being there in person'. The consequences of this are certainly many, and surely merit the attention of media scholars. Of those consequences, I argue that there will be profound changes to how our society produces, consumes and perceives certain works of art and culture. Focusing specifically on music, my research is intended to determine how YouTube users perceive this emerging medium, and their involvement with it. My thesis statement is as follows: many amateur musicians who contribute to YouTube are motivated by personal fulfilment, and perceive their involvement with the website as socially constructive.

In order support my thesis, and to learn about how amateur musicians perceive their own involvement with YouTube, it was necessary to conduct my own research. Because this project is about the changing perceptions of amateur music in the mass media, I decided to make homecasters *themselves* the subject of my research. After all, they are the driving force behind amateur music on YouTube – without such individuals independently uploading music videos, there would be no amateur music on YouTube to speak of. Understanding what motivates *them* to upload videos may shed some light on the nature of creative participation on the internet more broadly. In order to do that, I designed a short web-based survey. In this section, I introduce the survey, and explain the rationale for choosing this method of research.

YouTube is a global phenomenon, and its population of users is in the millions. In the interest of practicality, I have chosen to conduct research that is not intended to be generalized from. According to internet researchers Hewson et al, when conducting sociological studies of the internet, "large generalisable samples are not always what is required" (2003:81) – thus, my research was designed to explore the experiences and perceptions of only a few musical homecasters. My sampling strategy was very basic – it was designed only to ensure that respondents would have no connection to each other or to the researcher. In order to produce this kind of sample, I utilized YouTube's system of links to 'related videos.' By linking to a 'related video' six times and contacting whatever user I happened to stumble across (borrowing from the old adage of 'six degrees of separation'), I was able to produce a sufficiently random sample of musical homecasters who had no apparent connection to each other. Respondents were invited to participate in an online survey, and provided with a link. In total, fourteen individuals responded.

Though the research was at least partially quantitative, it is important to note that it was not designed in order to produce enough statistical data to be generalized from. The quantitative data accumulated in this study was only meant to supplement the qualitative data that was collected. So, for example, when a respondent was asked how many people subscribe to his or her YouTube profile, that information was not meant to be abstracted as a representation of any broader trend in subscription patterns. The conclusions

made in this thesis are based on the qualitative evidence provided by the respondents in the form of written comments.

5.2 "Giving Something Back": Analysis of Survey Results

Of all the fourteen homecasters who responded to the survey, all of them shared two things in common. The first is that they have all uploaded videos of themselves playing a musical instrument and/or singing. The second is that none of them have received any sort of payment from YouTube. Aside from those commonalities, the respondents all seem to have a slightly different 'place' both on YouTube, and in the world of musical performance. For example, nine of them had played in a band or a group, while five had not. Eight of them had uploaded an original song, while six had only uploaded songs by other artists. Three of them had uploaded fewer than five videos, and two of them had uploaded more than twenty-five – the rest were in between. The answers were evenly distributed, indicating that the respondents had varying levels of experience both as homecasters and as musicians. This was ideal for the kind of survey being conducted.

One of the things I was most curious about was whether homecasters considered *themselves* to be 'professional' or 'amateur' musicians. When asked "Have you ever performed music to a live audience?" respondents gave mixed answers. Some simply answered "No", while others elaborated on the kinds of venues that they had performed in. These included pubs, cafes, talent shows, and charity events – one respondent even claimed to have performed on the

street. Of all the respondents, however, only two claimed to have ever been paid for performing music, and only two considered themselves to be 'professional' musicians.

I was also curious about whether homecasters *aspired* to be professional musicians. Of the fourteen respondents, five of them expressed a desire to be regarded as a professional at some point in their future. The other nine seemed generally indifferent to the idea of achieving professional status as a musician, but still expressed strong interest in creating and producing music. When asked whether he or she aspired to be a professional musician, one respondent answered:

> "No. Not in the sense that it is my 'job'. I want to continue to grow, and eventually play some local gigs or make an album, but I don't think I want to label myself as a 'professional" musician'" (Respondent #9).

This answer suggests that the respondent believes he or she can perform live music and even produce an *album* of recorded music without ever being considered a professional musician. Consider another answer:

> "Not really. I mean, my main goal is to have fun and just learn as much about music as I can. Whatever happens, happens" (Respondent #8).

It is, of course, to be expected that some musicians may aspire for recognition and appreciation for their contributions to music. But it is interesting that most of the respondents claimed that recognition and respect were not necessarily the reasons they uploaded their videos to YouTube. Respondent #4 summarized the attitude best with his/her comment: "It would be nice, but that's not why I post things on YouTube."

The question of 'why' homecasters upload their music to YouTube is central to this thesis. When asked to explain in detail what motivates them to upload videos, respondents gave some surprising answers. Interestingly, not all of the respondents posted videos of musical *performances* per se – many of them contributed musical *tutorials* similar to the one mentioned in my introduction. One respondent wrote the following:

> "I began uploading tutorial videos from my favourite artists since I did not see any on YouTube. Since then, I've received positive responses from users who have played instruments for 10+ years to those who have never played. This motivates me to continue making videos because it's satisfying to know that my videos are helpful and appreciated" (Respondent #6).

This comment demonstrates that the respondent was motivated by encouragement from other musicians on YouTube, and that this encouragement was reinforced by a sense of personal satisfaction. Consider a comment from another respondent:

> "Well it all started with watching YouTube videos out of boredom at work. I then came up with the idea since I owned a guitar why not search for videos to learn how to play it. So I did and solely from watching videos on YouTube I began to learn songs and chord progressions. From there inside of about 6 months I was hooked and decided to give something back. So I began to do my own tutorials geared more for the beginners like myself who are just looking for the "campfire" skills lol. And so that's pretty much where I'm at right now, just making beginner tutorials and still learning new stuff myself" (Respondent #8).

This respondent was motivated, as he/she put it, by a desire to "give something back", implying a sense of collaboration or cooperation among other musicians on YouTube. It would seem that YouTube is not only a venue for musical performance, but for musical education.

The phenomenon of musical instruction via YouTube demonstrates that there is much more to homecast music-videos than performance. With so many different kinds of videos being produced for YouTube, further research might benefit from a more defined typology of video formats. The category "music video", after all, could include those produced by the culture industry. One of the challenges of researching emerging formats is that they tend naturally to defy classification. For example, are musical performances not implicitly instructive? Are instructional videos not, in a way, performances? Furthermore, if a homecaster contributes videos in order to sell his/her records, should they be classified differently than those who do not? Should videos be classified based on the motivations of the users, or the way the videos are received by an audience? Much of YouTube's future is up to the homecasters themselves – it is their application of the technology that will ultimately determine how the medium takes shape.

Other respondents claimed that they were motivated by the personal satisfaction that they felt when contributing to a community. One respondent said that he/she uploaded videos to YouTube so that they could be easily distributed to "family and friends". Others emphasized the sense of community that they feel with other YouTube users, and with other musicians:

> "Posting videos is my way of giving back to the music community, especially beginners. I was fortunate enough to meet and latch onto more experienced musicians when I was a kid and now I guess I'm hoping some beginners can latch onto me, even if we never meet" (Respondent #11).

And another:

"I do it to grow: musically, socially, and personally. I initially post videos because it forces me to make (what I consider to be) good performances. The community aspect is also *extremely* important. The more feedback I get on my work, the better I'll become. The motivation of the actual motion of getting up and posting videos comes from the fact that I think it's just flat-out *fun* (Respondent #9).

These responses suggest that some homecasters are motivated by a genuine desire to interact with other musicians. Furthermore, it would seem as though feedback from fellow amateurs actually encourages users to continue contributing their videos. This is an interesting finding because it demonstrates that homecasters are not motivated purely by a desire for fame, or even for admiration.

The final two questions on the survey prompted respondents to explain their thoughts on YouTube as a 'tool' for both professional and amateur musicians. In the case of professionals, most respondents recognized that YouTube could be used as a venue for promotion and publicity. In the case of amateurs, answers were more varied. Some perceived it as a tool mainly for improving as a musician (for example, several respondents referred to user-comments, both positive and negative, as useful sources of objective support/criticism). Others believed that YouTube afforded opportunities for amateurs to *become* professionals because it provided a kind of stepping-stone into more mainstream media, reflecting van Dijck's notion of YouTube as a perceived space for "upward mobility" in the music industry (2007:8). Several respondents disagreed, however, maintaining that YouTube is not necessarily a promotional medium – that the YouTube performance is itself a final work of art:

"This is how I think Youtube should be used for musicians: the less popular artists, who have real, unmolested talent, are the people that make the music community on Youtube amazing. With Myspace, all you get is a digital copy of a recorded song. With Youtube, most of the performances are raw, and (most importantly) accompanied by video. Few YouTube musicians have yet to become "popular," unlike Myspace's track record, which is why it's not the best option for musicians who want to make it big, but it is (in my opinion) the best online venue for amateur musical entertainment" (Respondent #10).

Ultimately, it is this notion that YouTube can be a perceived as a "venue for amateur musical entertainment" that is most relevant to this project. Many respondents have clearly indicated that they do not necessarily think of YouTube as a tool for self-promotion or publicity. Indeed, this research indicates the opposite: that many homecasters simply find the point-to-point interaction among other musicians that YouTube facilitates to be personally fulfilling and socially uplifting.

This research does not imply in any way that amateur music will come to supplant professional music in other media, nor does it suggest that the music industry is under any immediate threat because of YouTube. What it does suggests is that there is an emerging conceptualization of YouTube as a practical and accessible venue for artistic and cultural expression – a venue whose praxis was conceived from the bottom up by ordinary people and whose participatory nature seems to be unprecedented in the history of mass media. We are witnessing, in other words, the emergence of a 'new stage' on which people may perform – one that defines the relationship between performers and listeners in its own unique way.

The results of this research indicate that there is much to be gained in conducting further research on amateur web-content. Respondent #9's desire to produce an album without 'going professional', for example, touches on what could be called the 'Garage Band' phenomenon – the increasing ability of ordinary people to produce high-quality multi-track musical records using relatively accessible audio and computing equipment. This thesis focuses on the amateur musical performance, but a similar inquiry into the amateur musical *record* might produce fascinating insights into the evolution of musical production. Similar inquiries into other amateur forms of art such as animation, digital art, creative writing and photography may shed more light on the phenomenon of web-based participation on the web.

5.3   Conclusion

Ultimately, this thesis is about how new media affect people's attitudes towards art and culture. I have argued that one application of new media in particular, YouTube, demonstrates clear potential as a venue for new forms of artistic and cultural expression, and that this venue is perceived by its adherents as a space for fulfilling and constructive social engagement. In this final section, I condense the various arguments made in this thesis into a conclusion.

 Music sociology has demonstrated that all human societies have felt some need to produce music. For the many thousands of years that preceded complex social organization (such as industrial capitalism) music was deeply intertwined with ritualistic traditions involving entire communities of people, often

uniting them in song and dance. Today, however, developed societies have inherited centuries-old traditions of musical production and distribution that tend to separate the experience of music into separate social acts: composing, listening, and performing. Furthermore, the capitalist instrumentalization of musical expression has produced a distinction between 'professional' and 'amateur' musicians – tentatively defined as those who exchange their music as a commodity and those who do not, respectively. Those conceptual boundaries may gradually erode, I argue, as changes in media alter people's perceptions of musical composition and collaboration.

The 'changes in media' that I refer to are characterized by an increasing accessibility and practicability of visual and intuitive network-based electronic communication. Some of these changes are not endemic to the twenty-first century – they are part of a broader project of technological development that reaches back to the discovery of the electron. Since the beginning of electronic communication, network-based media, such as the telegraph and telephone, have become increasingly "convivial", meaning that people can use them without any specialized knowledge (Illich, 1973). The internet is the latest 'incarnation' of such media, and has demonstrated a clear tendency to become more intuitive and interactive throughout its own development.

Today, the internet continues to evolve, as new applications are consistently created for it. Some argue that the internet has entered a new phase of development characterized by an increase in media-rich user-generated content and user-based systems of reference. Much of this content falls under

the category of 'amateur' because it is typically not commissioned by any cultural institution, and is generally not subject to the standards that are normally required for publication through traditional media such as print and broadcast. The important difference between YouTube and its metaphorical counterpart the television, however, is that YouTube emerged from the technological tradition of the telegraph and the internet rather than that of the radio or the television – it is a point-to-point medium. Because of its unique ability to facilitate point-to-point communication, YouTube is an altogether new form of televisual communication, one that is fundamentally different from that of television. Naturally, this distinction has given rise to new forms of cultural expression, most notably a phenomenon Jose van Dijck calls "homecasting", a kind of personal broadcast (2007).

Popular perceptions of 'homecasting' have been coloured by an unfavourable focus, typically among broadcast media, on rare individuals who achieve unusual levels of fame. The evidence presented in this thesis demonstrates, however, that this new cultural form is perceived by many of its creators and contributors not as a gateway into mainstream media, but as a space for mutual support, personal interaction and genuine self-expression. Music is rarely treated as a form of property; rather, it is considered by most users to be an end in itself – an act of expression committed without any serious expectation of remuneration, reputation or mass distribution. This, I argue, suggests that the power of new media lies not in its ability to circumvent institutions or threaten industry, but to raise people's consciousness to the

possibilities of a system of media that accommodates everybody's desire for self-

expression, rather than accommodating only a few.

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