THE POLITICS OF YOUTUBE:
STUDYING ONLINE VIDEO AND POLITICAL DISCUSSION

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À minha Mãe
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Abstract

Twenty-first century changes in the mediascape have revived pivotal debates in sociology of communication: the relationship between news media, commercialisation, entertainment, and politics; and the role of the media consumer, as the ability to produce and disseminate media messages seems to no longer be restricted to media companies. As a conveyer of political discussion across boundaries, YouTube bears the promise of enabling an international public sphere, while also participating in the building of a shared identity.

The cultural and social significance of this website was the main driver for selecting it as the focus of empirical observation. Studying YouTube videos had two main objectives: to elucidate how YouTube is perceived as to its the influence on political discussion; to understand online video as a medium of interaction in political discussion, both as a non-collaborative (mainly top-down) and a collaborative practice (in the case of remix).

Particularly due to its perceived informality and absence of mediation, online video distributed through websites like YouTube is regarded as bringing politicians and citizens closer together. Online video is described as the perfect medium to carry out conversations on political affairs. In turn, YouTubers employ remixing and parody as methods of exposing the weaknesses of politicians and the political system, following the long-standing tradition of satirists, countering messages created in the context of institutional political communication.

From the critical observation and analysis of YouTube and its videos, high hopes are not entirely justified both in top-down and bottom-up perspectives. The creation, sharing and commenting of YouTube videos are carried out in the context of political discussion, but not always as expected – or desired – by politicians and political institutions. These forms of online participation, however, are constrained by the commercial environment in which they take place, weakening their subversive and transformative potential.

Keywords: YouTube, online video, collaboration, political discussion, satirical remix
Resumo

Os dilemas das perdas de legitimidade do Estado, do afastamento dos cidadãos e a falência dos modelos democráticos tornaram-se focos constantes de interesse dos media, da esfera universitária e do mundo político. Esta discussão ganhou novo alento com o destaque adquirido pelo tema da globalização e o conseqüente questionamento do lugar do Estado-nação, bem como pela disseminação das tecnologias da informação e da comunicação (TIC), a qual prenunciou possíveis alterações na relação entre governantes e governados. A transição de século foi, assim, marcada por um crescentce interesse no potencial de uma “democracia electrónica”, com expectativas de uma solução tecnologicamente suportada para as insuficiências do sistema democrático, e um conseqüente alargamento da comunicação política ao mundo online. Este movimento – acompanhado por mudanas no panorama dos media – reafirmou a pertinência de duas problemáticas centrais da sociologia da comunicação: a relação entre meios de comunicação noticiosos, comercialização, entretenimento e política; e o papel do consumidor dos media, à medida que a capacidade de produzir e disseminar mensagens mediáticas aparenta deixar de estar restringida às empresas dos media.

Com o decorrer da primeira década deste novo século, tornou-se claro que a Internet se encontrava em mutação. Uma das transformações mais importantes foi a passagem de uma Internet largamente baseada em texto para o predomínio da imagem – incluindo a imagem em movimento. O aumento significativo da largura de banda, a quase ubiquidade de ferramentas de registo de imagem e a simplificação dos programas de edição de vídeo permitiram a expansão exponencial da produção e partilha digital de vídeos. O crescimento de conteúdo vídeo online criado pelos utilizadores é um facto reconhecido tanto em relatórios institucionais como em abordagens teóricas. Para este desenvolvimento contribuiu, em grande medida, o lançamento do YouTube em 2005.

Este estudo do YouTube e dos seus vídeos foi orientado por dois objectivos centrais: expor as representações da influência do YouTube e dos seus vídeos na discussão política; e compreender o vídeo online como meio de interacção na discussão política, tanto como prática não-collaborativa (modelo transmissivo do tipo “cima para baixo”), como colaborativa (no caso da remistura). Esta pesquisa incluiu a análise dos diferentes formatos e géneros que podem ser encontrados nos vídeos do YouTube e o acompanhamento de discussões sobre
questões políticas estimuladas ou suportadas por vídeo. Este percurso de investigação conduziu à divisão da dissertação em seis capítulos.

O primeiro capítulo, “Debates sobre Internet, democracia, relações online e produção cultural”, abre com um breve sumário das principais questões em torno do debate sobre o potencial democrático das TIC, em especial no que se refere à sua influência positiva sobre os modos de relacionamento entre políticos e cidadãos. As críticas existentes merecem, contudo, destaque semelhante. São, em específico, identificadas como facetas menos mencionadas dos projectos de democracia electrónica o populismo, a fragmentação da esfera pública, as questões de controlo sobre informação, procedimentos e participantes. Segue-se uma perspectiva geral sobre o estudo das relações sociais online, nomeadamente através da discussão do modelo da “comunidade virtual” e a ascensão de conceitos como “colaboração” ou “comuns” (commons). A última secção debruça-se sobre a cultura como processo participativo e de resistência ao nível da construção de sentido. Os parágrafos finais procuram demonstrar de que modo o vídeo online incorpora estes debates. Este capítulo visa, deste modo, enquadrar o estudo do vídeo online político no contexto de um questionamento mais amplo.

O segundo capítulo, “YouTube, a empresa e o sítio web”, descreve o YouTube quer como empresa quer como infra-estrutura técnica em constante transformação. Esta mutação tem comprometido o seu ethos amador, ou “criado pelos utilizadores”, priorizando os ganhos financeiros, o que comporta também implicações políticas. O terceiro capítulo, “Notícias & Política, e géneros de vídeos políticos”, apresenta resultados preliminares do estudo de vídeos políticos do YouTube, sublinhando a complexidade da aferição de graus de interacção através de dados estatísticos. É ainda realizada uma breve panorâmica de géneros em vídeo político, no contexto de uma discussão mais geral sobre a ligação entre YouTube e política. Estes dois capítulos visam esboçar uma primeira enunciação das questões chave discutidas nesta dissertação.

Os dois capítulos seguintes abordam dois casos concretos, estabelecendo relações com outros canais e vídeos, com o objectivo de comparar e contrastar visões e práticas. O quarto capítulo, “O YouTube sobre o YouTube e Política: um estudo do Citizentube”, fornece um olhar sobre a concepção que o YouTube tem do seu próprio papel na política, das campanhas políticas ao envolvimento dos cidadãos e acções de protesto. Desde a escolha dos vídeos realçados e definições apresentadas de boas práticas online, às opiniões declaradas
pelos entrevistados para o CitizenTube, a mistura do entretenimento e da política surge como a estratégia mais vantajosa para alcançar a audiência. O quinto, “Políticos sobre o YouTube e Política: um estudo do EUTube”, debruça-se sobre o vídeo *online* em iniciativas de cima para baixo (*top-down*), em específico através da análise de como a Comissão Europeia tem abordado o vídeo *online* para comunicar e envolver os cidadãos, tendo também em consideração exemplos de países europeus específicos. A presença crescente da animação e do humor nos vídeos oficiais, e a dificuldade dos políticos em lidar com uma relação comunicacional menos unilateral são duas observações centrais exploradas neste capítulo.

Por fim, e em virtude dos resultados apresentados nos dois capítulos anteriores, bem como de observação participante continuada, o sexto capítulo, “Remistura e humor na era do vídeo *online*”, consiste num enfoque mais próximo sobre dois conjuntos de vídeos e de um vídeo em particular, sob um quadro teórico dedicado à sátira e à remistura. O capítulo começa com uma síntese da discussão conceptual em torno do humor e política. O primeiro estudo de caso exemplifica uma forma de remistura pouco exigente do ponto de vista da produção, mas muito vulgarizada *online*: a transformação das legendas de um excerto do filme *A Queda*, utilizando a personagem de Hitler não só para criar momentos absurdos, mas também para a crítica política. O segundo caso, que contempla o canal de YouTube “Subversive Remix Video”, fornece uma perspectiva histórica sobre as fontes de inspiração dos praticantes de remistura no século XXI. Por último, é analisada uma criação de um dos vloggers desse canal, uma remistura que exigiu perícia substancial na manipulação de conteúdo mediático. Neste capítulo, a remistura satírica é identificada como uma prática retórica ao dispor dos YouTubers, agora detentores da capacidade de manipulação digital de imagens provenientes dos meios de comunicação de massas para expressar opiniões e estabelecem diálogo. No entanto, são reconhecidas diversas limitações, como a frivolidade que caracteriza estas acções – esvaziando-as de significado político – e os obstáculos à formação de consenso, bem como as consequências de recorrer a material criado pelas indústrias de conteúdos.

Pela análise desenvolvida nestes capítulos conclui-se que as representações do papel do vídeo *online* reproduzem as percepções dos beneficiários para acção democrática que adviriam da expansão das TIC. Em especial devido à sua aparente informalidade e ausência de mediação, o vídeo *online* carregado no YouTube é visto como potenciador da aproximação entre políticos e cidadãos. O predomínio de formatos de entretenimento (humor, animação, música) está ligado a uma perspectiva da web em geral como divertida, ligeira e apropriada.
para o envolvimento político dos jovens, além de contribuir para a visão de um caráter informal do vídeo *online*. Este último é descrito como o *medium* perfeito para estabelecer conversas sobre assuntos políticos.

Contudo, as funcionalidades de web social presentes no YouTube são praticamente ignoradas, o que conduz a uma discrepância entre os discursos que elogiam o vídeo *online* como meio de comunicação e as práticas efectivas dos políticos, governos e organizações. É assim possível estabelecer alguns paralelos com os debates e as iniciativas políticas enquadradas na promoção de formas de democracia electrónica: apesar de uma retórica participativa, as práticas possuem mais semelhanças com um modelo restrito de democracia representativa. Por um lado, os procedimentos de tomada de decisão não são afectados. Por outro, o contributo dos cidadãos é condicionado pela restrição de interacção nos seus próprios canais oficiais e, de forma mais extrema, pela censura aos vídeos carregados pelos YouTubers. Tal como havia acontecido com os sítios web, os políticos recorrem ao vídeo *online*, e à web social em geral, essencialmente no contexto de campanhas electorais. Mesmo nestes casos, a comunicação política é realizada com mínima adaptação ao contexto *online* e a principal estratégia de diferenciação aplicada é tornar a política “mais divertida”.

No que respeita ao pretenso caráter emancipatório do vídeo *online*, este é visto como tendo potencial transformador do ambiente cultural, introduzindo novos actores, formas e dinâmicas dominantes. Os YouTubers recorrem à remistura e ao humor para expor as fraquezas dos políticos e do sistema político, seguindo a longa tradição dos satiristas, em confronto com as mensagens criadas no contexto da comunicação política institucional. Ao desmontar estas mensagens, a remistura satírica torna-se numa lição de literacia mediática e de retórica: expõe como a imagem política – no seu sentido lato – é produzida, montada e susceptível de manipulação. Acresce que o carácter intertextual da sátira e da remistura impõe uma elevada exigência aos espectadores dos vídeos, por forma que consigam compreender plenamente as referências invocadas.

No entanto, a remistura satírica está sujeita a constrangimentos enquanto táctica para afectar o equilíbrio de poder. A participação no debate político pode restringir-se à denúncia em vez de uma procura de consenso ou a oferta de propostas da autoria dos próprios cidadãos. Raramente oferece alternativas e pode até acentuar divergências. A sátira exclui os que não concordam com a crítica, bem como os que não a compreendem, assim reforçando tendências para a balcanização da discussão. As posições extremadas apoiam-se na existência de câmaras
de ressonância no YouTube, mas também na crítica excessivamente mordaz inscrita no vídeo. A balcanização e o extremismo contribuem deste modo para uma esfera pública ainda mais fragmentada – e que pode ser pouco hospitala⼈ra para vozes moderadas.

Por outro lado, vídeos muito mordazes ou absurdos realizam acima de tudo uma função de válvula de segurança, sendo difícil perceber as suas consequências transformadoras. Como o *culture jamming* em geral, as remisturas políticas apenas realizam a sua intenção subversiva quando guiadas por objectivos que extravasam a apropriação de imagens. Todavia, a preservação de sentidos dominantes inscritos nas imagens apropriadas limita o efeito crítico destas.

A partir da observação e análise críticas do YouTube e dos seus vídeos, as elevadas expectativas neles depositadas carecem de fundamento sólido quer em modelos de iniciativa institucional, isto é, de cima para baixo (*top-down*), quer de iniciativa de baixo para cima (*bottom-up*). A criação, partilha e comentário de vídeos YouTube ocorrem no contexto da discussão política, mas de formas nem sempre esperadas – ou desejadas – pelos políticos e instituições políticas. Acresce que estas formas alternativas de participação sofrem restrições advindas do ambiente comercial onde têm lugar, o que resulta no enfraquecimento do seu potencial subversivo.

Palavras-chave: YouTube, vídeo online, colaboração, discussão política, remistura satírica
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Introduction

Following a movement which began mid-twentieth century, especially after World War II, communication now comprehends not only the traditional media sector, but also telecommunications and computers (J. L. Garcia 2009a). The confluence – through digitalisation – of ICT with other technical and economic sectors is based on the incorporation of information and knowledge, the driving force of the commonly designated “knowledge industry” (Machlup 1962). New designations gained prevalence in the beginning of this century, such as “Web 2.0.” Such notion is part of a so-called second stage of the Internet in which an “architecture of participation” emerged and easy-to-use tools fostering collaboration were disseminated, namely blogging, tagging, wikis, or file-sharing applications. This first definition, stemming from a technological and business perspective, was discussed by Tim O'Reilly in 2004 at the “Web 2.0 Conference,” a meeting “designed to restore confidence in an industry that had lost its way after the dotcom bust” (O’Reilly and Battelle 2009). Collaborative production, social networking, user-generated or user-created content, mashups, are all branded as part of a landscape of Web 2.0 genres. Described as “a current buzzword that draws together various strands of a new generation of multimedia broadband online development and associated social dynamics,” Web 2.0 is also considered to be “the latest in a continuing stream of ICT digital innovation to which many profound and mundane sociotechnical changes are tied” (Dutton and Peltu 2007, 6).

These novel designations have a constant presence in webpages of technology companies and management solutions, as well as in influential technology magazines, online periodicals, blogs and forums, such as Wired, Boing Boing or Slashdot, which influence the discussion agenda on social and political aspects of the Internet. The offline world follows the same trend, verified by the pervasiveness of the references to “Web 2.0” and its variations (e.g. Society 2.0, or Government 2.0) in newspapers, television shows, political speeches, and academic papers. The focus is frequently given to transformations in the field of communication, in its practice, its professionals, and its theorization. This expression has already acquired official political legitimacy, along with other designations such as “participative Web” (OECD 2007). The view that we are at the aforementioned second stage
of the development of the Internet, with political and economic consequences, is hence sustained in documents produced by national governments and international organisations. In this dissertation I chose to resort to the term “social web” (Millerand, Proulx, and Rueff 2010), the conceptualisation and the viewpoint it entails: the designation “social web” indicates an option which favours the study of the relational aspect through a sociological, ethical and political lens, unlike Web 2.0, which is marked by engineering and marketing influences. Given the main focus of this research is on political and social facets of online practices, trying at the same time to maintain a critical perspective, this approach is more adequate to the study at hand.

As political communication marched into the online world, the importance of information and communication technologies (ICT) with respect to the possible modifications they may induce in citizen-government relations captured the attention of scholars, politicians, and media alike. New technologies are seen as the possible means to fulfil the promised function – yet not fully kept – by mass media, i.e., that of being instruments for the development of strong democracies. However, several concerns are raised regarding the increasing commodification of the Internet and the dominant role of entertainment in online practices, both interconnected. Twenty-first century changes to the mediascape have hence revived pivotal debates in sociology of communication: the relationship between news media, commercialisation, entertainment, and politics, one of the persistent topics in communication studies, especially since television replaced newspapers as the preferred vehicle for politicians attempts to reach citizens or, more often, voters; and the role of the media consumer, which has acquired new overtones as the ability to produce and disseminate media messages seems to no longer be strictly in the hands of media companies.
The definition of a research object: Why YouTube

In their seminal study *Internet. An ethnographic approach*, Daniel Miller and Don Slater (2000) opposed the view of the Internet as “a monolithic medium” and noted how its components were changing “at a frantic pace.”

After all, not very long ago this book would have focused on bulletin boards and flaming; it is in fact a book largely about email, chat and websites, and is trying to keep up with its 'subjects' in their understanding of ecommerce. In a year or two's time, when much of the web will be transfigured by high-bandwidth facilities, as well as by completed telecommunications deregulation, the common-sense view of what 'the Internet' is and what one should write about will have again been transformed (D. Miller and Slater 2000, 14–5).

Their prospective view proved to be accurate, even if optimistic in terms of the speed of the impact of the increase in bandwidth.¹ As the first decade of the twenty-first century progressed it became clear the Internet's landscape was changing, and one of the most important transformations was the passage from an almost strictly text-based Internet to the prevalence of image, and video in particular. At this time, studying online video is very close to being equivalent to studying YouTube, at least if the focus is on the dominant trend in most of the connected world.

The pivotal developments just described were indeed accompanied by the defining moment of the launching of YouTube. YouTube's relevance as a case study stems from its status as a pioneer in online video distribution, specifically for non-professional contributors, and as the leader in this field in most countries, at least during the seven years after its launch. The position of YouTube as the second search engine on the web, after Google, is described as sign that the Internet is increasingly image-based and our behaviours have changed accordingly: it shows “that searching videos has become a reflex as natural as searching text” (Gervais 2010, 33).² When *Time* designated “You” as the Person of the Year of 2006, while describing the “revolution” that merited this, the journalist wrote: “[I]t's a story about community and collaboration on a scale never seen before. It's about the cosmic compendium

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¹ Even if blogs already had a strong presence in both Internet practices and studies in previous years, Wikipedia (launched in 2001), social networking sites (Friendster – 2002, MySpace – 2003, Facebook – 2004), image-sharing sites (Picasa – 2002, Flickr – 2004), and video-sharing sites (Vimeo – 2004, DailyMotion – 2005, YouTube – 2005) needed a few more years to acquire critical mass.

² All non-English language text was translated by the author.

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of knowledge Wikipedia and the million-channel people's network YouTube and the online metropolis MySpace” (Grossman 2006). And despite referring to all user-generated content based websites, it was a screen with YouTube's format that featured on the cover. This was merely one year and a half after its official launch, and just after the acquisition by Google.

In the first *YouTube Reader* to come out, this company's influence is said to stretch beyond the realm of online video: “YouTube quickly became one of the most substantial indications of the significance of the Internet; at least as far as the ‘old’ media of magazines, newspapers and television were concerned” (Mitchem 2008, 274). The fact that social media and user-generated content predated YouTube did not prevent it from positioning itself as the latter's upstart champion (Gillespie 2010, 352). Online video is said to play an important role in the rise of a “participatory culture” (Jenkins 2006), and the return to a “Read/Write culture” (Lessig 2008). Both institutional reports (European Commission 2007; OECD 2007) and theoretical approaches (Benkler 2006; Bruns 2008; Leadbeater 2009; Shirky 2010; Flichy 2010) recognise online video as a pivotal part of the social web and an example of the increase in user-generated content.

In the process of narrowing my research object to online political discussion on the social web, YouTube became an increasingly relevant observation field, and not only – even if significantly – due to the specificities of online video as a communication form. At this time, in the beginning of 2008, I attended the *Politics 2.0 conference.* At this conference there was a very small number of papers on YouTube. However, during a discussion between sessions, a member of an European political party argued that YouTube was the only truly global website, which justified an investment in using it for campaigning. With very few exceptions across the world, this statement still holds true. This conversation took place previously to Twitter's exponential growth, and before MySpace, hi5 and Orkut lost considerable number of registered users to Facebook. It is always difficult to predict which is the “next big thing” on the web, or how long a website is going to stay popular online: the examples of Geocities and Friendster come to mind. Nonetheless, YouTube has remained the leader in online video since the beginning until the end of this study, despite controversies, and the rise of competitors.

YouTube's relevance equally stems from having determined the standard of a video-sharing website for Internet users and for other companies that followed, that is, it has “a

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3 “Politics: Web 2.0: An International Conference,” organised by the New Political Communication Unit, Department of Politics & International Relations, Royal Holloway, University of London, April 17-18, 2008.
certain degree of dominance over the idea of what a video sharing website should be like, and how it should work” (original emphasis, Burgess and Green 2009, 106). The same applies to the representation of online video in popular culture: for example, in Antonio Campo's (2008) film Afterschool, “ClipUs” is a direct and acknowledged allusion to YouTube. In addition, “just as blogs altered the distribution models of traditional print media,” strategies of corporate broadcasters quickly responded to YouTube's popularity by adapting “user-generated content to fill airtime” (Mitchem 2008, 274). Uploaded videos become news or illustrate news, while prominent users – the so-called YouTube celebrities – acquire visibility in traditional media, further increasing said popularity. However, not only do its videos receive wide coverage, the company itself has often been a news topic in its own right, due to business aspects and legal disputes. “It is not just the regularity of appearance in the mass media that makes the Internet a mainstream technology, but also the matter-of-factness of those appearances in a wide range of settings” (Hine 2000, 28), and the same applies to YouTube.

YouTube has also become a research subject spanning numerous areas of study, with approaches that range from semiotics, aesthetics, network analysis to film studies, a diversity apparent in existing readers dedicated solely to YouTube (Snickars and Vonderau 2009), or to online video while noting YouTube's central role (Lovink and Niederer 2008; Lovink and Miles 2011). More importantly, YouTube's dominant position places it among “just a handful of video ‘platforms’, search engines, blogging tools and interactive online spaces that are now the primary keepers of the cultural discussion as it moves to the internet” (Gillespie 2010, 348).

The cultural and social significance of this website was the main driver for selecting YouTube as the focus of my empirical analysis. When I started my research, “virtual communities” were prevalent in the existing literature, as noted in chapter I. The self-denominated “YouTube community,” a designation promoted by the company and to which many of its users adhere (Burgess and Green 2009; Strangelove 2010), was growing very quickly, as indicated in the statistics presented in chapter II. Still, as van Dijck notes discussing this “YouTube community,” “‘Communities’, in relation to media, thus refers to a large range of user groups, some of which resemble grassroots movements, but the overwhelming majority coincide with consumer groups or entertainment platforms” (2009,
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45). On the other hand, resorting to such term may in fact lead to a dismissive interpretation while analysing online social relations and political interaction, neglecting the potential of electronic communication for joining strangers and informing large collectivities (Calhoun 2004).

Calhoun's proposition proves particularly insightful since in this dissertation my focus is on videos uploaded on YouTube which target a political topic or are used to trigger political discussion. The selection of the empirical material is tightly connected to the two main objectives of this dissertation: to elucidate how YouTube is perceived as to its influence on political discussion; to understand how online video has become a medium of interaction in political discussion, both as non-collaborative (top-down, mainly) and a collaborative practice (in the case of remix). These objectives have led to the formulation of the following research question:

Do the creation, sharing and commenting of YouTube videos constitute forms of political discussion?

This question may, in turn, be subdivided into four more analytical questions: What is the self-image created by YouTube regarding its political role? How do politicians and citizens perceive this role? Which practices are at the centre of politicians' YouTube activity? What practices are deployed in YouTube user-generated videos on political topics?

In my search to answer these questions I analysed the different formats and genres that can be found in YouTube videos, and followed the discussions on political issues sparked or supported by online video both on and off the website, according to the methodology described below. The verification of YouTube videos effectiveness in setting the public and political agenda is beyond the scope of this thesis, although some of the findings here presented may point towards a particular trend.

Methodology

In pursuit of the objectives just stated and given the nature of the object, the empirical material under analysis includes videos within particular channels defined as case studies, individual videos, and sets of related online videos, acting in accordance to a snowball sampling technique (see Annex I for complete list). In the latter case, the procedure was to use “an initial set of data sources as the basis for locating additional data sources”
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(Morgan 2008, 800), i.e., to follow videos from other videos and various online sources.

First, I performed a general exploratory search browsing YouTube. I narrowed the definition of “political video” by selecting videos that were self-designated as political or pertaining to politics, namely by employing those terms in their description (e.g. “Citizentube. YouTube's political vlog”) or choosing to be categorized under “News & Politics.” In addition, I analysed videos either created by or dedicated to specific politicians and political institutions (e.g. videos in the EUTube channel). Other videos are compared when there is an existing connection to the former (either direct – video response or uploaded by the same user, or indirect – sharing a topic). I found the videos by browsing YouTube, using the search box to find specific videos, and by being redirected from blogs, other websites, and news media. Friends and colleagues, knowing the subject of my dissertation, often sent me videos or alerted me to their existence (in particular regarding the examples discussed in chapter VI). In the process of choosing the channels and videos I analyse in this thesis, I carried a more specific research in each case to have an overview of the material and apply the proper focus in the in-depth investigation, as well as to orient the theoretical support connected with my expected findings. I will explain the particular relevance of the videos analysed in each chapter, and their process of collection, as they are discussed.

After the exploratory period, and as the research progressed, I then proceeded to a close analysis of two case studies – Citizentube and EUTube – while maintaining constant browsing of YouTube videos. This period of observation lasted until the end of June 2009. During the first semester of 2009, my research was presented in several different venues specifically dedicated to the discussion of work in progress as well as peer-reviewed conferences.\textsuperscript{4} The preparation of these presentations, as well as the discussion with my

\textsuperscript{4} My research benefited from a visiting student position (January-April 2009) at the Laboratoire de communication mediatisée par ordinateur (LabCMO), coordinated by Serge Proulx, UQAM, and Centre interuniversitaire de recherche sur la science et la technologie (CIRST), directed by Pierre Doray, funded by two fellowships, one from the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT), and a second from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. In Canada, I participated in a peer-reviewed conference for post-graduate students at UQAM (March), as well as in two other events destined for a smaller, but more intervening audience: Clinique de métho, at the LabCMO, UQAM, Montreal (February), and the Infoscape Lab Lecture Series, Rogers Communication Centre, Faculty of Communication & Design, Ryerson University, Toronto (April). On that same year, I was accepted to two other peer-reviewed conferences: II Encontro Luso-Espanhol de Sociologia do Conhecimento, da Ciência e da Tecnologia, held at the ICS-UL, Lisbon (May), and Beyond East and West: Two Decades of Media Transformation After the Fall of Communism, held at the Central European University, Budapest (June), funded by my institution, ICS-UL. Finally, I presented the status of my research in the ICS’ PhD Candidates Research Seminar, in early July, commented upon by my colleagues and advisor.
advisor, colleagues and more experienced researchers, was crucial for defining the end of this stage in my research. From there I moved on from studying the two channels, and began the review of user-generated videos, taking into consideration previous findings: remixing and humour appeared as a central topic in terms of political videos from the observation of YouTube, other online sources, and the study of Citizentube and EUTube.

Looking into all this empirical material had to be guided by methodological orientations. In the next few pages, I will outline the different methods applied in this research, how they were combined and their relevance to this particular study.

Regarding data collection, all information was collected and compiled manually by myself, generating my own databases. Software was only used to store and organise data. The choice against the use of automatic procedures for collection came from my lack of capacity to program my own crawler (i.e., a software agent able to gather information according to pre-defined parameters, in this case from a website) or fully understand how crawlers available online work, namely which criteria they follow while retrieving data. My decision became final as a few experiments revealed incongruities between the data collected and my direct observation (e.g. not identifying videos that I knew existed). I hence reached the conclusion that to centre my empirical research on the results of available crawlers would have been the same as interpreting the answers to a questionnaire whose questions and sampling methods were unknown to me.

Nevertheless, to frame overall video watching practices, I resorted to quantitative data gathered from existing studies and YouTube's statistical information (in particular in section “YouTube, the company” of chapter II), taking care in identifying the source and comparing different results. This quantitative information was merely complementary to a qualitative research methodology. First, the study of new phenomena is commonly carried out by resorting to qualitative approaches (Given 2008). Second, first exploratory steps showed that quantitative data could lead to misleading assumptions, as demonstrated in chapter III.

To analyse these videos and their contextual elements, I followed visual methodologies. “After Benjamin's reflection, many thinkers and theoreticians started recognising throughout the twentieth century the visual traces of modern society and the nexus between technological change, the sensorial mode of perception and the evolution of humanity's forms of existence” (J. L. Garcia 2009b, 262), turning the study of image into an
important insight into sociological objects. In other words, “[s]ociology, photography, video hence provide a system of inquiry and conscientious and interdisciplinary knowledge to methodologically mature a cognitive need: the knowledge of the social world” (Rocca 2007, 40), even if visuals are mostly part of the research process, and not the object of study. Anthropology has a long tradition of applying such methods: images have been used both for recording, illustrating or describing field sites and as part of the interaction with informants (Mead and Bateson 2002). Nevertheless, it is also possible to find these practices in sociology (H. S. Becker 1974; Ferro 2005), especially in the context of ethnography (Pais, Carvalho, and Gusmão 2008). Video in qualitative social science research has been the topic of more and more methodological publications (Heath, Hindmarsh, and Luff 2010; Kissmann 2009). My interpretation was focused on the rhetorical organization of discourse (visual images and verbal texts), identifying key themes, persuasion techniques, complexities and contradictions, aided by a compositional approach (G. Rose 2002). I additionally drew from other image-based research approaches (Prosser 1996; Prosser 1998) and visual sociology (González García 1998; Grady 1996).

The compositional methodology focuses primarily on the site of the image, looking at content, and in the case of moving images, as inspired by the work of James Monaco (2000), the mise-en-scène or spatial organization (characteristics of the frame and the structure of shots, including point of view), the montage or temporal organisation (editing method: the types of cut and the rhythm), and sound (type and relation to the image) (G. Rose 2002). My analysis is complemented by considerations on the site of production, regarding the source of material, the technologies involved, and the creator of the video (to the specific extent I will soon discuss). Finally, the site of audiencing is studied in respect to the social practices of spectating, rather than the social identities of spectators (as distinguished by G. Rose 2002).

The social aspect of visual methodologies is connected to “the range of economic, social and political relations, institutions and practices that surround an image and through which it is seen and used” (G. Rose 2002, 17). Taking this into consideration and understanding the shortcoming of an analysis strictly centred in the image itself, I resorted to methodological tools from ethnographic approaches to studying the Internet (Hine 2000; D. Miller and Slater 2000), and recent online case studies (Millerand, Proulx, and Rueff 2010).
Important lessons were learned from the pioneer studies carried out by YouTube ethnographers such as Patricia Lange (2007a; 2007b; 2011), Michael Wesch (2008), and Michael Strangelove (2010).

Since non-registered users are able to watch and share videos, but they cannot use interactions features (i.e. rating, commenting and uploading videos), I created an account on YouTube. I conducted observations while browsing YouTube, watching videos, their video responses and related videos. I read comments and video descriptions, subscribed and explored YouTubers' channels, as well as watched videos with others. Even if the main impact of my observation over the videos I watched was to increase the number of views, I commented (on and off YouTube), rated, shared and was shared videos by email, through blogs and social networking sites. To be able to study the interface available to the video uploader and experience the process of video-making, I created, edited and uploaded videos as well as attended a workshop specially dedicated to remixing. I showed and discussed YouTube videos in my presentations at conferences and in classrooms.

As a result, my role as participant during the observation process can be defined as somewhere in between an active YouTuber and a lurker, since I did not create many videos, nor interacted heavily with other YouTubers, but I did not just watch YouTube videos, engaging in sharing practices. This makes my behaviour akin to most online video viewers: early surveys pointed towards a “motivated minority of the online video audience,” responsible for uploading, commenting and rating (Madden 2007, iii), and included sharing as a more common practice. Theorisations of user agency in this context have considered it “encompasses a range of different uses and agents,” therefore leading to the high pertinence of developing “a more nuanced model for understanding its cultural complexity” (Dijck 2009, 46). Early studies of YouTube have shown that this website also has a “complex user

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5 Video Vortex #6 workshop “Remixing and Re-Use of Open Video Collections,” March 10, 2011, Amsterdam, Netherlands, organised by the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision in collaboration with the Institute of Network Cultures. My travel and accommodation costs were supported by the Institute of Network Cultures.

6 Lurking is usually described as a more passive form of online behaviour, for example, “reading all the messages posted by community members without ever posting themselves” (Williams 2008, 561).

7 For example, in the case of the just mentioned “lurker” behaviour, “[a] case can be made for lurking being normal and public posting being abnormal. After all, if everyone was posting, who would be reading. It is unfortunate that the term lurker, with all of its negative connotation, has gained acceptance. Fortunately, lurking can now be understood as the many activities related to membership in online groups. Rather than being free-riders, lurkers should be called participants (publicly silent though they may often be)” (Nonnecke and Preece 2000, 7).
Despite the possibility to watch YouTube in external websites due to the embedding feature (explained in chapter II), I watched and reviewed the videos directly on YouTube, since that provided the highest probability of a shared experience and the constancy of contextual elements. On their respective page, YouTube videos are always accompanied by their title, description, tags, category, and statistics. Following the assumption that these different types of content may influence a watcher’s interpretation of a particular video, as a title does to a painting or a caption to a cartoon (G. Rose 2002, 31), they became part of the empirical information to be collected and examined.

By enjoying a complementary relationship, it is possible to argue “there is a dynamic relationship between words and images” (Prosser 1996, 29). In YouTube videos, the linguistic message may perform different functions narrowing the image's polysemy, namely anchorage and relay, to employ barthesian terms. In contextual elements, such as the title, “[t]he denominative function corresponds exactly to an anchorage of all the possible (denoted) meanings of the object by recourse to a nomenclature” (Barthes 1977a, 39). Yet, in other linguistic elements, “the words, in the same way as the images, are fragments of a more general syntagm and the unity of the message is realized at a higher level” (1977a, 41), thereby performing the function of relay. In the case of the videos discussed in chapter VI, it is the transformation of the textual elements (the subtitles above all, but to a lesser degree also the title and description) that changes each instance of the analysed parody. Discourse has yet another presence, once again performing the function of relay, since most of the videos analysed had narration or some sort of dialogue, leading to the transcription and close examination of that textual element in the videos under in-depth scrutiny.

Also a contextual element and given my focus on political discussion, the interaction around the videos, i.e. video responses and comments, had a mandatory inclusion in the empirical corpus. They were equally my main insight into the site of the audience, which in new media can be difficult to engage, specially in a context like YouTube: international,

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8 These two functions are not mutually exclusive, as Barthes tells us “[o]bviously, the two functions of the linguistic message can co-exist in the one iconic whole, but the dominance of the one or the other is of consequence for the general economy of a work” (1977a, 41).

9 As pointed out in studies dedicated to studying practices in everyday life, “[u]sers are hard to perceive as a social group that shares a common technological frame because of their dispersed state of existence, as well as their diverse cognitive and material resources, interests and ideologies. Users inhabit numerous invisible everyday settings” (Bakardjieva 2005, 13)

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scattered, and not necessarily loyal – one needs not to be registered to watch the videos and it is uncertain that a person returns to the watched videos.

“It is important to consider how you are looking at a particular image and to write – or perhaps express visually – that into your interpretation” (G. Rose 2002, 28), that is, reflexivity from the observation process, in addition to intensive engagement in video watching practices, allows a certain compensation for the lack of a more personal engagement with the audience. In other words, the researcher “cannot stand in for every user and recreate the circumstances in which they access the newsgroup, but she can at least experience what it is like to be a user” (original emphasis, Hine 2000, 23).

Moreover, I paid special attention to the profile of the uploader as video producer, whose experience in video-making and online political engagement I tried to specify, whenever possible. My concern was to distinguish the different levels of professionalism and amateurism present in the said user-generated content uploaded on YouTube. This assessment was done from information available online and accessible to all regular users. I decided not to interview or do any type of direct inquiry to the uploaders. My intention was to look at the videos from the same standpoint as the YouTube watcher and base my interpretations of the videos on that information alone. Visual research has mostly downplayed the role of the image’s maker regarding the creation of meaning in recent years (G. Rose 2002, 23), following the influence of Roland Barthes’ (1977b) theory laid out in his famous essay “The Death of the Author.” Both the work developed by research on everyday life (Certeau 1984), and the British Cultural Studies (Fiske 1989a; Fiske 1989b; Hall 1980) have given particular emphasis to the role of the audience in creating meaning.

Studying the continuous development of the website and the company as well as how users dealt with new features and transformations implied consulting YouTube Help Resources (in particular the YouTube Glossary, the Community Help Forums and the Help Centre). I consulted the archive and checked for updates by subscribing to the RSS feed of relevant blogs, namely YouTube's official blog “Broadcasting Ourselves,” Google Public Policy blog, and Citizentube blog. To give context to videos under review, establishing narrative threads and reconstructing public dialogue (Warburton 1998), I looked at other videos, websites, online pages of news media and blogs, adding to the perception of audiencing practices. According to Hine's (2000) description of online ethnographic practices,
we can “think of the ethnography of mediated interaction as mobile rather than multi-sited” (2000, 64).

The findings of my observations were registered in fieldnotes and databases for more quantitative information. Due to the constant changing character of the object, I resorted to preserve empirical data by taking screenshots of the main pages and keeping webshots with Zotero.\textsuperscript{10} All screenshots were taken by myself, except for the early screenshots of YouTube's homepage (Figure 7), collected through the Internet Archive Way Back Machine\textsuperscript{11} and the government removal request (Figure 27), given the restriction only applied to IP (Internet Protocol) addresses from the United Kingdom. The latter was purposely taken by a friend at my request, and therefore not collected online from any website. YouTomb\textsuperscript{12} was also a valuable source for information on videos taken down while I was still studying them and had not saved all the elements necessary for my research.

In terms of ethical concerns, and because my focus is on the videos and not their creators, I chose to privilege carrying out my analysis by identifying videos by their title and often omit the video maker's username.\textsuperscript{13} I proceeded in a similar fashion regarding comments. The exceptions were the channels specifically analysed, videos whose creator is widely known, either by being previously famous (e.g. politicians and artists), or by having

\textsuperscript{10} Zotero is a bibliographical tool integrated as an add-on to the browser Firefox. This application allows the capture of webshots (they provide more complete information, for example, hyperlinks remain active) as well as the retrieval and organization of information about a particular page.

\textsuperscript{11} The Wayback Machine is an initiative of the Internet Archive, a non-profit aiming to create a digital library of Internet sites as well as other digital cultural artefacts. Launched in 2001, it is now offering a BETA test version, due to its move from proprietary software to open source software. In spite of some changes, basic functioning is the same: by introducing a website's URL (Uniform Resource Locator), the Wayback Machine works as a search engine that retrieves archived pages from a specific period of time (as long as they were crawled). The original software was written by Alexa Internet, an Amazon.com company, dedicated to collecting data on browsing behaviour and hence produce web traffic analysis.

\textsuperscript{12} YouTomb is a research project developed by the MIT chapter of Free Culture, a student organization whose goal is to promote the public interest in intellectual property and information and communications technology policy. This project intends to track videos that have been taken down from YouTube due to alleged copyright violation.

\textsuperscript{13} I took into consideration the fact that, even if practices of online ethnography can be regarded as part of an unobtrusive research approach (Vannini 2008), they raise ethical issues, in particular concerning the privacy of the observed: “[n]onparticipant observation studies, conducted through lurking as it were, are ethically feasible only when the group is meant to be easily accessible, when the researcher’s presence would be disruptive if publicized to the group, when the information collected is not sensitive, and when the group’s location and confidentiality can be safely preserved” (2008, 278–9). I would like to note that I never named a private YouTube video in the description of my empirical analysis, as well as avoided naming any video that was only accessible by signing in to YouTube, unless it was uploaded in a very public channel and such restriction was in fact what made it significant (as the example of the video “Film lovers will love this,” discussed in chapter V).
since been interviewed on news media about their YouTube presence (e.g. James Kotecki, Philip de Vellis).

This choice of empirical material poses a great deal of challenges. YouTube is considered to be a particularly unstable object of study, given the characteristics it shares with a medium like television: dynamic change, diversity of content, and “everydayness” (Burgess and Green 2009). My empirical analysis accompanied almost the entire research process, extending from the moment I started studying YouTube videos (February 2008), to the final moments of writing this dissertation (July 2012), since important changes were constantly taking place (e.g. a major redesign of the website in November 2011).

As a result of YouTube videos’ instability as a study object, the researcher is faced with substantial transformations in its empirical data that she/he cannot control, and constant adjustments are required. That was the case with the major redesign YouTube performed in its layout in 2010 described below. In extreme cases, it is possible for the empirical material to disappear. This happened in my research as videos were sometimes taken-down either by the uploader or by YouTube, as in chapter IV.14 In time, and due to changes explained in chapter II, claims put forward by a third-party became more frequent, also rendering videos inaccessible. In chapter VI, I explain a particularly complicated instance of this occurrence, and how I had to manage and adapt to that event. This condition of studying YouTube makes the indication of the observation time frame and a comprehensive description of all the material even more essential. Still, these problems are part of the rich experience of not studying archived material and add an important dimension to the overall analysis:

Part of following a newsgroup in real time is making sense out of the arrival of messages in the wrong order, waiting for responses to messages, and experiencing periods of high and low activity in the newsgroup. With a collapsed ethnographic time frame these features of participant experience are less accessible. […] The utterances of participants might be preserved, but the experience of participating is not (Hine 2000, 23).

Not only is the empirical object unstable, but so are the conceptions and theories for analysing it. A holistic approach seems to be more fruitful in analysing an object still very nebulous. I have therefore based my work in theorisation and empirical work that inscribe themselves in the “cross-disciplinary field of Internet studies,” as described by the Association

14 YouTube cannot be viewed as a trustworthy archive because “[t]he reliability of YouTube as a stable online library is weakened by severe application of copyright as well as users’ whims” (Kim 2012, 65).
of Internet Researchers.\textsuperscript{15} Notwithstanding this point of departure, more established scientific disciplines and knowledge fields – sociology, media studies, anthropology, political theory, economy, literary studies, law and computer science – provided solid contributions to this research. In researching online video and its role in political discussion, it is difficult to escape the arguments put forward by van Dijck on the study of user agency: “[u]ser agency in the age of digital media can no longer be assessed from one exclusive disciplinary angle as the social, cultural, economic, technological and legal aspects of UGC sites are inextricably intertwined” (2009, 55).

\textbf{Structure of the dissertation}

This dissertation is divided into six chapters.

The first chapter, “Debates on Internet, democracy, online relations and cultural production,” presents a brief summary on the issues at the centre of the discussion on the democratic potential of information and communication technology, and gives special notice to existing criticism. This is followed by an overview on the study of online social relations, namely by discussing the “virtual community” model and the rise of concepts such as “collaboration” or “commons.” The last section is dedicated to the view of culture as a participatory process. The final paragraphs explain how online video incorporates these debates.

The second chapter, “YouTube, the company and the website,” describes YouTube both as a company and as a technical infrastructure in constant transformation, and how that mutation compromises its “user-generated ethos” in favour of financial gains, while also having political implications. The third chapter, “News & Politics and political video genres,” presents first findings from studying YouTube political videos, pointing out the complexity in assessing interaction by looking at statistical data, and makes a brief overview of genres in political video, within the context of a general discussion of the connection between YouTube and politics. These two chapters aim to propound the key issues discussed in this dissertation, and therefore often refer to the remaining chapters for a more in-depth analysis of particular topics.

\textsuperscript{15} This international “member-based support network” is responsible for managing a widely subscribed and active discussion list on this subject and organizes an increasingly attended annual conference. Their first conference was in 2000, 14-17 September, in Lawrence, USA, dedicated to “The State of the Discipline.”
The next two chapters study two cases in particular, while establishing connections to other channels and other videos, to compare and contrast views and practices. Chapter IV – “YouTube on YouTube and Politics: Studying Citizentube” provides insight into YouTube's conception of the website's role in politics, from campaigning, to citizen engagement and protest. From the choice of featured videos and the presented definitions of good practice in political videos, to the opinions stated by the interviewed for Citizentube, the mixing of entertainment and politics comes across as being the most advantageous strategy for captivating an audience. Chapter V – “Politicians on YouTube and Politics: Studying EUTube” looks at online video from a top-down perspective, namely by analysing how a political organisation like the European Commission (EC) has approached online video for communicating and engaging citizens, while taking into consideration examples from individual European countries. Animation and humour's increased presence in official videos, and the difficulty of politicians in dealing with interaction are two central themes explored in this chapter.

Finally, and as a result of the findings presented in the two previous chapters, as well as continuous participant observation, Chapter VI – “Remix and humour in the age of online video” consists of a closer look at two sets of videos plus one video in particular, under a theoretical framework on satire and remix. This chapter hence starts with a brief conceptual discussion on humour and politics. The first case study, the Hitler meme and in particular its instances dedicated to political criticism, exemplifies a form of remixing which is not highly demanding from a producer point of view, but very popular online. The second case, the Subversive Remix Video channel, grants an historical perspective on the sources of inspiration for twenty-first century remixers. Finally, I analyse a creation by one of Subversive Remix Video's vloggers, a remix that unlike the meme videos required significant expertise in the manipulation of media content. In this chapter, satirical remixing is identified as a rhetorical practice at the hands of YouTubers, now able to manipulate digitised images from mass media to express opinions and engage in dialogue. However, several limits are recognised, such as the frivolity that may characterise these actions, making them devoid of political meaning, the obstacles to consensus-building it may raise as well as the consequences of resorting to copyrighted material created by the content industries.
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The dynamic character of the subject presents a major difficulty for researchers on Internet and democracy. The volume of scientific work developed and made available on the topics addressed in this investigation is overwhelming, demanding an enormous effort in keeping up with academic research being published in multiple formats, including books and journal articles, but also working papers, essays on media outlets as well as blogposts, as researchers try to avoid being outdated upon publication. Many controversies remain not only regarding the meaning and implications of online practices, but even the very words used to describe them, a direct sign of insufficiencies in conceptualisation.\(^{16}\) The need to integrate multiple perspectives should not mean disregarding the importance of social theory and critical thinking, “[t]he emergence of the Internet has resulted in a plurality of concepts such as Internet economy, digital democracy, cyberculture, virtual community, cyberlove, eParticipation, eGovernment, eGovernance, online journalism, social software, Web 2.0 and so forth. There is no clear meaning of these terms; some of them remain very vague or contradictory” (Fuchs 2009, 75). It is a pivotal task for researchers in this field to contribute to the clarification of the mobilised concepts for studying technologically mediated communication, and that was a focal aspiration while writing my dissertation.

\(^{16}\) For example, whether the preferred term in describing websites like Facebook is “social network sites,” as argued by Boyd and Ellison (2008), or “social networking sites,” as countered by Beer (2008), or “platforms,” to mention a term heavily criticised by Gillespie (2010) and discussed in chapter II; I have already mentioned in this Introduction the opposition of “web 2.0” versus “social web,” which I will further discuss in chapter I; in chapter III, I consider the designations “meme” and “viral” and their widespread use to describe online video.
I.

Debates on Internet, democracy, online relations and cultural production

To fully address the overarching concerns presented in academic works on Internet and politics is well beyond the scope of a dissertation. Nevertheless, my research of the role of online video in political discussion requires a preliminary summary framing the key issues identified in this debate. To begin with, attention is given to reflections on the relation between Internet and democracy, in particular theoretical models of electronic democracy. Although “democracy” as a concept has a much wider scope, my focus on this dissertation is on the aspects concerning citizen participation in political affairs, giving special emphasis to taking part in political discussion, or deliberation.

Given that overly positive outlooks on e-democracy are not consensual, it is also necessary to take into account critical perspectives on the democratic potential of information and communication technologies. Such apprehensiveness is not restricted to concerns regarding the different forms of digital divide that may widen previous social divides, rather it is much wider in scope, including barriers in institutional culture, populism, fragmentation of the public sphere, the transformation of citizenship into consumption, extremism and balkanisation, as well as several issues regarding the control over information, procedures and participants themselves. The following section focuses on the conceptualisation of online relations, namely the “virtual communities” approach and the shift towards alternative stances, as, for example, the emphasis on collaboration. Finally, the production of culture is problematised following participatory paradigms and linking such perspectives with online video.
Internet and democracy

The Internet has often been presented as a standalone solution for the problems of political communication, even of contemporary democracy and citizenship, in a view where the promise of a better world reflects the unprecedented valorisation of information technologies.¹ From this perspective, it is argued that we are “at the very beginning of an entirely new level of civilization” (D. S. Robertson 1998, 179), whose driving force is computer technology. The position held by Robertson is also sustained by authors like Lévy (2002), Negroponte (1995) or Rheingold (1993; 2002). Philippe Breton (2000) describes such stance as part of a pervasive “Internet cult.” In opposition to overly optimistic technology preachers, one can find those who – for dissimilar motivations – are particularly critic towards technology, especially information technology. Some of the most important contributions to the debate on new technologies stem from this critical stance, especially when based on philosophical arguments or arguments of principle. Concerns regarding the excess of mediated experience, the pursuit of technical solutions to non-technical problems and ethical and moral dilemmas are present in the reasoning of various thinkers of technology (Winner 1988; Mitcham 1994; H. Martins 1996; H. Martins 2011; H. Martins and Garcia 2003) even if sociology has for long evaded such focus (J. L. Garcia 2003).

As studies on Internet and politics have brought to light (e.g. Cardon 2010; Cardoso, Carrilho, and Espanha 2002; Chadwick and Howard 2008; Coleman and Blumler 2009; Correia, Fidalgo, and Serra 2003; Oates, Owen, and Gibson 2006; Proulx and Jauréguiberry 2003), the relation between the Internet and citizen participation is a complex issue, requiring reflection from multiple perspectives and disciplines. The issues regarding the loss of public trust in governments and consequently the decline in their legitimacy are as present as the Internet and Web 2.0 in today’s media, academic work and political speeches. This matter has generated vast controversy in which the current democratic model is frequently criticised, even if mainly due to the loss of faith in its processes and institutions and to the consequent onset of a “crisis of disengagement” (Coleman and Blumler 2009, 1).

¹ Information technologies and the unity of people is but the last of a string of connected utopias as, for example, Descartes and Leibniz’ universal language, Saint-Simon’s network, or Teilhard de Chardin’s noosphere. For an overview on the history of the planetary utopia see (Mattelart 2000). For a discussion on how the network and information technologies lost their utopian dimension and became associated with capitalism and globalisation see (Subtil 2007).
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For Habermas, deliberation is pivotal to the democratic procedure, and the role of the public sphere is to enable the mobilisation of “relevant issues and controversial answers, requisite information and appropriate arguments for and against” (2009, 162). The intended result of a communicative circuit between centre and the periphery are “reflected public opinions,” which the media-dominated public sphere can only produce “under favourable conditions” (original emphasis, Habermas 2009, 162–7). Namely, that power-holders are faced with an independent media system and a participatory citizenry. In his view, citizen participation should not be restricted to elections; rather, “collectively binding political decisions should always be taken under the scrutiny of a commenting and monitoring public” (2009, 177).

The existence of a vibrant public sphere – one in which citizens communicate through rational arguments – is considered an essential condition for the functioning of the democratic State, and even its own existence, as had been defended by Habermas (1994 [1962]) in his seminal book The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. Yet, upon revisiting his work, the author states that,

[t]he public sphere, simultaneously prestructured and dominated by the mass media, developed into an arena infiltrated by power in which, by means of topic selection and topical contributions, a battle is fought not only over influence but over the control of communications flows that affect behaviour while their strategic intentions are kept hidden as much as possible (Habermas 1992, 437).

The debate on the desired level of citizen intervention in the matters of the State is marked by confrontation, namely in terms of the intensity, frequency and relevance of citizen participation. Each one bears a specific – and also contrasting – perspective on the virtue and political capacity of citizens. Among supporters of a participatory format, the need for a “strong democracy” has been invoked, characterised by a more engaged citizenship (B. Barber 1984). The championing of direct democracy, with the privilege and exaltation of a more active and full role of the citizen, follows a tradition inspired in Rousseau's work (1981 [1762]).² From this perspective, citizens should be allowed every possible opportunity to

² According to the author of Social Contract, the people under a law should be its own authors and their sovereignty cannot be represented, as much as their will cannot be represented (Rousseau 1981 [1762]). In regard to motivation for participation, the philosopher believes a rational individual finds it to be in his best interest to politically participate, since all acts of government should be subordinated to laws made by the people, and those laws are equally applied to him and his dealings.
directly take part in political decision making, through their rational capabilities and in a
Kantian confrontation of perspectives. Those who defend the democratic potential of ICT are
theoretically closer to the view proposing more directness in democracy (P. D. da Silva 2008),
even if in terms of political orientations this increase in citizen participation is mainly
discussed as a way to strengthen representative democracy (as becomes clear in chapter V of
this dissertation).

Yet, reality is often described as contrasting with the ideal of the active citizen,
associated with a direct democracy filled with vitality. Authors such as Putnam (2000; 2002)
argue we have been witnessing a decline in turnout numbers, in political party and union
membership as well as in citizen trust in key institutions. These are seen as signs of the
deficiency and, for some, bankruptcy of the democratic regime in the existing format. Hence
it is declared that there is a pressing need for action, and political participation itself, as a part
of citizenship, seems to require transformation in its mechanisms. Pippa Norris (2007) claims
that changes are already under way, but are neglected in studies such as Putnam's because of
their partial perspective grounded on a narrow concept of citizen engagement.³

Norris (2001) differentiated between the cyber-optimist, the cyber-pessimist, and the
cyber-skeptic perspectives on the future of the Internet as to civic engagement and political
implications. The element of truth in each depends on the focus of the respective study, the
author argued; there are not many signs of the revitalization of mass participation through
digital direct democracy, but at the same time, she supported that “politics as usual” is not
being replicated in absolute in the online environment as digital technologies contribute to
level the playing field, in particular for “social transnational advocacy networks, alternative
social movements, protest organisations and minor parties, such as those concerned with
environmentalism, globalisation, human rights, world trade, conflict resolution, and single-
issue causes from all shades of the political spectrum” (2001, 19).

Norris (2007) acknowledges a rise of alternative organizational forms of activism
that is related to the growth and mainstreaming of cause-oriented politics. The latter is
opposed to citizen-oriented politics, linked to elections and parties, since it “focus[es]

³ Pippa Norris also questioned Putnam's claims regarding the negative impact of television on citizen
engagement. In her direct reply to this author, she argues “that the relationship between civic engagement and
television viewership is more complex than sometimes suggested,” and furthermore “the charge that
television is the root cause of the lack of confidence and trust in American democracy seems on this basis (in
the weaker version) unproven, and (in the stronger claim) to be deeply implausible” (1996, 479)
attention upon specific issues and policy concerns, exemplified by consumer politics (buying or boycotting certain products for political or ethical reasons), petitioning, demonstrations, and protests. The distinction is not watertight” (Norris 2007, 639–40). The process of globalization as well as privatization, marketization and deregulation have reinforced “the need for alternative repertoires for political expression and mobilization” (2007, 641).

As citizens seem to drift apart from forms of political participation once predominant making many fear the failure of democracy, other forms – referred to as non-conventional – appear to have been gaining visibility and relevance. Looking at approaches that aim to rethink the public sphere as a theoretical construct and as a reality, here one may find proposals that harbour a positive perspective on the fragmentation of the public sphere, turning the criticism on its head, regarding it as a strength and not a sign of demise. Nancy Fraser's (1990) conceptualisation of “counterpublics,” in which distinct publics instil the democratic debate with vitality as opposed to a monolithic and exclusivist public sphere, offers a theoretical framework which provides heuristic possibilities to the study of online citizen participation.5

The focus on online political participation has led to the development of research centred on models of deliberative democracy, generating extensive literature on the subject (reviewed in Bohman and Rehg 2002; Carpini, Cook, and Jacobs 2004; Bächtiger and Pedrini 2010). This increase in relevance is traced back to the 1980s, as liberal representative democracy became the target of increasing theoretical criticism and calls for a more participatory alternative intensified, marking a rupture with instrumental perspectives of democracy (Vieira and Silva forthcoming). Deliberative democracy has hence been analysed in terms of the application of its model to the online context (Esteves 2007; Ferreira 2010), and has been linked to “talking politics online” (Greffet and Wojcik 2008). The relation with ICT has been problematised in works that comprehend current contributions on the study of the public sphere, both on the national and international levels (Calhoun 2004; Correia and

4 This political repertoire still builds from the past since “historically many techniques used by cause-oriented activists are not particularly novel” (Norris 2007, 640).
5 For an analysis of Fraser's criticism and her dialogue with Habermas, see (F. C. da Silva 2002). The philosopher partly reviewed his arguments, including in terms of his neglect to consider the importance of other public spheres: “[it] is wrong to speak of one single public […] Apart from introducing a greater internal differentiation of the bourgeois public […] a different picture emerges if from the very beginning one admits the coexistence of competing public spheres and takes account of the dynamics of those processes of communication that are excluded from the dominant public sphere” (original emphasis, Habermas 1992, 424–5).
Maia 2011; Fossum and Schlesinger 2007).

The spread and development of digital technologies was an important factor in the growing interest in the reshaping of democracy (in both the negative and the positive sense). I have previously discussed how the specific topic of citizen participation and the redesign of citizen-government relations has increasingly regained new strength (P. D. da Silva 2008). As Mattelart points out “[e]ach new generation of technology revived the discourse of salvation, the promise of universal concord, decentralised democracy, social justice and general prosperity” (2003, 23). Such high expectations are due to a “naivety concerning the media,” or in other words, “in believing that the invention and the development of each media not only represents a 'progress' – but even a 'revolution' – regarding its predecessors but also carries [...] a 'progress' – or a 'revolution' – in terms of the different structures of society” (Serra 2007, 170–1). Hence, and similarly to previous media, information and communication technologies (ICT) increased hope in the possibility of tearing down obstacles to a model of democracy characterised by stronger and more frequent citizen participation. The expectations laid upon ICT – and the Internet in particular – as promoters of a more participatory democracy are grounded not only in their ability to supply tools that allow for citizen engagement in public debate and even decision-making, but even further in their condition as motivators for citizens to make use of these tools.

The political world was very fast to make an appropriation of the issue of ICT and their political and social implications. Since the final decades of the twentieth century, there was a proliferation of reports from governments and international organisations with this particular focus. In all these documents a commonality seems to surpass partisan differences: a clear positive connotation in the expression “Information Society.” Their generalised lack of critical perspective and resulting blind-sidedness of political rhetoric urge a cautious analysis:

The enthusiasm with which these technologies are greeted leads us to mistakenly believe that technical change holds the key to solving cultural, political and social problems. It forgets that more information is not better information, that information is not the same as knowledge, and that democracy cannot be reduced to the production and dissemination of more information (J. L. Garcia 2011, 759).

Mattelart continues: “Each time, the amnesia regarding earlier technology would be confirmed [...] Neither the often radically different historical conditions of their institutionalisation, nor the flagrant failure to fulfil their promises regarding their supposed benefits, could make this millenarian world of technological images falter” (2003, 23).
Peter Golding describes information society as “a broad encapsulation of the argument that the growth of ICTs has fostered a wholesale shift in the social order” (2000, 168). For this author, this notion, which in the Western World is tied to a focus on employment and the economy, has marked sociological analysis of the transformations resulting from the rapid expansion of ICT, together with “post-materialism” and “globalisation.” Mattelart (2003) presents us an insightful genealogy of information society, the concept and the project, which can also be described as a powerful metaphor with pragmatic consequences (Proulx 2008). According to the Canadian researcher, 1995, the year that the Internet opened up to commercial endeavours, also marked the universal triumph of such metaphor. In his view, “[t]he universal adoption of the metaphor was less due to a particular theoretical coherence of the concept, but above all given the dissemination of its use by the main governments of industrialised societies and developing countries” (Proulx 2008, 115). Stemming from technological determinism, “information society” is thus a political metaphor that supports the enforcement of a technological and political project connected to economic and financial globalisation, while sustaining world hierarchies of power. Faced with its inevitability – it is the way of progress, it is the solution for late 1900s crises – we feel guilty for obeying a technological imperative, and Proulx suggests that it may be for this reason that we place democratic and communitarian hopes in computers.7

In a redeeming view of information technologies, the advent of information society brings with it an opportunity to overcome the shortcomings of representative democracy, such as poor control over politicians due to large gaps between elections or the excessive influence of lobbyists. In this context some speak of a “new Age of Reason” (Winston 2003) or a “fundamental reinvention of government,”8 in which there would be a transition from the present representative model to a mode characterised by an increase of direct public participation (a position described by Raab et al. 1996, 289). In a more extreme conception, this would even mean the full substitution of the legislative bodies and the traditional functions of political parties by networks created for specific purposes. In this model, the discussion on public policies would be carried out through multimedia interaction, instead of

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7 Proulx (2008) notes the ideological contrast between the preference of “global information society” by governmental and corporate interests, as opposed to the privilege of civil society – and social movements in particular – of the expression “shared knowledge societies.”

8 This expression is found not only regarding new technologies, but also in the appraisal of the application of corporate principles to government (Osborne and Gaebler 1993).
in parliamentary committees.

But how can information and communication technologies contribute to the performance of the “crucial functions in the democratic processes,” in the words of an institution such as the Portuguese Observatory for the Information and Knowledge Society (OSIC 2005)? The first aspect concerns the role of the web as an information source and opinion maker. Since early on, this function has been seen as the one with the highest potential and would produce a substantial enhancement in both the quantity and the quality of information on political topics. The Internet could constitute a valid alternative to the “infotainment” present in old mass media. Information is presented as a primary condition for participation in political debate, decision-making and public policy-making, thus contributing to the basis for a more deliberative democracy. Studies like Henry Milner's (2002) have established a connection between being informed and the perception of effectiveness in participation, and consequently a predisposition to political engagement. When making information access as well as participation easier (and more effective), the obstacles of “resigned cynicism” (Giddens 1996) or “rational ignorance” (a concept by Anthony Downs employed by Fishkin 1997) would be overcome and citizen active participation would increase.

The avid supporters of online media see mediators as obstacles to information circulation and to transparency in several fields, including media and politics (a perspective described by Breton 2000). Therefore, for some researchers, one of the innovations brought by Internet that gave the most significant contribution to the improvement of information quality is the possibility to dispose of intermediaries between the primary information sources and the final receivers, the citizens. First, political agents would regain access to their own mechanisms for delivering messages to citizens. This direct contact is extended to experts and

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9 The reflexions of Tito Cardoso e Cunha may direct us to a possible motive for a clear obsession with more and more information: “to communicate in democracy seems to be today increasingly noisy. Silence still holds in our imaginary the connotation of the repression imposed on the voice and its free expression” (2002, 143).

10 The consequences of media produced entertainment to the critical spirit of citizens is a central subject of reflexion in the study of mass communication, from the Frankfurt School (Horkheimer and Adorno 2000 [1947]; Adorno 2003a [1952-3]), to proposals such as Postman's (1985) or Sartori's (2000), which I will draw from in chapter IV.

11 Specific research on the topic of civic practices has indicated that the higher the importance citizens attribute to their opinion, the higher the tendency for political socialization (Cabrál 2000). Milner proposes “civic literacy” as a designation for “the knowledge and ability capacity of citizens to make sense of their political world” (2002, 1).
pundits who find in the Internet a way to make their opinions known without depending on mass media (Monteiro 1999, 61). The monopoly of traditional media as the purveyors of political information and venue for political debate would hence be affected, enabling the citizen to obtain information from multiple sources. The seeker – namely the information-hungry citizen – is now the informational centre of gravity. Resorting to information technologies, in a search for deeper levels of information according to his aims, the web user builds its own knowledge and perspective from a sort of “cut and paste” of information from multiple origins, creating a personal scrapbook, or the “Daily Me,” as Negroponte (1995) called the result of this collection.

Second, the Internet would allow the dissemination of information not only by those who already used traditional media to do so, but also by the entire population, thereby increasing the diversity in sources. Every one of us now has the ability to create content for everyone else, as argued by the former Portuguese Minister for Science, Technology and Higher Education, Mariano Gago (2002, 31). Blogs were swiftly regarded as having the potential for an even greater growth of this ability, given that they were relatively easy to start and update, at least in comparison with web pages whose creation and maintenance required specific technical skills. This would enable a form of “grassroots journalism,” with the ability to overthrow corporate power over the news (Gillmor 2006). Multiple websites with increasingly simpler and more appealing templates saw their accounts expand, leading some to say “[n]ow that the bloggers are no longer a minority group of vanguardists, but millions of people, probably it does not even make sense to speak of ‘bloggers' anymore” (Granieri 2006, 36).

In the descriptions of a possible e-democracy, the role of information technologies is not entirely restricted to being an information source. Manuel Castells argues that if new technologies facilitate governmental surveillance, they can also “be used for citizens to enhance their control over the state, by rightfully accessing information in public data banks, by interacting with their political representatives online” (1997, 341). In the beginning of the twenty-first century, some of the most common uses of internet as a “tool for online engagement” included: direct contact with politicians through email, e-petitions, polls or forums on social and political issues, as well as on the policies to be implemented (the European Union portal displays a few examples), as a sort of virtual think-tanks, and e-voting
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(for further details on this matter, see OECD 2003). From the second half of the 2000s onwards, social networking services also started to be sought by government institutions to establish a connection with citizens, as will also be discussed regarding the appeal of the social web.

“Electronic democracy” or “e-democracy” is not the only term employed to describe a relation between government and citizens mediated by ICT. Yet, it is undeniable that “e-democracy” together with “e-government” have gained prominence. This rhetoric has found its way into public policies, whose objectives include making information available and delivering online services, as well as implementing consultation and participation tools. Although there is a clear emphasis on the first aspect, there have been some attempts to develop political procedures and instruments aimed for wider citizen participation, outside periodic elections. This set of initiatives is part of an institutional effort in the promotion of Information Society, particularly in discussions related to citizen engagement. E-government as service delivery has been more developed and has a higher level of sophistication than e-democracy as citizen engagement. In a report issued by the Oxford Internet Institute, concerning a workshop with the participation of the British government, it is stated: “The delivery of online public services (‘e-government’) has generally been treated separately from ‘e-democracy’ engagements between government and citizens and within civil society” (Dutton and Peltu 2007, 8). If in what comes to e-government there is a clear investment and a positive outlook is common in progress statements, the promotion of e-democracy towards citizen empowerment is lacking.

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12 The attractiveness of e-mail as a tool for participation was based on combining “the benefits of telephone, letter and fax, without many of the corresponding disadvantages” (Graham 1999, 66), for individuals, as well as groups. Web pages were equally praised for being more impressive (with sound and image – moving and non-moving – besides text), more versatile than pamphlets or catalogues, and interactive, allowing visitors the possibility of feedback. Chat rooms, in turn, have been both praised (Sá 2002) and criticised (Hill and Hughes 1998) as a format for online discussion.

13 Castells (1996) equally highlighted two other scopes of citizen participation: experiments of civic participation on the local level, and ICT-supported of the actions associated to the “new movements” (social, environmental, and humanitarian). Regarding the former, an example of such experiments that has become more and more common, in terms of practice and as study object, consists of initiatives in participatory budgeting (Peixoto 2009). As to the “new movements” – or even “new, new” (Feixa, Pereira, and Juris 2009) – it has been noted that “[g]iven their larger flexibility, social movement organizations have emerged as more open to experimentation and permeable to technological changes, with a more innovative and dynamic use of the Internet” (Della Porta 2011, 811). In 2011, online engagement gained a more revolutionary lens (in the promotion of terms such as “wiki-revolutions,” Castells 2011). The “Arab Spring”, the “Indignados” in Spain, the “March 12th Movement” in Portugal, and the Occupy movement in the USA, events spread all over the world, were associated to the democratic potential of the social web (Kluivenberg 2011; for a critical discussion see Christensen 2011).
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Despite this widespread presence in official documents as well as in academic work, e-democracy is not a clear concept, sharing such weakness with many other terms employed in Internet studies (as noted in the Introduction). Thomas Zittel (2004) notes how it is associated with various online phenomena, and, in fact, it has become an “umbrella concept” for distinct online practices. According to this author, “electronic democracy is a multidimensional discourse” (2004, 236), albeit mainly focused on how technology can enhance participatory forms of democracy. Rachel Gibson et al. (2004) note that the first theorisations of Internet and democracy centred themselves on the former's capacity to promote direct democracy, and yet, very few significant changes could be noticed. Moreover, the prevalence of a political communication approach turned the focus of the existing studies on institutions and their adaptation to the Internet to media and styles of communication.

Different models have been proposed, each highlighting a specific set of characteristics. As previously discussed, the praising of ICT as offering solutions to failures in contemporary democratic systems is often linked to participatory notions, while the enhancement of representative democracy is mainly present in public policy, at least at the European level. In chapter V, I attempt to make this point clearer from the analysis of EU action plans and other strategic documents, but also by noting how the practices in online video of the European Commission and European politicians imply a narrow sense of interaction with the citizen. Largely dominating “mainstream digital democracy thinking and practice” in the USA, Oceania and Europe, such position has been described as the “liberal-individualist position” and is allegedly “the easiest option to realize” due to pervasiveness of

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14 Coleman and Blumler demonstrated how the British Government carried out a rhetorical construction of e-democracy in the United Kingdom, particularly through the treatment it started receiving in political speeches from the late 1990s onwards (2009, 141–8). Golding makes a similar claim in respect information society, also referring to British politics, “if the birth of the information society is inevitable, it will none the less not lack for powerful and rhetorically insistent midwives” (2000, 169).

15 Zittel identifies three dimensions of democracy: jurisdictional, representative, and decisional. Each provides the basis for a different model of e-democracy and can be analysed at the constitutional, the institutional and the behavioral levels (2004, 234–6).

16 Presenting a discussion of four typologies proposed by Martin Hagen, Jan van Dijk, Christine Bellamy, and Joan Subirats, Fernando Harto de Vera points to the existence of two main positions between which the debate seems to move: from a complementary perspective, the application ICT would aim to “improve the capacities and the performance of representative democracy,” as opposed to a view in which the goal is the “overcoming of this representative democracy, replacing it, to a lesser or greater extent, by mechanisms of direct democracy” (2006, 42).
its rhetoric and practice (Dahlberg 2011, 866). Still, the position connected to the values and practices of deliberative democracy has become more influential in these areas of the world, and not only strictly in connection with information and communication technologies and the assessment of their political potential, as mentioned above. In respect to the latter, given their alleged “ability to foster dialogue, debate and discussion” (Correia 2008, 88), recent social theory has claimed the adequateness of the use of information and communication technologies to the deliberative model of democracy, also called a “pluralist democracy” (Dijk 2012).

Despite claiming some skepticism as to a model of democracy centered in public deliberation, Coleman and Blumler support “a more deliberative democracy,” one where public talk would be encouraged and taken seriously, in its multiple forms, and that “would seek to connect a wide range of consultative and participatory projects, as well as fragmentary and informal public conversations, to the everyday workings of political policy formation and decision-making” (2009, 38). These authors defend contemporary democracy is in dire need of help and that the solution to its problems cannot be restricted to changes in the technologies used in public communication, even if the online networks have a contribute to give in overcoming the barriers of distance, time and scale that previous hindered deliberation. Coleman and Blumler regard the Internet “as an empty space of power which is both vulnerable to state-centric (and for that matter, corporate) strategies and open to occupation by citizens who have few other spaces available to express themselves in constructive democratic ways” (2009, 9).

Even if there is a positive outlook in these accounts of e-democracy regarding the potential of information technologies for democracy, especially in respect to a model that promotes deliberation, there is also a perception of the existence of constraints to the full realization of all hopes and expectations in e-democracy. Researchers like Golding (2000) fear that “net politics” may result in individualisation, unequal access and disenfranchisement, the exact opposite of the prevailing political discourse. In the following section, I will present the chief concerns that inhabit the discussion on online political participation and e-democracy policies.

17 Recognising, as Zittel and Harto de Vera, the existence of multiple viewpoints on e-democracy (although he names it “digital democracy”), Lincoln Dahlberg offers an outline of four positions, namely the just mentioned liberal-individualist, deliberative, counter-publics, and autonomist Marxist (2011).
Critical perspectives on e-democracy

Despite all the possibilities that are highlighted, the praising of e-democracy does not gather complete consensus, as is also the case regarding the general social, philosophical and moral debate on technology. Garcia points out that, although “[s]tudying the influence of the Internet shows how relevant it is to the level of multiplication of information sources, the weathering of the monopoly of media companies, and new discussion instruments,” one must take into consideration “problems regarding information reliability, new social limits (the digital divide) and, in particular, the transformation of the public sphere” (2011, 758). Even an institution with an overall positive assessment, like the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), cautions that “in applying ICTs to the democratic process care has to be taken not to make democracy a more vulnerable concept” (2003, 60). In the the last section I tackled shortcomings in conceptualisation, offering a measure of clarification of at least the central assumptions underlying different proposals. The implications of a process of commodification of the web – already noted in the Introduction and again addressed in the following chapter – are intertwined with many of the sources of criticism. The central topic of “net neutrality” in respect to the power of corporations, but also to the eagerness of governments to control electronic communications (usually under the guise of the fight against cybercrime), is unavoidable while looking into the dilemmas of the digital age.

Nevertheless, the main warnings have addressed the possibility of a deeper divide and discrimination resulting from the implementation of an e-democracy: a digital and participation divide with wider social repercussions. Besides these issues concerning the digital divide – here understood in a broad sense, not solely restricted to access to technology – other representativeness problems must be taken into account, namely the tendency for people with extreme positions to participate more and their efforts to skew instances of participation. Finally, this discussion must focus the assumption that “those disengaged from civic life offline are the least likely to be mobilised by online opportunities” (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UN 2008, 113), and how that affects e-democracy expectations.

One may consider that “there are perennial issues that are raised with each new development, from writing, to the telegraph, to the telephone, to radio and television, and to the Internet” (Everard 2000, 132). Assuming that Internet connections, hardware and software
tend to become cheaper and easier to handle, looking at the growing number of “connected people” and given low requirements in terms of skills, some voices argued that the divide would tend to close. Following Negroponte's (1995) optimism regarding the nature and thus future of the technological gap, generational theories describe “the net generation” (Tapscott 1998), “millenials” (Winograd and Hais 2008) and “digital natives” (Prensky 2001a; 2001b; Palfrey and Gasser 2008) as naturally apt for enjoying all the social, economic and political benefits of information and communication technologies.18

According to one of the main references in the study of the diffusion of innovations, Everett Rogers, “[t]he Internet has spread more rapidly than any other technological innovation in the history of humankind” (2003, xix). Yet, Rogers recognises technological innovations and their adoption have undesirable consequences, among which is the widening of pre-existing socioeconomic gaps.19 In this context, he defines the “digital divide” as “the gap that exists between individuals advantaged by the Internet and those individuals relatively disadvantaged by the Internet” (2003, 474). The differentials in access have indeed been at the centre of many debates on the balance between benefits and drawbacks brought about by ICT (see Rifkin 2000). In recent years, the formula “have/have nots” has been problematised, and the portrayal of the digital divide in relation to the reproduction of inequality is currently regarded as more complex and multifaceted (Almeida, Alves, and Delicado 2011). The term “digital divide” designates unequal access to information technology, on the one hand, and lack of skills to use them, on the other hand, whether they relate to handling a computer and web technology, or to information management.20

Pippa Norris distinguishes the democratic divide aspect of the digital divide as signifying “the difference between those who do, and do not, use the panoply of digital resources to engage, mobilize, and participate in public life” (2001, 4), and which may perdure even if Internet penetration rates reach maximum levels. Norris states that despite the reduction in information and communication costs in digital politics, at the individual level,

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18 Lead scholars in the research on the online practices of children and youth offer a more balanced perspective, recognising possibilities and limitations to the perception of children as inherently media savvy (see Livingstone 2011). For a critical discussion on the discourse on the digital native, especially in literacy debates see (Thornham and McFarlane 2011; A. Alves 2012).
19 Rogers (E. M. Rogers 2001) links this perspective on the digital divide with research developed under the knowledge gap hypothesis (c.f. Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien 2002 [1970]).
20 Despite having a mainly optimistic take on ICT, an author like Castells acknowledges the risk of a new “Athenian democracy,” in which “the uneducated, switched off masses of the world, and of the country, would remain excluded from the new democratic core” (1997, 351).
the Internet does not contribute to an increase in motivation for political activism (similarly to what was observed regarding mass media).\textsuperscript{21}

The main goal of policies and initiatives promoted to bridge the digital divide is to avoid strengthening formerly existing disparities in financial capacity, power, class and geography. Bennett and Entman, in their introduction to Mediated Politics. Communication in the Future of Democracy, validate the relevance of the problem of access arguing that it concerns the entire process of communication, and not just a particular medium: “access to communication is one of the key measures of power and equality in modern democracies” (2001, 2). In this compilation, Oscar Gandy Jr. emphasises the fact that “people may have the same 'rights', but the circumstances they face in attempting to exercise those rights means that the rights they enjoy are far from equivalent” (2001, 142). The same inequality in the ability of making oneself heard is feared to persist in the so-called new media, “at present there is good evidence to think that relative wealth shows itself on the Internet as much as in any other medium” (Graham 1999, 79). We would thus still face the risk of witnessing the return of restricted suffrage, given that citizens with fewer resources – whether financial, of time or energy – might be destined to a less active political role.\textsuperscript{22} As a result, the representativeness of consultation processes or even more intense forms of engagement would remain at high risk. Splichal notes some of the hazards this condition brings to democracy and how it is largely neglected, as opposed to other forms of discrimination. In his own words,

[T]he view on which the number of votes citizens have should depend on their taxable income, or any other external inequality, would obviously be considered antidemocratic because citizens would be unequal in terms of votes. Yet this is usually not thought to be the case with regard to the unequal availability of influence in a stage prior to the voting process (Splichal 1999, 302).

Apart from the concern with access and basic skills required for using a computer or surfing the net, the investment and inclusion in state educational programs of media literacy modules are also discussed. It is not, however, a new proposal. It was already recommended regarding mass media consumption by authors such as Masterman (1985). In addition, before

\textsuperscript{21} Political participation, especially voting, has been linked not only to income levels, but also to linguistic, technical, organisational and communicational skills. However, having the necessary skills and resources does not mean they will be applied in political participation (Magalhães 2001).

\textsuperscript{22} The same concerns are expressed regarding equality in deliberative forums, both in terms of access and the ability to fully participate in them (Vieira and Silva forthcoming).
acquiring online competencies, one could argue that citizens must learn other basic informational skills. Benjamin Barber supports that they should, for instance, “learn how to go looking for the datum they need, in a library or laboratory, rather than gaining easy access to endless streams of data for which they have no need at all” (2003, 44), viewed as an essential foundation upon which to build.

As mentioned before, studies point to a more pervasive online practice of sharing personal thoughts and creations, namely through blogs and the social web. However, regarding own content production, some exploratory work indicates that a “participation divide” based on socioeconomic status still exists, which raises concerns as to further inequality as online cultural participation gains more social importance (Hargittai and Walejko 2008). Even if a wider public has the opportunity to make their voice heard due to lower costs in participation, a tendency towards centralisation continues to be found, since few changes were verified in terms of the agents that are successful in their endeavours, and it is these that still concentrate high visibility (Gonzalez Bailon 2007, 248). In contrast, rather than a persistent inequality that translated itself to the online world, Clay Shirky considers the distribution of blogs according to power laws a predictable result of the very act of choosing, “[i]n large systems where many people are free to choose between many options, a small subset of the whole will get a disproportionate amount of traffic (or attention, or income) even if no members of the system actively work toward such an outcome” (2006, 36).

It is recognised that “established media and Internet businesses have increasingly acquired UCC platforms for commercial purposes” (OECD 2007, 18). In his appraisal of these matters, Proulx alerts governments that the “passage from a universe of consumption to that of citizenship” (2007, 11) is only possible if a wider public has access and is able to make its own appropriation of new information technologies. Esteves proposes a form of “public service” regarding online networks, because he fears that “a new exclusivism can already be on the rise – with the imposition of new restrictions to information access and to user interaction, which has increasingly become the rule in the world of the so-called e-economy” (2007, 221). Moreover, there are reports of biased bloggers under false names, hiding their interests, bloggers being paid to review a specific issue or just to mention a product or service (European Commission 2011)\(^\text{23}\) whereas “astroturfing” – false grassroots participation – has

\(^{23}\) “[S]everal Member States have reported that cosmetic companies have paid bloggers to promote and advertise their products on a blog aimed at teenagers, unbeknownst to other users” (European Commission
become a valid concern regarding political blogs (Farrell and Drezner 2008). For Golding, “politics has itself become part of the commercial embrace” (2000, 175).

Aside from the need to develop skills for active citizenship and digital literacy, an increase in participation tools and mechanisms demands that government officials or civil servants assigned to them become capable of mastering the technologies being used by citizens, as well as improve communication skills such as clearness in the presentation of the topics under discussion or the ones required in the moderation of online discussions. In addition, even if consultation and participation processes have able participants on both sides of the institutional fence, how a government can receive and deal with the contribution of citizens, more so in a context of large numbers, is a pivotal – albeit ignored – challenge. It is not just a logistic and technical problem, concerning the number of human and technological resources. It implies a change in mentality towards a good acceptance of more regular contributions from the citizenry, and the resulting willingness to model policies accordingly.

Fuchs observes that “[e]verybody can then voice her or his opinion on the Web, but nobody will care about it because the real decisions are still taken by the elite groups. The information produced then constitutes an endless flood of data, but not significant political voices” (2009, 83). Or, in other words, if the motives for engaging citizens are merely populist or a way to escape making hard decisions, and if policies do not reflect the contributions of citizens, then there is no improvement in government-citizen relations, quite the opposite. As a result, there can be a total refusal of the citizens to make use of information technologies for engagement purposes or a manipulation of participation tools and supplied information.

Too often the public is asked for its views about an issue – by government, individual politicians, the media or interest groups – only to discover later that the policy has already been decided and that consultation is taking place either as a formality, because there is a duty to consult, or in order to claim public support for a controversial decision. […] If citizens' deliberative input is manipulated or ignored, increased confidence in democracy will soon turn into an increase sense of inefficacy, cynicism and resentment (Coleman and Blumler 2009, 38–9).

24 The difficulty in achieving proficiency in moderation will be addressed in chapter V, in which I outline the complexities of the task and how European institutional actors have dealt with managing online comments.
Moreover, online polls call upon the spectre of “couch-potato politics” and “push-button democracy” (Raab et al. 1996, 290), if they push political debate to the background and turn participation into an electronic gathering of thoughtless opinions. As critics point out in respect to the excessive expectations laid on the Internet, slacktivism is only the push of a button away (Morozov 2011).

In other words, “communication can shape power and participation in society in negative ways, by obscuring the motives and interests behind political decisions, or in positive ways, by promoting the involvement of citizens in those decisions” (Bennett and Entman 2001, 2). According to the United Nations, the latter does not seem to be prevailing: “only 11 per cent of countries surveyed committed themselves to incorporating the results of e-participation into the decision-making process. This figure clearly indicates that the majority of governments are not in a position to directly involve citizens into the decision-making process” (2008, 65). Short-term focused governments may feel the temptation to over-resort to polling; yet, speed is not an absolute value in democratic system: “In a strong, deliberative democracy, however, this lickety-split virtue, the capacity to operate in a hurry, becomes a defect. In a strong democracy, the primary civic injunction is ‘slow down!’” (B. Barber 2003, 38).

Studies on online everyday practices reveal “a discrepancy between the ways these bodies [public institutions] framed their relationship with the prospective users of their Internet services, and the expectations of users themselves” (Bakardjieva 2005, 194). This resulted from different models of communication being privileged: the “traditional information-producer/provider versus client model” by the government, “dialogue” by the citizens. Genuine political will towards participatory politics is required for trust to be built and for engagement initiatives to be positive for democracy. In the absence of such will of the State and its bodies, the possibility of usage of these participation tools and even the supply of information do not bring citizens closer to the government, nor does it make the latter more transparent. In fact, there is nothing more opaque than the illusion of transparency.

Despite the dismal findings of her research, Bakardjieva (2005) maintains online participation can still be successful if the interests of citizens lead the process, instead of those of governments. Yet, it may be difficult to find a common ground for all stakeholders. Whether due to exacerbated individualism, or to the loss of “media-based interpretative
communities” (Dahlgren 1993), the public sphere seems to be breaking into pieces, while giving birth to multiple, and turned inwards public spheres. Argumentative persuasion in public discussion faces more obstacles, as an universal auditorium is replaced by an infinity of rhizomatic audience members (Cunha 2004). This fragmentation of the public sphere brought on by ICT is seen as having negative consequences, as before had been argued regarding segmented television (Bennett and Entman 2001; Wolton 1999). In a direct reference to Negroponte's personal newspaper, mentioned above, Neuman forewarns: “If each of us reads our electronically filtered 'Daily Me' we reinforce our own beliefs and opinions and know less about out neighbours' beliefs and concerns” (2001, 303). Sunstein makes similar criticism to Negroponte's dreams of personalisation, and warns again the design of “something like a communications universe of their own choosing” (2007, 3). First, he argues, unplanned encounters, that involve unsought viewpoints, help to avoid extremism; second, a shared range of experiences – including mediated ones – contributes to less social fragmentation.

Habermas himself reflected on the democratic merits of online discussion, situating such positive contribution in authoritarian contexts, and pointed out its shortcomings in liberal regimes. For the philosopher and sociologist, online debates benefit political communication if their aim is mobilisation and their focus “real processes,” namely election campaigns and current controversies. The scholar argues that:

[T]he emergence of millions of 'chat rooms' scattered throughout the world and of globally networked 'issue publics' tends rather to fragment the huge mass public, which in the public sphere is centered on the same issues at the same time in spite of its size. This public disintegrates in virtual space into a large number of contingent fragmented groups, held together by special interests. As a result, the existing national publics seem to be undermined rather than reinforced. The Web provides the hardware for the delocalization of an intensified and accelerated mode of communication, but it can itself do nothing to stem the centrifugal tendencies. For the present, there are no functional equivalents, in this virtual space, for the structures of publicity which reassemble the decentralized messages, sift them, and synthesize them in edited form. (Habermas 2009, 157–8)

Dahlgren, however, notes that the segmentation of the audience and the resulting “differentiated interpretive communities” (Dahlgren 1993, 17) are simultaneous with the possibility of a global citizenship. Cf. Calhoun's discussion on the possibility of an international public sphere (Calhoun 2004).
As Fidalgo reminds us, “[i]t is true that the Internet offers like any other medium access to the widest variety of content, however, experience shows that the use actually done of the Internet is concentrated in a reduced number of routines, visited pages and contacted people” (2011, 70). For this researcher, such restriction is enhanced by a cellphone-enabled “always connected” condition which maintains us under the strong influence of our primary groups (as described by Cooley), keeping us closed in our private world. Moreover, in the online world, it can be very easy to consider our own positions as more valid and even the only legitimate ones, while ignoring and questioning the credibility of all contrary arguments. These conditions create obstacles to consensus building, and may promote a deficit in solidarity and predisposition to compromise (Raab et al. 1996). “For a healthy democracy, shared public spaces, virtual or not, are a lot better than echo chambers” (Sunstein 2007, 95), as group polarization and the balkanization of opinions make it harder to reach the common ground necessary for democratic life.

Those who do desire to diversify their sources of information may find a confusion of voices that generates the so called “lost in space” feeling: “[t]he constant promise that a vital piece of information or a vibrant place of virtual life are just out there, slightly beyond our reach, often drives those in online life further into the embrace of information” (Jordan 1999, 119). The great number of information sources also raises the issue of how to trust the information one comes across. Internet apostles rebut on the grounds that “websites are produced and maintained by people and institutions that sign their contributions and stand up for their validity before the internet community” (Lévy 2002, 267); moreover, a “sort of public opinion” operates in the Internet helping to discern which are the best sites. The fact is that the identity of the producer is not always clear (Dahlgren 2001, 51) and this applies to websites, but also to the lists produced by said “public opinion.” In addition, online common practices like mass linking – on blogs, for instance – may result in the blurring of “the line between sometimes vitriolic attacks and much more responsible opinion writing” (Sunstein 2007, 60).

It is important to recognise that not all citizens will resort to information technologies

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26 “The autonomous exercise of reason fades away in a fully connected society. Instead of taking a stand, the individual tends to act and react under any circumstance accordingly to the expectations of those close to him” (Fidalgo 2011, 71). Fidalgo concludes his reflection by stating that “[t]he permanent and ubiquitous connection made by cellphones is today an objective cause of much of the supervised thought” (“pensamento tutelado” in the original, 2011, 72).
to improve democracy. Since the free exchange of information is also attractive to extremists promoting hate speech (Whine 1997), it is perhaps true that “for every Web page concerned with human rights, there is probably another devoted to advancing a white supremacist cause” (Hill and Hughes 1998, 13). Moreover, extremism threatens representativeness in discussion settings that may have not started with that characterization. Fiorina argues that in specific situations, namely when the probability for individual participation to have any influence is small – at the national level or when it involves a large number of participants, as well as when the outcome is obvious – instead of being instrumental, political behaviour can be expressive, i.e., the expression of a preference for a political outcome: “actions may have intrinsic value – rather than means to other ends, actions may be ends in themselves” (1999, 419). It is regarded as a problem because expressive participation tends to often be more extremist and ideologically motivated, two characteristics that complement each other.

For authors such as Fiorina, the phenomenon of extremism should not be considered an exception, since it has become generalised and its impact is felt in several community issues, besides being prone to acquiring visibility. Consequently, a more participatory democracy does not imply that the participation occurring in it is representative and, therefore, takes into account the interests of the whole society. This situation risks exponential growth because a strong presence of extreme positions may lead to more moderate participants being pushed away. These tend to avoid public discussions dominated by extreme positions, not only for the exacerbated rhetoric, but also for the topics themselves. Such restriction over the plurality in the views of participants is enhanced if, along with extreme voices, individuals commonly known as “trolls” and “flamers” disrupt discussion, sometimes even overtaking forums and comment sections. The impact of these interferences shall be addressed in this thesis, from a conceptual perspective in chapter III and as an empirical issue in chapter V.

It is difficult to safely say that the engagement of citizens is positive in itself, since extremist or egotistical participation may have negative effects on social life by saturating the public sphere. As a result, it is imperative to assure the representativeness of the people who participate, which implies, among other things, making social inequality irrelevant for this purpose and to dilute extremist positions. However, this sort of action is insufficient if the quality of participation is not fostered and turned into a primary goal. To achieve this, one
must not forget that “the democratic appropriation of new interactive technologies requires patient dialogue between cultures” (Mattelart 2003, 151), and not “one-size fits all” solutions.

A very important question affecting online practices, in general, and citizen engagement specifically, is the question of control: control over information, over procedures, over participants themselves. Control over information brings us to the issue of mediation on the web. As discussed in the previous section, the end of mediation has been heralded as the end of the promise of bringing citizens and government closer, enabling a more direct and even intimate relation. In chapter IV and V, that is clearly the prevailing rhetoric politicians resort to while describing the benefits of an online presence. And yet, filtering is inevitable, we need “to impose some order on an overwhelming number of sources of information” (Sunstein 2007, 52). For Barber, “[t]he question is not whether or not to facilitate, mediate and gate-keep. It is which form of facilitation, which mediation, which gatekeeper?” (2003, 42). The political importance of technical infrastructure in the selection and ranking of information has been the object of study for over a decade. In Lucas Introna and Helen Nissenbaum's decisive contribution to this line of research, the authors warn against the increasing “evident tendency of many of the leading search engines to give prominence to popular, wealthy, and powerful sites at the expense of others” (2000, 181). Such prominence is given by humans, paid to make such selection (for instance, promoted links on Google and promoted videos on YouTube, as noted in chapter II), but also determined by “technical mechanisms of crawling, indexing, and ranking algorithms” (2000, 181). Similar concerns have been raised in the works of Richard Rogers (2004) on information politics, who recently contributed to a monograph dedicated to the “politics of search” (K. Becker and Stalder 2009).27 The current debate on net neutrality – on the dangers of the control over access to content or Internet sites by Internet Service Providers (ISPs) – has not disregarded the importance of the algorithm in shaping Internet communication (McKelvey 2010).

Concerns regarding network neutrality and open standards have certainly grown, in part because “[t]he very real threat of the creation of an internet tiered in terms of speed and

27 His chapter, “The Googlization Question, and the Inculpable Engine,” raises concerns regarding “algorithmic concentration,” as other search engines emulate Google, the lack of plurality in the returns, and the profiling of taste, especially in terms of an often overlooked aspect: how personalisation makes us partially responsible for those results, therefore rendering Google “inculpable” (R. Rogers 2009a). Vaidhyanathan's (2011) work, referenced in Rogers' analysis and which has since assumed the form of the book The Googlization of Everything (And Why We Should Worry), has strongly contributed to foster related discussion.
access, and dependent on the ownership and control of physical infrastructure and content, highlights the importance of the hardware and software upon which the net operates” (Everitt and Mills 2009, 762). The recent state of events has led some of its strongest supporters declare that “[t]he Web as we know it” is at risk (Berners-Lee 2010). On a policy perspective, governments have followed four approaches: restricting the action of ISPs through legal regulation; forcing ISPs to be transparent in their practices; allowing ISPs to act as they please; and finally enforcing governmental control (Stover 2010).

Recent research on Internet control has demonstrated that “[i]nstead of a network of networks, therefore, it is perhaps more accurate to characterize the internet as a network of filters and chokepoints” (original emphasis, Deibert 2008, 324). Internet content filtering through address blocking or content analysis, to name but two common techniques, has become increasingly pervasive, with very little transparency or accountability of governments towards the respective citizenry (Deibert et al. 2008; Deibert et al. 2010). Social web companies often carry out Internet content filtering, on the grounds of copyright claims: on YouTube, for instance, the availability of videos is known to be restricted by geographical location, and content is filtered automatically to verify copyright violation. However, as equally discussed in the next chapters, filtering is not in fact restricted to copyright control, as governments increasingly approach companies like Google and subsidiary YouTube with take-down or blocking requests.

Regarding control over procedures, chapter V describes how governments show little permissiveness as to a more active role of citizens in designing consultation and participation initiatives. Nevertheless, online procedures are under other forms of control, even when participation in political debate is unsolicited, unstructured and outside an official setting – namely taking place on the social web. Technical and marketing decisions concerning website design as well as available features place restrictions on what individuals have access to, their interpretations and their actions. This is discussed at length in chapter II resorting to YouTube as an illustration of how the redesign and new features may direct users to certain patterns of behaviour, even if there are those who are able to subvert the expectations of the company.

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28 Marketing’s influence goes beyond the distribution and the promotion of technological products: it has an intervention regarding the technical features of said products, therefore interfering in the conception and design stage (Mendonça 2012).
Finally, in respect to control over participants, the high potential for surveillance and debates on privacy are at the centre of the concerns, “opening up a conversation about technology, privacy, and civil society is not romantically nostalgic, not Luddite in the least. It seems like part of democracy defining its sacred spaces” (Turkle 2011, 264). It both comprises the State as a “Big Brother” and the various “Little Brothers” swarming the Internet. As Andrejevic points out, this form of data “has been around as long as commercial broadcasting, but digital technology makes it easier and cheaper to collect than ever before. One of the advantages of an interactive platform for the delivery of commercial content is that it enables the capture of increasingly detailed information about patterns of user behavior and response” (2009, 415). The gathering of information under the form of metadata collection constitutes a form of surveillance (Lyon 1994), and raises concerns as to the violation of privacy, carried out more often by private institutions than by the government (Etzioni 1999). This collection is characterised by a dual asymmetry: one based on power (control over the metadata), whereas the other is epistemic (knowledge of the monitoring procedures) (Brunton and Nissenbaum 2011). Such state of events has led to reflections on available options in regulation dedicated to surveillance and privacy that may tackle the increasing complexity of online activities (Raab 2008).

Still, besides the damaging consequences to democratic practice of the pervasiveness of commercial data-mining, online participation is affected by the apprehensiveness as to the possibility of State of acquiring a substantial capacity for control over citizens. People with unconventional views may not wish to express them: for political communication to occur through the Internet it is has to be trustworthy (Raab 1997, 155), or, in other words, effective in eliminating fear of retaliation for speaking up. If in dictatorial regimes such anxiety is consensually viewed as being well-founded (highlighting the courage of the people involved in the online face of resistance to the regime in China, the so called “Green Revolution” in Iran and the “Arab Spring” in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya), in democratic countries it was until recently considered to be less grounded.

In the beginning of the twenty-first century, one may be led to conclude that arguments have been provided for increasing control by democratic governments. Child pornography is a long-standing motive given by States for controlling online information
flows. Terrorism has been often presented as a reason for a tighter control over the information circulating on the Internet and who circulates the information, especially in the wake of September 11, 2001. The scope of the monitoring taking place sometimes leaks to the pages of the media in anecdotal but revealing accounts, as for example in the coverage of how two British tourists were allegedly prevented from entering the USA due to humorous remarks on Twitter (A. Martins 2012). In addition, events like the London riots have originated claims from the prime minister of a need to track suspicious behaviour on the social web (Halliday 2011b; Halliday and Garside 2011), a course of action promptly criticised by a journalism professor in a comment column: “[b]eware, sir. If you take these steps, what separates you from the Saudi government demanding the ability to listen to and restrict its BBM networks? What separates you from Arab tyrannies cutting off social communication via Twitter or from China banning it?” (Jarvis 2011). A recent study from Verizon, a global telecommunications company, in partnership with several security forces, distinguishes the actions of professional cybercriminals and activist groups, and highlight the exponential rise of hacktivism in 2011 (Verizon RISK Team 2012). Yet, such distinction may be less clear in the eyes of public authorities. News reports indicate there has been a strong effort by police forces to track down and arrest members of Anonymous, an amorphous group known for defacing public websites, distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks, among other strategies, with political intent (BBC 2011). Hacktivism in general has been described as the “al-Qaeda of cyberspace” by government officials, while discussing cybersecurity policies (S. Alves 2012). By contrast an author like Jonathan Zittrain distinguishes between “good” and “bad” hackers, and argues that the former should “take ownership of the challenges posed by their malicious siblings and create the tools needed to help nonhackers keep the Net on a constructive trajectory” (2009, 245). The refusal to do so leads to the more commonly

29 The study developed by Howard et al. traces this back to the early days of public use of the Internet: the first reported example “of state censorship, legislation, and regulation of information received online” occurred in 1995 and concerned an order by German prosecutors to prevent four millions subscribers worldwide to access sex-related information, as the result of a police investigation into child pornography (2011, 219).

30 The Australian Federal Police, the Dutch Tech Crime Unit, the Irish Reporting and Information Security Service, the Police Central e-Crime Unit of the London Metropolitan Police, and the United States Secret Service.

31 According to this study, “[t]he frequency and regularity of cases tied to activist groups that came through our doors in 2011 exceeded the number worked in all previous years combined” (Verizon RISK Team 2012, 19). The responsible for this quote was the Deputy to the Portuguese Minister for Internal Affairs. Pedro Esteves justifies such characterisation since “there is no brain, it is a network” and it “is a radical movement because there is no compromise, it does not accept any truce” (cited in S. Alves 2012).
supported solutions of lockdown (closed applications and devices, either by software or hardware) and governmental control.

A comparative case study analysis developed by Howard et al. (2011) on state intervention over digital networks resulted in a collection of such events from 1995 to 2010, resorting to multiple sources. A total of 101 countries was involved in 566 unique incidents, of which slightly over half (51%) took place in authoritarian regimes, while over a third (39%) happened in democracies. The proportion of incidents in democratic countries, however, has steadily and dramatically increased since 1995, with the exception of 2009, in which there was drop in registered events (see figure 1, 2011, 223). As to the methods of intervention, these include “targeting full-networks (shutting down the Internet), subnetworks (blocking websites), network-nodes (targeting individuals), and by proxy (pressuring ISPs)” (2011, 224). According to the data, authoritarian countries seem to focus more on full-networks, subnetworks, and nodes, although when going after individuals, their actions tend to be more severe. Democratic countries seem to prefer targeting individual websites and actors by proxy.

Regarding the motives behind these measures, they are divided into two groups. The first group concerns “protecting political authority,” and comprehends protecting political leaders and state institutions; election crisis; eliminating propaganda; mitigating dissidence; and national security. The second group pertaining to “preserving the public good,” features reasons such as preserving cultural and religious morals, the most cited; preserving racial harmony; protecting children; cultural preservation; protecting individuals’ privacy; and dissuading criminal activity. For the authors of this study, even if there was no surprise in the results in respect to authoritarian regimes, their codification of events revealed that, despite some differences, “democratic regimes exercise intervention efforts at nearly the same level for these same reasons, which severely limits civil society groups from participating in the foundational democratic practices of the regime” (Howard et al. 2011, 228).33

Still, the three authors recognise civil society's ability to circumvent state censorship practices, namely through tactics similar to the ones employed by citizens to evade online

33 Main motives for intervention according to political regime, in authoritarian and democratic regimes (excluding difficult to categorise items): preserving cultural and religious morals (Agree – 37; Disagree – 27), national security (A = 34; D = 29), protecting political leaders and state authorities (A = 23; D = 30), protecting children (A = 2; D = 30), dissuading criminal activity (A = 18; D = 29), eliminating propaganda (A = 24; D = 5).
companies' efforts of data gathering. These “obfuscation tactics” consist of “producing misleading, false, or ambiguous data to make data gathering less reliable and therefore less valuable” (Brunton and Nissenbaum 2011). They include demanding tactics such as resorting to Tor or proxy servers, often used in the context of political resistance and activism. In this regard, it is noted that “at this stage, it is difficult for me to be truly optimistic as to the possibilities still very limited as to the power to effectively counteract the strategies of digital barberism” (Proulx 2011, 9).

To end this section, a final note is made in respect to the reliance on technologies to solve the problems of democracy. As argued by Schuler, “one doesn’t buy it at a shopping mall or discover it nicely wrapped in pretty paper, a gift from the government or the technology gods” (2003, 70). Similar positions on the requirement of a motivated citizenry can be found in the work of several authors (for example Dijk 2012; Hill and Hughes 1998). In brief, since “civil society and citizenship only flourish in freedom and they require conscious individuals willing to defend it” (González de la Fe 2007, 482), technological development does not do away with the need to strengthen civic values and the promotion of a democratic culture by citizens, of which passivity and self-alienation cannot be a part.

After looking into the main issues regarding Internet and democracy and respective criticism, but before addressing the specific case of YouTube, it is necessary to consider the main questions raised by studies dedicated to researching online social relations and communication practices.

Virtual communities and collaboration

What will on-line interactive communities be like? In most fields they will consist of geographically separated members, sometimes grouped in small clusters and sometimes working individually. They will be communities not of common location, but of common interest (original emphasis, Licklider and Taylor 1990, 37–38).

The article in question – originally from 1968 – is entitled “The Computer as a Communication Device,” and its authors, Licklider and Taylor, are responsible for both technical advancements and reflexive thought, warranting them a place in the history of computer research (Ceruzzi 2003). The expression used is “online community,” commonly
used interchangeably with “virtual community,” a term which gained a stronger theoretical presence during the 1980s and the 1990s, in studies on online social relations.

The “virtuality” of communities is only seen as the characteristic of the space where they gather. The communities themselves are real – “people are still talking to people, albeit mediated by computers” – and in them emotional bounds are forged, and community identification can even be superior to the one felt towards people who live on the same street (Everard 2000, 133). For some researchers, the “expression 'virtual' tends today to increasingly designate the simple resorting to computer and electronic devices in the exchange and communication process” (Proulx 2006, 16), as opposed to a more ancient meaning associated to philosophy and the connection with the real.34 Virtual communities hence correspond to the “tie of fellowship that is created between members of a given user group in a chat, discussion list or forum, those participants share tastes, values, interests or common goals, or even at best, an actual collective project” (original emphasis, 2006, 17).35 In this sense, a parallel can be draw with a communitarian perspective, in which community is characterised by a web of affectional relationships and commitment to a shared culture (Etzioni 2003, 226).

According to Rheingold, probably one of the most quoted names on virtual communities and one of their strongest supporters, “the Net is an informal term for the loosely interconnected computer networks that use CMC [computer-mediated communication] technology to link people around the world into public discussions,” while “virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace” (1993, xx). In turn, Lévy claims “cyberspace appears as a kind of technical materialization of modern ideals”, since “in the age of electronic media, equality is realized as the ability of each of us to transmit to everyone else; liberty is objectivized in encryption software and cross-border access to a multiplicity of virtual communities; fraternity takes the form of global interconnectivity” (original emphasis, 2002, 269). Negroponte points in the same direction, arguing “digital technology can be a natural force drawing people into greater world harmony” (1995, 230). This new form of community,

34 For more on the notion of virtuality, especially as a category for social analysis, see (Proulx and Latzko-Toth 2006).
35 The highlighted expression in the original French text is “lien d'appartenance.”
according to Internet utopians, would liberate people from the limits imposed by “such social characteristics as race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status” (Hampton and Wellman 2003, 281). As pointed out by Serra, according to the perspective just described, this new type of communities “embody a ‘civilisation’ free from tyranny, inequality and the injustices of the real world we live in; a ‘civilisation’ that, by allowing everyone to communicate equally with everyone, assigns the task of permanently building the community to everyone” (1998, 147).

Disputing positions like that of Rheingold, Levy or Negroponte on this question, Barber considers that said “virtual communities” are, for the most part, “vicarious conglomerations lacking the empathy and need for common ground that define real-world communities” (2003, 39). Dominique Wolton (2000), in turn, argues the Internet leads to “interactive solitudes,” translated into the difficulty to interact in the real world, regardless of how easy it is in the virtual world. These thinkers build their approach not on how ties and communities are formed, but on how people become more separate, even if always connected to each other. Therefore, if we compare reflections on how democracy and new technologies can transform society, a common concern arises with a 150 year gap: a tendency towards growing individualism fostered by their atomising character, leading to the increasing distance between citizens. While Tocqueville warned against the loss of the notion of the greater universe which is society in general (Tocqueville 2002 [1835,1840]), Breton considers that a process of “mondialisation” is taking place, in a very different sense from the usually used – “globalisation” – but perhaps closer to Tocqueville’s view: “[i]n a certain sense, such ‘society’ is becoming a world society, not because exchanges take place in a same ‘planetary village,’ rather because each person turns himself into his own world” (Breton 2000, 104). This process is closely related to the building of a communication network which is able to isolate man by making face-to-face meeting fundamentally obsolete. The latter is replaced by the “ideal of a new social tie, completely virtual, i.e. spiritual, in which to gather in a new communion we need to separate ourselves from each other” (2000, 5). In the online world, we end up being Alone Together (Turkle 2011).³⁶

For some critics, electronic communication is considered a limited form of

³⁶ Sherry Turkle describes her book as being “about how we are changed as technology offers us substitutes for connecting with each other face-to-face. We are offered robots and a whole world of machine-mediated relationships on networked devices. As we instant-message, e-mail, text, and Twitter, technology redraws the boundaries between intimacy and solitude” (2011, 11).
communication as opposed to the richness of non-verbal communication (Sussman 1997). This brings to mind Tarde's (1989 [1893]) description of the face-to-face instance of what he considers to be the elementary social relation – conversation: “the interlocutors act upon each other, closely, through the tone of voice, the look, the features, the magnetism of the gesture, and not only through language” (1989, 88). For the French theorist, conversation can be defined as “all dialogue without direct usefulness, in which we talk mainly for talking, for pleasure, for play, for politeness” (1989, 87), and plays a pivotal social, economic and political role. Habermas has commented on how the internet has played a role in the revival of “the historically submerged phenomenon of an egalitarian public of reading and writing conversational partners and correspondents” (2009, 157). More than a century after Tarde's praise, “conversation” has in fact become one of the preferred metaphors to describe online interaction. In chapter IV, I will describe how conversations are enacted through online video, and how they are regarded as akin to face-to-face dialogue.

Criticism of the myth of the virtual community also include reminders of the persistence of the digital divide across countries, regions and social categories, both in terms of access and Internet use (Serra 2007), and the questioning of their democratic validity due to the lack of geographic roots. Kolko and Reid (1998) consider that the vision of the fragmented self can be extended to the political body, therefore undermining any political potential of said communities. In contrast, Wellman and Hampton (1999) state that analysing communities implies a focus on institutions and social relations, as opposed to territory, which became clearer in cyberspace. It is argued that people are now connected to people, instead of place to place, as mobile devices and wireless Internet weaken the dependence between the two and afford networked individualism (Wellman 2002).

This assumption goes back to an even earlier date than the heated discussion of the 1990s and early twenty-first century, as we have seen by Licklider and Taylor's prospective writings. The sharing of common interests these authors propose may not only imply simple debate on the subject, but also the creation of “communities of practice,” as the ones described by Wenger (2007) or “knowledge communities,” that have developed in Wikipedia, Slashdot, and even private companies such as Amazon (David 2007). According to Philip Agre (1998), “most communities engage in some degree of collective cognition – the
interactions through which they learn from one another's experiences, set common strategies, develop a shared vocabulary, and evolve a distinctive way of thinking” (1998, 81).38

Although references to “online communities” and “virtual communities” are still present in the latest research, analysing online social relations almost solely through that lens has been called into question. Conceptual problems have led researchers to propose the abandonment of that term (Kendall 2011). Such focus on “community” and the debates surrounding it “has deflected attention from the fact that a continuum of forms of being and acting together is growing from the technology of the Internet” (Bakardjieva 2005). As a consequence, it could lead to limitations in understanding research topics like political engagement and how it takes place online. For Calhoun, in respect to the possibility of an international sphere supported by information technology, that is the case.

The Internet can make local community less isolated or it can lead people to substitute online ties to relative strangers for interaction with neighbours. It can promote both enclaves and connectivity, nations and cosmopolitanism. Heavy reliance on the term ‘community’ to describe computer-mediated groupings borrows from the warm and fuzzy connotations that the idea of community has in everyday life and especially in nostalgia. But it also obscures one of the most important potential roles for electronic communication which is enhancing public discourse - a form of discourse that joins strangers and enables large collectivities to make informed choices about their institutions and their future.[…] To say that a public exists is mainly to say that there is more or less open, self-organized communication among strangers (Calhoun 2004, 244).

This recognition of insufficiencies in the “virtual community” approach, in connection to the focus on the sharing of interests, has led to other conceptualisations gaining more prominence in the analysis of online interaction, especially in regard to new modes of content production. Despite accusations on the lack of skills of the “amateur” (Keen 2007, noted in chapter IV), several studies on communication, culture and media consider the digital environment (resulting from the convergence between computer science, audiovisual media and telecommunications, as well as a second convergence on the cultural level) to be fertile ground for cultural creation no longer restricted to a small number of participants (e.g. Flichy 2010; Millerand, Proulx, and Rueff 2010). The transformation in who produces not only

38 The perspective of distributed cognition is built on these premises, highlighting the role of objects and technical systems, meaning external elements are a relevant part of cognitive processes (A. Alves 2011).
content, but also culture is associated with the potential of the Internet as a democratic tool, as can be noticed in the summary of its characteristics presented by Jan van Dijk, in the latest edition of his *The Network Society*:

- *An interactive* medium that departs from the one-sided communication of existing mass media.
- *An active and creative* medium enabling users to transform from viewers, listeners and readers to participants.
- *A direct* medium in which everybody is equal in principle as assumed expertise has to prove itself before being accepted.
- *A network* medium enabling the collective creation of products online, not primarily by individual authors or businesses (original emphasis, Dijk 2012, 109).

The free software paradigm is said to have the possibility today to move to other contexts, namely citizenship and political participation (see Benkler 2006). For Stallman, “free software” concerns “software that users have the freedom to distribute and change” (1993), and should not be mistaken with gratuitous software. Therefore, the focus is on the joint construction of knowledge and the collaborative development of products. Inspired by the free software movement, the Creative Commons organisation – a concept promoted by Lessig (2001) – created a licensing system which aims to legally frame sharing creative work, as well as its sister initiatives Science Commons and Open Educational Resources Commons. This “alternative model for managing copyright in digital content” (Fitzgerald 2007, 5) has been transcribed into different national legal systems, and diversely applied, from music to academic papers.

The term “Commons” has become widely used in different contexts, but always tied to information sharing and the bouleversement of current property systems. In his book *Cause Commune,* Aigrain (2005c) warns against the power of corporations in shaping the law as well as controlling the sharing of information and knowledge. However, at the same time, he tells us of the other world that also “lives on this planet,” one of cooperation and solidarity, one in

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39 Stallman was forced to clarify such distinction in a 1993 footnote to the original 1985 version of manifesto. Still, critics have failed to consider the opposition of “free speech” and “free beer,” as it is commonly described by free software advocates, and miss the point of statements such as “[I]nformation wants to be free:” “Information wants nothing at all. This contemporary epigram instead reveals, indirectly, what people want. […] ‘information wants to be free’ increasingly give the slogan a normative spin. Its meaning then boils down to this: people want information for free” (T. Bell 1998). On the distinction between free software and open source see (A. M. Rosa 2007).
which the commons are enablers of human development, and not bringing us closer to “universal ruin,” as Hardin (1968) strongly puts it.\footnote{Philipppe Aigrain, both a researcher and a very active voice in the defence of the commons, especially in matters of intellectual property, has highlighted success stories which were not only restricted to the world of software, not only in his academic work (2005c, 26), but also in the media (2005a; 2005b). The “Common Cause” Aigrain refers to is the advent of information technologies, which has made both opposing “worlds” possible.} Benkler (2002; 2006) describes the emergence of a \textit{commons-based peer production}, as a result of a set of changes that “have increased the role of non market and non proprietary production, both by individuals alone and by cooperative efforts in a wide range of loosely or tightly woven collaborations” (2006, 2).

Von Hippel's book on the democratisation of innovation is dedicated “to all who are building the information commons” – the result of innovators in a particular field making their developments freely available to all, and hence providing an alternative to information under private intellectual property (2005, 12–3). Coleman and Blumler discuss the connecting role of an “online civic commons,” supporting a public sphere regarded “as a constellation of intersecting networks” and in a context of collaborative governance (2009, 180).

Going through web pages we find some illustrative examples of what is understood by “collaboration age,” with an associated defence of democratic content production. One of the best known examples is probably the Wikipedia project, which has been the topic of multiple scientific publications and is a recurrent example, given, for instance, in the works of authors already cited (Aigrain 2005c; Benkler 2006; Bruns 2008; Lessig 2008).\footnote{In fact, Lawrence Lessig dedicates the “version 2.0” of his book \textit{Code} to Wikipedia, claiming it is “the one surprise that teaches more than every thing here” (2006, vi).} Wikis are “software hosted on a server and that allow users to build, edit and modify the content of a website” (Goldenberg 2010, 29). However, their collaborative character is equally linked to enabling the negotiation of the very rules of operation and relationship, as noted by this researcher. The “wiki” prefix has been used to describe different events and practices, from “wikivism” (Stacey 2008), to instances where the software itself is mainly absent, such as in the case of Wikileaks and wiki-revolutions (Castells 2011), or the analogy does not hold to the actual definition of the term “wiki.” Several examples of the latter can be found in \textit{Wikinomics}, a book focused on the potential of “mass collaboration” (Tapscott and Williams 2006).\footnote{The main assumption of this book is the transformation of consumers into “prosumers,” meaning that they “participate in the creation of products in an active and ongoing way” (Tapscott and Williams 2006, 126).}

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, “collaboration” became one of the most
important terms for conceptualising ICTs; in fact, “[w]ith the advent of Web 2.0, the narrative of participation shifted from emphasizing access to emphasizing collaboration and collective action” (Schäfer 2011). For Dutton and Peltu (2007), the expression “Web 2.0” does not solely refer to a modification in the technological capacity and to an evolution of applications towards user-friendliness, enabling people with low or no technical knowledge to take advantage of computer and Internet use. Moreover, it means to imply a transition towards a communicative empowerment of citizens, in particular in terms of the production and distribution of content. The term “Web 2.0” is not, however, consensual. Diverging perspectives privilege the term “social software”, since it eliminates the impression of a progress that did not actually occur and that seems in fact to be contradictory to one of its key strategies: “the perpetual beta”, or in other words, “the recognition not of logical progression but of the indeterminacy that results from technical/cultural ensembles” (Everitt and Mills 2009, 755). In addition, these authors describe “Web 2.0” as too amorphous and indefinable when detached from its cultural context to merit critical use (2009, 755).43

Some authors argue that the 2.0 designation has embodied the technical dimension of devices, being too closely tied to the rhetoric of computer engineers and marketing specialists (Millerand, Proulx, and Rueff 2010). Consequently, these researchers prefer the designation “social web” since it implies a sociological, ethical and political approach, rather than a technical or managerial perspective. At the same time, such conceptual option allows them to question certain euphoric discourses around Web 2.0 and their ideological implications. Within this framework of analysis, theoretical and empirical work has been carried out in order to characterise the specificities of the participation of non-professionals in the cultural and media spheres and clarify “citizen empowerment” as afforded by the social web. This work does not neglect to take into account the contradictions generated in the process, particularly regarding the tension between commodification and an online gift economy (Proulx and Goldenberg 2010; Proulx et al. 2011).

Associated to relations in virtual communities, collaboration, in turn, occurs “when a community of participants is intentionally involved in a joint effort to achieve a common understanding on a particular subject” (M. N. Campos 2006, 331). This concept has lost its ideological charge, in Internet studies, which once made it an equivalent of betrayal (very

43 Everitt and Mills question if such use of the 2.0 suffix is in fact a “a quest for validation based on pseudo-technological terminology” or derived “from an envy of technological culture” (2009, 752).
strong in the context of nazism and fascism), to become a powerful maxim in cyberspace, closely tied to online tools or managerial work methods, in particular when resorting to said tools. It is distinguishable from similar words, sometimes used as synonyms, since collaboration “requires collective commitment to a common mission and a shared effort to get results that would never be achieved by any of the parts in isolation” (Figueiredo 2008, 597). By contrast, cooperation is a situation beneficial for all but “individual aims and autonomy are not sacrificed,” while in coordination “the recognition of the benefit of working together is not critical,” even if there is an acceptance of a loss of autonomy (2008, 597). For Christian Papiloud, “collaboration” in the context of digital technologies focuses on the process of exchange and communication, and hence designates “the circulation of representations, of messages and practices mobilised by men or machines directed at a more or less well defined goal […] or without an actual goal” (2007, 13).

Not contrasted with “collaboration,” the term “contribution” has proven fruitful in studies on the mutation of communication to refer to a “unity behind the diversity” of online practices (Proulx and Millerand 2010, 24). Following a “logic of gift,” contribution as a social form is regarded as the obverse of the rampage of informational capital, characterised by the search for material or financial retribution (see chapter II). “The contribution activities,” in turn, “are mainly funded in the desire for a reciprocity in the exchanges, and if it takes place, they may result in a symbolic retribution”(Proulx 2011, 2). Such “culture of contribution” is linked to a culture of freedom and gratuitousness, and can be traced back to the early days of the Internet and practices such as the sharing of “Requests for Comments” among ARPA researchers (Proulx and Goldenberg 2010).

Along the same collaborative lines, Rheingold (2002) had announced a new social revolution carried out by smart mobs, people who could act together without knowing each other. This would be achieved by resorting to new technologies, in particular mobile

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44 If we accept as a guiding principle that “e-collaboration is only sustainable as long as each part feels it is gaining from it and acts so as to grant that all the other parts feel likewise” (Figueiredo 2008, 596), it becomes clear how easy it is for a collaborative project to go wrong or to experience serious difficulties.

45 Serge Proulx is the senior researcher in the research project “L'usage contributif: émergence de nouvelles formes participatives de création et échange sur Internet” (2009-2012), funded by Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

46 While presenting possible paths to rethink dominant copyright systems, Proulx and Goldenberg bring up a few topics discussed in this thesis, namely the fair use doctrine, the Creative Commons licenses, Lessig's binary “Read Only” and “Read/Write,” as well as Aigrain's proposal of a “creative contribution.” “Contribution” here refers to a system of financial rewards, both compensating and stimulating creativity, set to enable the sustainability of a digital commons and the thriving of non-market sharing (Aigrain 2012).
communication devices. Although there is a very positive tone concerning possible gains in political participation, this author still recognised that not all smart mobs have good intentions, and that those electronic devices can also be used to promote violence. Crowds and their proneness to violence have been the topic of sociological reflection, namely in the classical work of Gabriel Tarde (1989 [1893]) and Gustave Le Bon (1963 [1895]). Yet, giving credence to the strength the crowd is assigned in the transformation of the processes underlying economic operations and the democratic repercussions it may lead to, in the digital environment the concept of the crowd is closer to its understanding as “a social power whose effect is always more or less disruptive and revolutionary” (Park 1972 [1903], 47; c.f. Thompson 1971). In the realm of the discussion on the subject of political action, the very conceptual crisis that fostered a focus on the individual also contributed to the contemplation of “ways of thinking politics in a collective plural that is always different from the mere sum of individuals” (discussed in Neves and Dias 2010, 9). Among such proposals of reconceptualisation, one finds the work of Hardt and Negri in which “the crowd” becomes the “multitude.” More than a theoretical model, it assumes the form of a project for “an inclusive democratic global society,” as stated in their book's preface (Hardt and Negri 2004, xi); the multitude is intended to be the alternative to the rule of the “Empire,” the focus of their previous book.

Despite the focus on sharing given by authors such as Rheingold and democratic conceptions of the crowd, one must bear in mind that users are today seen as “resources” with an economic value, and a big part of it arises from “collaboration” practices facilitated by what has been designated as Web 2.0 tools. Authors like James Surowiecki (2005) argue that resorting to the crowd can be a strategic option with positive outcomes. In this view, crowds are “wise”, and can even be more intelligent than experts because of the emergent effects of their collective action. Besides the benefits to marketing strategies derived from metadata collection (problematised above), the crowd becomes a valuable resource for private companies (Howe 2008). In the blog that led to the book, Howe underlines the economic potential of *crowdsourcing*: “the act of taking a job traditionally performed by a designated

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47 In his study of the representation of the crowd on television, Cintra Torres presents an overview of socio-political thought on the “crowd,” from classical reflection to network society. In this researcher's view there is not a cohesive theoretical body of work on the subject: multiple conceptions and multiple typologies coexist, making its definition all the more difficult (Torres 2010).
agent (usually an employee) and outsourcing it to an undefined, generally large group of people in the form of an open call” (Howe 2006). This is considered a new trend in which companies take advantage of the potential of online networking – especially amateur and unpaid work.

The next and final section is dedicated to reflecting on the cultural production of said online crowd, making a retrospective on studies on the production of reception and establishing a connection to the specific example of online video.

**The production of culture, resistance and online video**

In their companion on communication studies and their development, Breton and Proulx (2002) highlight the first publication of Stuart Hall's paper “Encoding/decoding,” in 1974, as a defining moment in the foundation of reception theory, embedded with a critical perspective. Hall assumed the position of director at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in 1968, following the founder Richard Hoggart who highly praised Hall's dexterity in manipulating theories (Neveu and Mattelart 1996). “Encoding/decoding” is hence a mandatory reference in any study that alludes to the legacy of the British Cultural Studies and the Birmingham center. Hall argues there is not a necessary correspondence between the meaning produced in the encoding process and the translated in the decoding. He denies a perfect symmetry, even if some degree of reciprocity is required, or else communication would not be possible at all. The process continues to be thought in terms of a structural influence, yet the moment of translation into social practices is not underestimated.

Hall identifies three positions in the decoding of television discourse, namely, the “dominant-hegemonic position,” the “negotiated code or position,” and the “oppositional code” (1980, 114–6). In the first position the viewer strictly follows the encoding, and in the second, he/she partly adapts significations at the situated level. In the third case, although there is no misunderstanding of the discourse, it is decoded “in a globally contrary way. He/she detotalizes the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference” (original emphasis, 1980, 116). For Stuart Hall when an oppositional reading replaces a previously more common negotiated reading is a

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48 This research centre, according to its own members, aimed to “inaugurate research in the area of contemporary culture and society: cultural forms, practices and institutions, their relation to society and social change” (Hall et al. 1980, 7).
pivotal political moment. In his own words, “[h]ere the 'politics of signification' – the struggle in discourse – is joined” (1980, 116).

In *Understanding Popular Culture* e *Reading the Popular*, Fiske (1989b; 1989a) develops his perspective on the social and political dynamics traversing popular culture. He tries to distance himself both from apolitical celebratory approaches, and more critical views in which the forces of domination are prevalent. For Fiske the concept of a mass culture is an oxymoron: “a homogeneous, externally produced culture cannot be sold ready-made to the masses: culture simply does not work like that” (1989b, 23). As a struggle between domination and opposition, popular culture is political in its core. Roland Barthes (2002 [1970]) is an acknowledged influence for Fiske, namely his characterisation of texts as *lisible* (readerly) and *scriptible* (writerly), in *S/Z*. According to Fiske (1989b), popular culture texts belong to a third category – *producerly* – since they both allow an easy reading (as the former) and compel to a participative construction of meaning, due to their openness (as the latter).

Producerly texts are excessive and obvious, two characteristics usually considered to be negative, but which here are regarded as harbouring great potential for being fertile raw material. Excess brings to light what was regarded as common sense and, in the same blow, questions it, sharing affinities with parody in its mocking capabilities, in its subversion of norms, in its evasion of ideological force. Fiske aims to tackle this power struggle from the side of resistance, and not of dominant ideology, noting that although the power of capitalism is fundamentally economic, it is faced with another kind of power, the semiotic power, or, has he puts it, “the power to make meanings” (1989a, 10). In this context, and resorting to Hall's (1980) terminology, it may imply the mobilisation of oppositional readings, and therefore have political significance.

As such, in his work, the researcher centres the issue on the power relations between dominators and subordinated, and pays tribute to the military metaphors of de Certeau (1984 [1980]): the actions of the former as characterised as strategic, whereas the latter engage in guerrilla tactics. For the French scholar, “[t]he tactics of consumption, the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong, thus lend a political dimension to everyday practices” (1984, xvii). It is a never-ending battle, whose goals are not radical social change – a revolution – but strengthening said subordinated instead, and hence contribute to a more equal
distribution of power. Here one might note that de Certeau places himself in a position that can lead to dubious readings: if, on the one hand, it is celebrating the potential of private acts, on the other hand, these can be considered as mere scratches in a powerful structure, which remains otherwise unharmed (Silverstone 1994). As I will discuss in chapter VI, this stance behind the argument that portrays humour and satiric criticism as conservative.

The importance of the connection to the everyday life and the exploration of what the system has to offers is part of the basis of the rapport Fiske makes with Certeau. The exercise of semiotic power is inherent to the very characteristics of popular culture: it is not entirely in the hands of the culture industries, since all they are able to do “is produce a repertoire of texts or cultural resources for the various formations of the people to use or reject in the ongoing process of producing their popular culture” (Fiske 1989b, 24). The resources are transformed into popular culture through the construction of relevances for the readers, in particular at the micro level. Still, popular culture may never see its political potential activated at any level, and may in fact mix progressive and conservative tones.

The localisation of this action at the micropolitical level underlies its characterisation as progressive, rather than radical. In other words, it does not aim a total disruption of the system, but, as said, the redistribution of power, strengthening the power of the disadvantaged in this semiotic struggle which nevertheless reflects a wider scope. As de Certeau points out in the final paragraphs of his introduction to L'invention du quotidien. I. Arts de faire (translated as The Practice of Everyday Life), justifying the analysis of the “tactics” described above:

[I]t concerns as well the status of the individual in technical systems since the involvement of the subject diminishes in proportion to the technocratic expansion of these systems. Increasingly constrained, yet less and less concerned with these vast frameworks, the individual detaches himself from them without being able to escape them and henceforth only try to outwit them, to pull tricks on them, to rediscover, within an electronicised and computerised megalopolis, the “art” of the hunters and rural folk of earlier days. […] These ways of reappropriating the product-system, ways created by consumers, have as their goal a therapeutics for deteriorating social relations and make use of techniques of re-employment in which we can recognise the procedures of everyday practices. A politics of such ploys should be developed (original emphasis, Certeau 1984, xxiii–xxiv).
De Certeau situates his study in the enunciation level, establishing a parallel with speech acts on the assumption that “users make (bricolent) innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules” (1984, xiii–xiv). Bricolage – translated as “making do” – is here understood as an “artisan-like inventiveness,” a poetic form of manipulation.

Digitization, platforms like YouTube and the simplification of editing software have made the use of the resources created by the culture industries, namely audiovisual resources, more malleable at the hands of media consumers. Therefore, it could be argued that in the twenty-first century, popular culture is no longer restricted to providing resources that enable subversive consumption, through the construction of relevances and open readings. Popular culture is thus described as allowing forms of creative production beyond consumption, entailing a process of selection, transformation and redistribution. Henry Jenkins considers we are witnessing a cultural shift and this is connected with the growth of a participatory culture, contrasting with former views of passive media spectatorship, even if participation is not evenly matched. Rooted in pre-existing practices, the Web is said to have “pushed that hidden layer of cultural activity into the foreground” (2006, 137).

In the 1990s, it was considered timely to reflect on the pertinence of de Certeau's theorisation for media studies, and analyse his main postulates and influences together with new approaches on reception (Proulx 1994). In the following decades, it is argued that by looking at the user's everyday and how he/she “makes do,” sociological works on the uses of communication technologies have contributed to debunking his/her passivity in the relation to technology (Jauréguiiberry and Proulx 2011). The contrast of the uses actually made as opposed to the uses inscribed in the technologies by their producers reveals the user to be an actor, who not only reacts, but is also responsible for a degree of creativity. These authors argue that this raises the possibility of social change occurring from the uses of technology, hence refuting the views of absolute technological determinism. Nevertheless, the overestimation of the user's autonomy is included among the limits of the reviewed studies. The user is an actor “within the structures which constantly limit his/her capacities of

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49 These authors distinguish the approach followed by the sociology of uses of communication technologies developed in France after 1980 from the north-american functionalist “uses and gratifications” current. Unlike the latter, the former's critical perspective focused on the emancipatory potential of information and communication technologies.
resistance,' 'bricolage' and 'détournement’” (Jauréguiberry and Proulx 2011, 56). Making reference to de Certeau in his assessment that such practices are ruses aimed at the power, these researchers emphasize that the influence of the latter must be considered, rather than a focus on the user as if he/she were isolated in his/her actions.

One can also find the term “bricolage” in the work of Mark Deuze, in this case in the context of digital culture. This author sees “the praxis of digital culture as an expression of individualisation, postnationalism, and globalisation” (2006, 64). Again, it is not argued that there is nothing absolutely new in digital cultural practices, nor that they only occur online; rather, that their predominance has been intensified. Media users have come to “accept the fact that reality is constructed, assembled, and manipulated by media” (2006, 66), forcing them to intervene in the media environment, akin to the employment of tactics against strategies as conceived by de Certeau. Such process implies:

1. Active agents in the process of meaning-making (we become participants).
2. We adopt but at the same time modify, manipulate, and thus reform consensual ways of understanding reality (we engage in remediation).
3. We flexively assemble our own particular versions of such reality (we are bricoleurs) (Deuze 2006, 66).

Deuze therefore identifies three constitutive features of digital culture, participation, remediation and bricolage, which embody their own respective contradictions, disconnection, tradition, and originality. Participation is not only expected from the media, but also enacted, even if does not correspond to an idealised form, i.e., always valuable and for selfless reasons. Regarding remediation, it implies the so-called “mainstream” culture is subverted and forced to adapt to new demands. However, this form of distanciation is linked to a process of individualization – or even “hyperindividualization” – and fragmentation of the public sphere, a concern already present in early criticisms of online communication (presented above). For Deuze, people are mainly driven by private interests, and their engagement with

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50 In respect to “bricolage,” Deuze (2006) cites multiple works by John Hartley, who also makes reference to the concept developed by Lévy-Strauss, dear to de Certeau. The latter is not mentioned.

51 Carducci, in turn, equates remediation with culture jamming, which will further discussed in chapter VI. In his mobilisation of a sociological perspective of these practices, he argues “[c]ulture jamming reflects a theory of culture as a site of political action, seeing consumer culture as a viable path to social change” (Carducci 2006, 130).

52 This fragmentation would lead to the proliferation of “private public spheres (or personal information spaces) within which we only talk to and with ourselves” (Deuze 2006, 68). Cf. the discussion in the second section of this chapter on such topic.
digital media is not directly tied to activism or criticism. Finally, bricolage is for this author a main and propelling element of digital culture. In academic literature, it is usually associated with “remixing, reconstructing, and reusing of separate artefacts, actions, ideas, signs, symbols, and styles in order to create new insights or meanings” (Deuze 2006, 70). Multiple copies are better regarded than a bad original, as originality ceases to be the determinant of quality in the creative activity. The bricoleur-citizen, in specific, does not have clear-cut identifications and his/her actions may have multiple orientations: he/she is characterised by privileging the practice of bricolage, regardless of the object or purpose.

Images form discourses to understand power, hierarchies and inequalities. In 1935, Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (“Triumph des Willens” in the original) was released. This documentary/epic/propaganda film intended to baffle the world with the might of Hitler's Germany. Nevertheless, images – even iconic and strong images like Riefenstahl's, even considered “too dangerous to be viewed” (Salked 1996, 138) – can be used to criticise the very object of acclamation, through bricolage practices such as the already mentioned *détournement*, culture jamming, recontextualisation, repurposing, or, more recently, remixing as a subversive exercise, carried out to expose bias, manipulation, and deceit. According to authors like Edwards and Tryon (2009), “[a]s allegories of empowerment, mashup creators engage in a set of materialist practices that represent a belief in the power of personal broadcasting, media creativity and remix aesthetics to contribute to a stronger and healthier participatory democracy.” Engaging in what they call “critical digital intertextuality,” YouTubers do not restrict their actions to decoding or opposing content that is presented to them, they contest it, “using bricolage techniques to challenge its status as a transparent media text,” and therefore enhance their media literacy (2009).

The growing interest in online video is closely connected to the increasing importance and pervasiveness of image in the Internet. Based on the early efforts of Tim Berners-Lee and with an official birth date of 6 August 1991 (D. Bell 2009, 31), World Wide Web protocols made it possible “for computers connected to the Web to display pictures, sound, and film” (O’Malley and Rosenzweig 1997, 132). But it was the release of Mosaic in 1993, a graphical browser which simplified the access to the “Web” to a non-scientific audience, that allegedly “brought forth drastic transformations in media economy, forms of possible and available content, user demographics, as well as the general visibility and the
cultural role of the internet as a medium with a global reach” (Paasonen 2010, 411). The fifth major revision of HTML, the language that enables web pages to be displayed, was a step forward towards the dominance of image, with the inclusion of the video element (I further discuss the importance of HTML 5 in chapter VI). We are arguably witnessing a second acceleration of the “iconic turn,” following the first one characterised by the movement from printed word to television (described in Habermas 2009, 53).

Various other “converging factors” would facilitate the dissemination of image, and specifically video. Developments in the Internet backbone, the establishment of compression/decompression standards, the increasing access to high-speed connections, the advancements in mobile phones and terminals such as smartphones, netbooks and tablets and emerging economic models (Gervais 2010, 31), contributed to this phenomenon. In addition, the exponential growth of bandwidth, the close to ubiquity and increased quality of digital cameras (now present in almost all cellphones), the improvement in the hardware available in people's homes (especially in terms of image processing), and the simplification of video editing tools have enabled more and more people to become video-makers and share their creations to a wider audience, increasing even more the availability of video.

As noted in the introduction of this dissertation, online video in general, and YouTube in particular, are at the centre of the social web as well as of the research that has been developed on the subject. As Wikipedia, YouTube is featured as one of the case studies analysed (e.g. Lessig 2008; Bruns 2008), even if less often so and lacking depth. YouTube is described as a “community,” which makes videos together, collaborating in their production, as well as views, comments, shares, votes, flags and is inspired by each other's videos (see Introduction). In YouTube, Aigrain's (2005c) two worlds also collide: corporate content, highly protected, highly controlled, and the sense of a video commons available for reinterpretation and transformation. Remix thus embodies the struggle between these two worlds.
Conclusion: Framing the study of online video and political discussion

In an era of positive outlooks pointing to the rise of collective intelligence (Lévy 2002), where crowds are a source (Howe 2008), and a wise one (Surowiecki 2005), folksonomies organize content (Peters 2009), production turns into peer-production (Benkler 2006) or produsage (Bruns 2008), citizens become journalists (Gillmor 2006), at a time of revival of Read/Write creativity (Lessig 2008), inherently intertextual, a product of juxtaposition and bricolage, remix and satire seem to have found fertile ground to flourish. And yet, the renegotiation of power relationships in the social web does not depend on unrestrained user agency, and hence to understand it one must consider the websites themselves as well as advertisers. In other words, “[c]ritiquing the economic logic of a site like YouTube means considering how power relations structure the ‘free’ choice” (Andrejevic 2009, 418). Are cultural forms like remix and satire resistance tactics that raise awareness and train critical spirit, or just distractions that allow for some relief from daily life concerns, of no political consequence, created and disseminated in a commodified environment? The clarification of whether they can be regarded as part of an alternative repertoire for political engagement, more cause-oriented, as suggested by Norris (2007), or contribute to the constitution of counterpublics, as understood by Fraser (1990), is central to the analysis developed in this dissertation.

Previous criticism of the social and political role of information and communication technologies equally holds true to online video and the practices surrounding it. Besides being affected by the discrepancies of the digital divide, understood in a broader sense, YouTube embodies a new form of divide that separates the owners of the websites that gather user data and the content creators. This raises issues concerning control over information, and especially procedures and participants, described in this chapter, and that will be more specifically analysed in the next chapter. In spite of the expectations of the promotion of a closer relation between politicians, activist groups and individual citizens, all engaged in a democratic conversation through online video, it is difficult to deny the growth in co-opting as well as astroturfing, as campaign staff and false grassroots movements appropriate subversive practices, including remixing and parodying, for their own legitimising ends. Already on YouTube, amusement, activism and business are intertwined and harder to
distinguish. This nebulous coexistence means YouTube videos are not always created and distributed with simple and clean-cut motivations.

Building on the study of YouTube as a company and website, together with the empirical analysis of several YouTube videos, comments, and video-responses, the next chapters aim to provide a contribution to the reflection on political discussion and how it is affected by transformations in the media through which it takes place.
II.

YouTube, the company and the website

To complement the backdrop for the study of political videos and YouTube's connections with the political world, the second chapter seeks to establish a timeline for significant transformations and events YouTube has experienced both as a company and as a website from 2005 to 2011. The analysis of the chain of options taken during this period points towards a decisive turn from stimulating user-generated content as the basis of YouTube – made explicit by the tag line “Broadcast Yourself!” – to the strong promotion of professional content. The online video company has endeavoured to reach out to traditional actors from the political world, while also making deals with the entertainment and advertising industries. In addition, YouTubers are enticed to become YouTube Partners, and therefore may choose to privilege formats and formulas more prone to “go viral” and reach a wide audience. Such focus on revenue by both professional and amateur video producers may be integrated in a process of commodification of the Internet described by a broader critique of emerging practices in the online world. This chapter raises the question of which kind of consequences this process may have to the role of YouTube videos in political discussion and citizen engagement.

YouTube, the early years

This video website was created in February 2005 by Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim, former employees at PayPal, the payment service sold to eBay in 2002. They were building on the idea of “proposing a platform for the publication and exchange of videos based on the Flash format that avoids the tedious installation of a plug-in” (Gervais 2010, 30). This would bring them a competitive edge, given this software was already installed in most online computers, according to Adobe themselves, the proprietary company (Huang 2006). But YouTube did not only simplify watching: its central technical contribution to online video was to facilitate uploading, sharing, relations between videos, and the introduction of “new social aspects to the viewing of videos,” such as commenting or rating (Cheng, Dale, and Liu 2007).
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In an interview, Karim stated work was divided based on their skills: Hurley had the role of the designer, while Chen and Karim dedicated themselves to the technical aspect of the site (Karim cited in Hopkins 2006). When it was time to share management responsibilities, this was done according to strengths and interests: Chad Hurley as Chief Executive Officer, and Steve Chen as Chief Technology Officer. Karim became an adviser and returned to university to pursue his academic path in computer studies, maintaining a smaller part of ownership. In October 2010, Hurley officially stepped down as CEO to assume a position as an adviser. He was replaced by Salar Kamangar, vice president of product management and an early Google employee (Bond 2010). In the official statement released by Google, Chad Hurley stated his role had already been mainly advisory in the two previous years, and Kamangar was actually running daily operations on YouTube (Weintraub 2010). At around the same time, Steve Chen quit his CTO position to work elsewhere in Google, but with a lot less public attention and media coverage (Kafka 2009). He also became an angel investor in several start-ups.

Figure 1: “Me at the zoo,” the first video uploaded on YouTube. Screenshot taken on July 21, 2011.
The lesser known founder uploaded and featured in the first video present on YouTube: “A day at the zoo” (see figure 1). Its description tells us this 19-second video was uploaded on April 23, 2005, and shot by a third party at the San Diego Zoo, despite using the founder's own account: jawed. The video simply consists of Karim Jawed making a very short comment on the elephants. Its low quality and banality has led to many dismissive comments by YouTubers and web analysers, even if they recognise its chronological importance. Mashable would cover the fifth anniversary of its upload by stating that “[t]he video doesn’t look like much, but it sparked a revolution” (Schroeder 2010), while Gizmodo questions “if he would have filmed something else,” had Jawed known what would follow (Golijan 2010). Soon after, in May 2005, YouTube was beta launched, enabling Internet users to first test the website, and upload their own videos.

In November the same year, a month before its official launch, a fourth element pivotal to the development of YouTube came into play by investing 3.5 million dollars, namely Sequoia Capital. The venture firm would make a bigger investment in the spring of 2006. This year would be witness to major events pulling YouTube to the centre of media and corporate attention.

First, as the number of uploaded videos started rising, many big companies in the content industry (namely television networks and record companies) started raising copyright issues regarding their material present on YouTube, put there by other hands. After a first phase in which they demanded the removal of the videos, and even included the filing of lawsuits, some of the plaintiffs ended up establishing partnerships with YouTube (for example, NBC and CBS in the television world, and Warner Music, Universal Music Group and Sony BMG Music Entertainment, in music), even if all attempted later on to renegotiate their terms (Helft 2009). However, not all companies followed this course of action, and eventually decided to go through with suing YouTube for allowing copyrighted material on its website, in the United States and abroad.\footnote{For example, companies from France, Spain, the Netherlands and Italy (Andrejevic 2009, 409).} The Viacom lawsuit (filed in 2007) is probably the most famous copyright dispute involving YouTube, being ruled in favour of the video sharing company (see Liedtke 2010; Gervais 2010).

Still, YouTube's image was not left spotless in the whole ordeal: Viacom's main claim was YouTube was knowingly following the steps of Napster and Google was encouraging that
behaviour (Manjoo 2010). YouTube's stronger defence was based on the fact that allegedly their operations were legal under the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) (Levine 2010). Considering itself to be under the “safe harbour” designation, as defined by the DMCA, YouTube would hence be protected from liability for copyright infringement claims based on YouTubers actions (von Lohmann 2010). To comply with the DMCA, YouTube had replied to copyright owners by removing thousands of videos (Hunt 2007, 199). A second argument put forward by YouTube was that “Viacom continuously and secretly uploaded its content to YouTube, even while publicly complaining about its presence there,” making it more difficult to identify authorised and non-authorised content (Levine 2010). Another path first pursued by YouTube was a fair use defence under Copyright Act 1976 in the USA. A legal analysis of this option concluded it would not make a strong case (Kumar 2008), which suggests that the “safe harbour” allegation has been a wiser choice. The fear of legal consequences ended up reaching YouTubers who actively shared videos through embedding on their websites or blogs, as YouTube's and their liability was unclear to them (von Lohmann 2007a).

Second, Google tried to invigorate the competition with YouTube, by launching its web-based uploader, hence making it easier and more simple to post videos on Google Video (Strompolos 2006). This strategic move, however, reached only dismaying results – the giant's actions had but a slight effect on the leading position of YouTube in non-professional video sharing. Quickly realising that defeating YouTube in their own game would be very difficult, on October 9, 2006, Google announced having reached a deal to acquire the company for 1,65 billion US dollars in a stock-for-stock transaction. In the following November, the deal between these two companies was closed, and YouTube became part of the Google empire. Still, Google's (2006) press release about the acquisition stated “YouTube will operate independently to preserve its successful brand and passionate community.” It has been argued that the increase in legal actions against YouTube could also be connected with this deal, and not just with the skyrocketing of the upload of copyrighted songs, “because

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2 Google Video was launched on January 5, 2006, as a search service for televised content. In April 2005, Google would announce their Video Upload Program allowing Internet users to submit their own videos (Google Video Team 2005). However, in a first phase, videos were pre-approved before appearing online and it was necessary to install a Video Uploader tool in the user's computer (released first only for Windows, but a month later a second uploader was made available in Java software, making it possible to upload videos also from Macintosh and Linux computers). Google Video discontinued uploads in 2009, stating it was going to strictly focus on search technology (Cohen 2009).
companies found the appropriate target, the one who can pay, Google” (Kim 2012, 55).³

The year would come to a close with Time's announcement of Person of the Year, an important milestone in YouTube's history. In one of the magazine's news items, “The YouTube Gurus,” the founders of YouTube are described as “premoguls, near magnates. They foreshadow but don't quite yet embody the wealth and power that accompany their role as the new demiurges of the online world” (Cloud 2006). In May 2007, Steve Chen and Chad Hurley would win a Webby Person of the Year award, this time explicitly for YouTube. According to the Webbys' website, “The Webby Awards is the Internet's most respected symbol of success,” for websites & mobile, interactive advertising, and film & video (Webby Awards 2011).⁴ Later in 2009, this time the honour bestowed would not be restricted to the Internet: a Peabody Award. The George Foster Peabody Awards “recognize distinguished achievement and meritorious service by radio and television networks, stations, producing organizations, cable television organizations and individuals” since 1940 (Peabody Awards 2010), and its winners include mainly television and radio programming, although in recent years that has begun to change, with the inclusion of many new media actors.

YouTube in numbers

In May 2010, YouTube celebrated the five-year anniversary of its beta launch, highlighting in its press site a series of “Key YouTube Stats.” According to this website, YouTube generated two billion views per day,⁵ users spent an average of 15 minutes on the site each day, and 24 hours of video were uploaded every minute. Other quantitative data included these figures: 70% traffic from outside the US; over 7 000 hours of full-length movies and shows; more than 50% of videos were rated or included comments; and the embedding of the YouTube player across tens of millions of websites.

³ Kim describes how copyright issues were reframed from “the collision between greedy media moguls and freedom fighter YouTube” to “an economic conflict of interest between big media groups” (2012, 56).

⁴ In following years, YouTube would receive more Webby Awards, with projects such as the YouTube Livein 2009, the YouTube Symphony Orchestra in 2010, and YouTube Play – a partnership with the Guggenheim Museum for the exhibition of YouTube videos submitted and selected for this purpose in 2011.

⁵ According to the YouTube glossary, “[a] view occurs when a person watches your video. In order to preserve accuracy in view counts, we identify irregular playbacks such as spam and remove these from viewcount.” An experiment carried out by TubeMogul ranked eight online video websites according to their view count methodology: blip.tv (most stringent), Vimeo and Metacafe (stringent) Dailymotion, MySpace, Viddler, Yahoo! Video and YouTube (less stringent). The report's conclusion claims “while the industry has moved closer toward a standardized metric of what a 'view' actually constitutes, it remains relatively unclear” (TubeMogul 2010), a statement which should be read bearing in mind this company sells video analytics services.
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YouTube notes that over 4 million people were connected and auto-sharing to at least one social networking website. According to an infographic made with data from YouTube, but compiled by a website monitoring company, also posted on the five-year anniversary website, it was possible to find 46,2 years of YouTube videos watched every day on Facebook, 12,7 years on Orkut, 5,6 years on MySpace, and 1,2 years on Hi5.

At the end of 2010, the YouTube official blog stated that during that year over 700 billion videos were watched, and more than 13 million hours of video were uploaded. Bringing back the past, one should bear in mind that in December 2005 (the official launch), 8 million videos were watched per day, whereas in July 2006 (before being bought by Google), that number already reached 100 million.

In November 2010, YouTube announced reaching over 35 hours of video uploaded every minute. Figure 2 presents the chart included to show the evolution in this number:

![Hours of Video Uploaded per Minute](chart.png)

Source: Broadcasting Ourselves ;) The Official YouTube Blog

Figure 2: Hours of video uploaded per minute: chart posted on the official YouTube blog on November 10, 2010.

To explain why “the number of uploads to YouTube have more than doubled in the last two years” a few factors were picked out: the increase in limits (both in duration – from 10 to 15 minutes – and file size – currently two gigabytes), an increase in uploads from outside the website (e.g. from video games), and developments in mobile phones, making it easier and faster to upload videos to YouTube. The YouTube mobile site has been available
since June 2007 (although the full video catalogue was only accessible six months later), and
the significant growth in mobile phone usage was not restricted to uploading. In January 2011,
the official blog announced that YouTube exceeded “200 million views a day on mobile, a 3x
increase in 2010” (Doronichev 2011).

In February 2011, YouTube's interface had 43 language options. Four languages had
two different versions, namely Chinese (traditional and simplified), English (US and UK),
Portuguese (Portugal and Brasil), and Spanish (España and Lationamérica). In addition, a
YouTuber could pick from 45 different locations, i.e., “Worldwide” and 44 countries. It is
important to mention that changing location affected the displayed content, creating 45
different “YouTubes,” while the language choice only changed the interface. Once logged in,
customisation would increase, namely in terms of the videos and channel suggested for the
YouTuber, based on his previous activity on the website.

However, YouTube's performance is not only measured by the company itself. Consultancy and web-rating companies also follow online video and YouTube positioning in
that domain. As claimed by Alexa Internet, in February 2011 (six-year anniversary of its
creation), YouTube held third place worldwide according to their three-month traffic rankings,
after Google (first), and Facebook (second), and followed by Yahoo (fourth) and Windows
Live (fifth). A quarter of global Internet users visited YouTube, and in terms of demographics
these two groups are very similar to one another. The three exceptions are an over-
representation of the 18-24 year olds and an under-representation of 55-64 year olds at
YouTube, as well as an over-representation of people browsing from school.

Looking at how measurement companies portray online video and YouTube in
particular, this company is the undisputed leader in its segment in a significant part of the
world. Only two years after its creation, and mere months after being bought by Google, the
July's Pew/Internet report on online video regarding the first trimester of 2007, in the USA,
stated YouTube was responsible for 27% overall viewing, while among young adults (18-29)
that number reached almost half of video watching (Madden 2007, 4), showing already a
considerable presence.

Still, even if more recent measurements do agree on YouTube's first place in online
video viewing, it is possible to find some discrepancies in the figures presented by various

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6 Alexa Internet requires users to download a toolbar to collect the data. Therefore, despite often being used as a
reference, it should be noted its figures only account for the users who installed said toolbar.
companies, as demonstrated in figure 3. For example, for all online video, Nielsen registered slightly over 136 million Total Unique Viewers in the USA for June 2010 and close to 144 million for January 2011, comScore indicated around 178 million Total Unique Viewers in the USA for July 2010, as part of their Video Metrix service. Regarding YouTube and its Unique Viewers, Nielsen indicates 101 million (June 2010) and close to 113 million (January 2011) for YouTube, whereas comScore counts 143 million (July 2010) for all Google sites. In terms of ranking, the major difference is the position occupied by Hulu.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Online brand</th>
<th>Unique viewers (000)</th>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Unique viewers (000)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>101 131</td>
<td>Google Sites</td>
<td>143 226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yahoo!</td>
<td>26 685</td>
<td>Yahoo! Sites</td>
<td>55 107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>26 651</td>
<td>Facebook.com</td>
<td>46 571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSN/WindowsLive/Bing</td>
<td>15 926</td>
<td>Microsoft Sites</td>
<td>45 558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google</td>
<td>13 027</td>
<td>VEVO</td>
<td>43 911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hulu</td>
<td>12 325</td>
<td>Fox Interactive Media</td>
<td>38 136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNN Digital Network</td>
<td>10 621</td>
<td>Turner Network</td>
<td>33 442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox Interactive Media</td>
<td>9 164</td>
<td>Viacom Digital</td>
<td>30 715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESPN Digital Network</td>
<td>8 487</td>
<td>Disney Online</td>
<td>28 475</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The CollegeHumor Network</td>
<td>7 249</td>
<td>Hulu</td>
<td>28 455</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Nielsen Company, comScore

Figure 3: Comparison of unique viewer count presented by the Nielsen company and comScore Video Metrix. Information gathered from their June 2010 and July 2010 reports, respectively.

Dailymotion, a France-based video sharing website, was able at first to challenge YouTube's leadership in that country (Carlin 2006). However, that was never the case in Europe in general, and as video streaming quickly expanded in France, a year later Google sites already assumed the top position (comScore 2007). YouTube's blocking in China has led to the rise of a strong competitor like Youku, allegedly introducing innovative business models in this area, besides dominating Chinese viewership (Lococo and Lee 2010). In Russia, RuTube was described as “the biggest online video-sharing and transmitting service on RUNET” (Gornykh 2009, 442). Yet, at the time of RuTube's 15-million acquisition by a media conglomerate, according to another analytics gatherer, YouTube attracted more unique
visitors in that country (Schonfeld 2008).

However, online video is not directly watched only on YouTube and other websites specially dedicated to video sharing. Since June 2005 (between their beta and their official launch), YouTube has allowed embedding of its videos on other websites. A detailed analysis on how bloggers use this feature and the respective YouTube's statistics and demographics can be found in studies carried out by the Canadian company Sysomos (2009), focusing on both embedded and linked videos (see figure 4).

![Share by Countries](sysomos.png)

Source: Sysomos

Figure 4: Market share of YouTube's presence in blogs per country, according to Sysomos. Chart featured in the study A Look Inside Online Video Engagement - Part I, posted in the company's website in October 2009.

For YouTube, the first study concluded that it was the most popular video website for video engagement in the blogosphere with 81.9% of total embedded and linked videos, followed by Vimeo (8.8%), Daily Motion (4%) and MySpace (1.1%). This market leadership is even more overwhelming than the difference in unique viewership discussed before. In geographic terms, the most popular countries for YouTube video engagement within blogs were the U.S.A. (31.9%), Brazil (6.6%), Spain (5.6%), the U.K. (4.4%) and Canada (3.9%). Portugal was not that distant, reaching 3%. By demographics, bloggers between the age of 20 and 35 years old were the most active in embedding and linking (58%), while as far as gender is concerned, the distribution was 58% male and 42% female.

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7 More than 100 million blog posts were examined between July and September 2009. Links and embedded videos were identified within the following video platforms: YouTube, Blip.tv, Dailymotion, Metacafe, MTV, Vimeo, Hulu, Yahoo! Video, Google Video, Break.com, MySpace and MSN Video.
YouTube's business model

Wasko and Erickson (2009) note that the fixation on transforming audiences into revenue or monetisation, characteristic of the long-standing commercialisation of media, has now migrated to websites similar to YouTube, even if profit was not the main goal of most of them when they first emerged. The two main business models around online video are the paying model, which has met stronger resistance than in music (Blanchot 2010, 35), and free distribution, supported by advertising through the monetisation of the audience (Farchy 2009, 363), dominant at the time of this study. Increased effectiveness in marketing and accuracy in measurement are major attraction factors to advertisers, combined with the promise of a lucrative “Long Tail” effect (C. Anderson 2004; 2006), compensating online video's lack of television's concentration of eyeballs.\(^8\) Online attention is regarded as a scarce resource, generating an economy of audience and traffic (Farchy 2009). However, one of YouTube's signs of success, the fact that “the amount of traffic generated by YouTube in 2008 equals the amount on the entire Internet in 2000” (2009, 361), also has its share of downsides. Even if deals have since been made to lower costs, the website's technical infrastructure has drained a significant of the financial investment from the beginning (Snickars 2009), besides having faced threats of supplemental charges for data transfer from telecommunications companies (Farchy 2009, 368).

YouTube primary business model has been based on advertisement, but its strategies have changed and diversified over the years. The first advertising formats announced were participatory video ads (posted daily on the homepage to be judged by users – through comments and ratings, for example), and the brand channels, in August 2006, before Google's acquisition. The offer in advertising progressively diversified in the following years: one year after, in August 2007, InVideo Ads were launched; in November 2008, it was time to allow Pre-roll ads and Promoted Videos on YouTube videos;\(^9\) in the beginning of 2009, there was a significant increase in homepage ads formats, from one to seven; in March 2010, YouTube mobile ads were launched. Nevertheless, most advertisers feared being associated with the wrong videos even if they sometimes achieved significant popularity (the so-called “virality”

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\(^8\) The long-tail model has been criticised for overplaying the financial gains from the end of the tail, not only regarding the specific case of YouTube (Farchy 2009), but also all the web (Elberse 2008).

\(^9\) Promoted videos are displayed against relevant search results and related video content on YouTube, similarly to Google's “promoted links.”
discussed in chapter III), which is one of the explanations why YouTube decided to delay the possibility to insert pre-roll or overlay ads into user-generated content (Gillespie 2010, 353).

In addition to the increase in diversity of the offer in advertising formats, in December 2007, the YouTube Partner Program was expanded (YouTube 2007b). This instatement of a new application process followed a previous closed invitation to “thousands of mid-sized to large content creators” (YouTube 2007a), who would join professional content partners. Having this status enables YouTubers to share the revenue made from advertising present on their videos. One of the requirements for being a YouTube partner is the size of one's audience, as stated in YouTube's Help Centre regarding “Partner Program Basics.” Therefore, it works as a stimulus for increasing one's viewer numbers. Two years later, YouTube praised the success of this initiative by announcing “our partner program grew to around 15,000 participants worldwide” (including companies like Disney, but also the so-called “YouTube celebrities”) and even offered grants for the purchase of new video production equipment to the most successful partners in 2010 (Pickett 2010).

Almost five years after the creation of YouTube, in January 2010, YouTube Rentals is launched (YouTube 2011a). In May 2011, it expanded to full-length blockbusters, as widely reported online (Halliday 2011a; Bergen 2011). Movies and full-length television shows were already available since spring 2009, but this time there was an attempt to monetise that type of content, even if in August 2011 it was only available to content owners in the USA and for viewers in that country. This restriction applies to a lot of the content uploaded by entertainment companies, selecting which countries can or cannot watch not only movies, but also TV shows and music videos.

In short, market agreements between YouTube and content industries turned out to be part of the solution for “sharing the benefits of valorization of the audience with those who helped create it” (Farchy 2009, 369). More and more companies use YouTube as part of their online strategies, trying to be innovative in their uses, and YouTube entices them to “Broadcast your campaign” (see figure 5). Brand channels, for example, can undergo more

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10 In 2008, Click-to-Buy buttons on videos redirected watchers to websites like Amazon or iTunes (Schroeder 2008), however, they seem to have been replaced by simple links to points of purchase. Another experiment in monetising YouTube videos was the introduction of paid downloads (Tran 2009). This feature was eventually dropped. From the moment it was made available, there were soon reminders that Google had already tried that route without success (Warren 2009).
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customisation, such as the inclusion of web applications. Live streams have increased and diversified from including political public addresses, to interviews, news coverage, fashion shows, sports events, and concerts, earning its own tab in the aftermath of the 2010 redesign of YouTube, described below.

![YouTube](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

Figure 5: YouTube's Broadcast Your Campaign page. Screenshot taken on August 25, 2011.

Some entertainers have found that posting their work on YouTube could lead to profit: for instance, the comedy troupe Monty Python, faced with multiple online videos of their sketches, decided to upload their own quality versions and direct watchers to points of purchase. The results seemed to prove this move was sound business strategy: “not only did

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11 Some possibilities of integration with other social media are not at the grasp of the common You Tuber, despite being at the disposal of companies: with the help of an application that linked YouTube and Twitter, in the “Mano a Mano in el Baño” promotional campaign, the characters “Old Spice Guy” and “Fabio” responded to tweets both with tweets and videos. The tweets could be read directly on the channel. There was also an application for Facebook, but it seemed to draw little attention by comparison.

12 Monty Python's channel page read: “[...]We’ve launched our own Monty Python channel on YouTube. No more of those crap quality videos you’ve been posting. We’re giving you the real thing - HQ videos delivered straight from our vault. What’s more, we’re taking our most viewed clips and uploading brand new HQ versions. And what’s even more, we’re letting you see absolutely everything for free. So there! But we want something in return. None of your drivel, mindless comments. Instead, we want you to click on the links, buy our movies & TV shows and soften our pain and disgust at being ripped off all these years.”
their YouTube videos shoot to the top of the most viewed lists, but their DVDs also quickly climbed to No. 2 on Amazon’s Movies & TV bestsellers list, with increased sales of 23,000 percent” (Schroeder 2009). Moreover, media companies started to change their perspective on YouTube and regard it “not as a rival but as a new channel to re-transmit their programs and a new source of advertising revenue” (Kim 2012, 57).

Brand channels, new advertising formats, elaborate marketing strategies, however, tell only part of the story of how YouTube improved its relationship with professional content producers and the content industry in general. After experimenting with manual filtering, in October 2007, the Content ID system was launched:

YouTube's offers copyright holders to easily identify and manage their content on YouTube. The tool creates ID files which are then run against user uploads and, if a match occurs, the copyright holders policy preferences are then applied to that video. Rights owners can choose to block, track or monetize their content. (YouTube 2011b)

The launch of this feature was met with immediate suspicion by digital rights advocates like the Electronic Frontier Foundation, especially regarding its consequences to fair use and remix practices (von Lohmann 2007b). Nevertheless, the Content ID system seems to have appeased many copyright holders. Soon it was considered useful not only for control or anti-piracy measures, but also for marketing and monetization, especially since its connection with YouTube's analytics tool, YouTube Insight (Gannes 2009). In 2010, in the fifth anniversary of the website, YouTube announced the scanning of over 100 years of video every day by Content ID. Critics have pointed out that employing software to detect presumed copyright infringement leads companies like Warner Music Group to engage in “shotgun tactics” and send thousands of takedown notices in a short period of time (Gillespie 2010), a procedure some companies did follow, as shown in chapter VI. These type of situation

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13 The possibility to turn copyright violations into profit by means of automatized systems is not a result of YouTube's establishment of Content ID verification. “Automated rights management” had been previously described as able “to enforce standard copyright claims mechanically, without resort to the threat of litigation,” as well as allowing “copyright owners and others to create and enforce contracts that specify other sets of rights” (T. T. Bell 1998, 560). In Bell's view this would have positive consequences, and lead to a move from “fair use” to “fared use,” i.e., to “make copyrighted works in the digital intermedia available under reciprocal quasi-compulsory licenses” (1998, 561). Criticism is placed on the over-praising of fair use by academics, since “[m]ore careful scrutiny demonstrates that fair use imposes costs on consumers via risk of suit, on copyright owners via uncompensated uses, and on society as a whole via transaction costs” (1998, 619). Bell claims “[t]he alternative presented by fared use, because it can liberate us from a copyright system rotten with uncertainty, in fact offers freer access to expressive works” (1998, 619).
“demonstrate how YouTube's system can break down” (Clay 2011, 219).

More importantly, the concept of “copyright infringement” is very wide, and is not restricted to uploading original content. In YouTube's “copyright school” video, infringement “occurs when a copyrighted work is reproduced, distributed, performed or publicly displayed,” and also includes the uploading of the content being filmed (e.g. in a screening), a live performance, and videos that feature it, for example, music being played in the background.¹⁴ In the frequently asked questions section of YouTube's Copyright Center, it is said that cover songs may also fall under infringement (YouTube 2011c).¹⁵

In respect to resorting to copyrighted material for creating videos, the Copyright Centre acknowledges the possibility of a Fair Use or Fair Dealing defence, and links to videos and legislation that could help a YouTuber to understand and claim that condition for his/her videos. However, in the “Copyright school” video, even if this issue is addressed concerning mashups or remixes, fair use is portrayed as complicated – a long explanation, filled with legal jargon, is featured on screen, and the main character tries to push it way.

Such description was not well received by fair use advocates, generating an immediate response: the launching of a contest for “a better video than YouTube that explains both what you can and can't do with copyrighted content” (Jayasuriya 2011).¹⁶ As copyright control mechanisms progressively grew more sophisticated, fair use has equally started enjoying increased attention, after being in the shadows for decades (Aufderheide and Jaszi 2011), leading to an effort of clarification of this doctrine. Aufderheide's Center for Social Media (School of Communication, American University), together with the Washington College of Law, developed a section of their website entirely dedicated to the topic, in which they provide “tools for creators, teachers, and researchers to better use their fair use rights”

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¹⁴ YouTubers who received a copyright notification for their videos were required to watch this video and answer a short questionnaire, featured on its right (Green 2011).

¹⁵ In October the same year, the “Free Bieber” campaign was launched against the Commercial Felony Streaming Act (Bill S.978) proposed to the US congress that would make it “a felony to post videos that contain copyright-infringing music, with up to five years in prison for violators” (Doctorow 2011). The name of the campaign is a direct reference to pop star Justin Bieber, who was discovered through the YouTube videos his mother uploaded of him singing cover songs.

¹⁶ The judges of this contest were almost all remixers, and included Jonathan McIntosh, a video maker whose work is discussed in chapter VI. The winner would be announced the following July, “Fair Use School: Response to YouTube's Copyright School,” that falls short of being a “balanced video.” This video mainly focuses on making fair use intelligible and on actions of defence against copyright notifications, namely counter-notices.
Their “Code of Best Practices in Fair Use for Online Video” defines fair use as “the right to use copyrighted material without permission or payment under some circumstances” (Center for Social Media 2008, 1). The code does not offer a clear legal delimitation of the fair use right, rather it provides “evidence of commonly held understandings—some drawn from the experience of other creative communities (including documentary filmmakers) and supported by legal precedents, and all grounded in current practice of online video” (2008, 4). Despite the absence of an air-tight definition, Section 107 of the 1976 Copyright Act codifies factors that determine fair use for legal purposes: “the purpose and character of use, including whether such use is of a commercial nature or is for nonprofit educational purposes;” “the nature of the copyrighted work;” “the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole; and “the effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work” (Hunt 2007, 206).

“Fair use” is also known as “fair dealing,” and “exceptions or limitations to copyright” (OECD 2007). The European Union has reportedly been slow in catering to the demands of the content industries, especially in comparison to the pro-activity of its member states (Deibert et al. 2010). Still, in 2011, the European Union received media attention regarding the approval of a copyright extension to music performers (from 50 to 70 years), marking “a significant victory for the music industry, which has long campaigned for the change amid lost sales and online piracy” (Halliday 2011c).

Despite a long list of exceptions or limitations to reproduction rights being established in the Directive on the harmonisation of certain aspects of copyright and related rights in the information society (Directive 2001/29/EC, Article 5, number 3, items a. through o.), “European courts have been skeptical of claims to fair use of copyrighted content” (Deibert et al. 2010, 282). In his book Remix, Lawrence Lessig reminds readers that “defending a claim of ‘fair use’ is expensive,” and that “[b]y default, RW [Read/Write culture]

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17 Another example of an academic effort towards the enlightenment of non-corporate users regarding their rights is the “Chilling Effects” project. Conceived and developed at the Berkman Center for Internet & Society, and once more involving the Washington College of Law, in addition to these institutions, it is a joint project bringing together the Electronic Frontier Foundation, Stanford, Berkeley, University of San Francisco, University of Maine, and Santa Clara University School of Law. This project aims to “aims to help you understand the protections that the First Amendment and intellectual property laws give to your online activities” (Chilling Effects 2011), and part of their work is the development of a searchable database of Cease and Desist notices.
use violates copyright law. RW culture is thus presumptively illegal” (Lessig 2008, 100). Looking back at the reexaminations and reformulations on copyright principles over the past decades, the historical sense of the transformations occurring in this domain is towards “the expansion of copyright protection and the narrowing of copyright limitations and exceptions” (Litman 2006, 123). Like Litman, who argues there has been a campaign against fair use, Axel Bruns warns that the changes in the legal framework may eliminate the possibility of presenting fair use claims altogether, meaning “that on the one hand, news producers need to show more awareness of what is permitted under applicable laws, but on the other they also need to join the struggle to keep their practices legal” (2010, 128). This discussion was already addressed in chapter I and will also be resumed in chapter VI, bringing together questions of fair use, satire and remix.

Despite the seemingly growing alliance with copyright owners, YouTube seems to want to please the critics of copyright practice as defended by the content industries. In 2011, besides the standard YouTube license, YouTube started offering uploaders the option of licensing their videos with the Creative Commons CC-By-3.0 license, allowing sharing and remixing, including for commercial purposes, as long as attribution is made to the creator of that video. In addition, YouTube introduced new remixing options in its cloud-based video editor (Jardin 2011), allowing YouTubers to search for Creative Commons licensed videos and integrate them in their creations (see figure 6). In the videos licensed under Creative

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18 The author argues that a change in rhetoric, namely in metaphors, regarding the relationship between the author and the public produced legal effects: the idea of “bargain” (the author was “bribed” to create new works for the public to “enjoy, consume, learn from, and reuse”) was substituted by the characterisation of copyright as a “system of incentives,” tipping the scale towards copyright owners. This model established a “direct relationship between the extent of copyright protection and the amount of authorship produced and distributed” (Litman 2006, 125). With the conversion of copyright into a trade issue, “[c]opyright today is less about incentives or compensation than it is about control” (2006, 125).

19 This license is in line with YouTube's Terms of Service: “For clarity, you retain all of your ownership rights in your Content. However, by submitting Content to YouTube, you hereby grant YouTube a worldwide, non-exclusive, royalty-free, sublicensable and transferable license to use, reproduce, distribute, prepare derivative works of, display, and perform the Content in connection with the Service and YouTube's (and its successors' and affiliates') business, including without limitation for promoting and redistributing part or all of the Service (and derivative works thereof) in any media formats and through any media channels. You also hereby grant each user of the Service a non-exclusive license to access your Content through the Service, and to use, reproduce, distribute, display and perform such Content as permitted through the functionality of the Service and under these Terms of Service.”

20 Vimeo, a video website that aims to differentiate itself for being more art-driven, had allowed Creative Commons licensing close to a year before (Axon 2010b).

21 This video editor was launched in June 2010 and would progressively see more features being added throughout 2011. It's predecessor, YouTube Remixer, was considered “slow and buggy” and only enjoyed a short-life span in 2007 (Chitu 2010).
Commons, a remix button was included (as seen in figure 13), and the list of sources used appear next to the description of the video.

Figure 6: YouTube's Video Editor. Screenshot taken on August 15, 2011.

The “Copyright School” video itself, by featuring the well-known, satirical and dark-humoured cartoons “Happy Tree Friends,” and by taking copyright to its extreme, may be seen as YouTube mocking copyright holders instead of abiding to them. Whichever is true, the ambiguity is still there, as in many facets of YouTube.

Gillespie (2010) argues that by calling themselves “platforms” and by succeeding in framing public discourse, companies like YouTube or Facebook are able to differently position themselves for the various intended audiences, be it amateur users, advertisers, professional content producers, or policy makers. In Gillespie's view, “platform” is a powerful discursive tool that allows online content providers – and very specifically YouTube – to create a multidimensional conception of their role in the online world. He distinguishes four semantic territories for the word platform – computational, architectural, figurative, and political – that despite their differences share the suggestion of “a progressive and egalitarian arrangement, promising to support those who stand upon it” (2010, 350). This “broadly progressive sales pitch” omits “the tensions inherent in their service: between user-generated and commercially-produced content, between cultivating community and serving up advertising, between intervening in the delivery of content and remaining neutral” (2010, 348).

Such tension between generating revenue and democratizing media access has been
noted by other researchers, who not only imply – as Gillespie seems to do – but identify the dominant side of this tug-of-war: “[w]hile users may prosper from the YouTube experience, those who are likely to actually prosper in the future – if YouTube's strategies succeed – are the site owners and their corporate partners” (Wasko and Erickson 2009, 384). Success stories like Monty Python's can be interpreted as the opposite of the “cybertarian dream;” rather, it is described as the realisation of “the culture industries’ dream: permitting corporations to engage in product placement each time their own copyright is infringed online, and learning more and more about their audiences” (T. Miller 2009, 429).

For some time, advertising was sold only to accompany content from partners, due to early skepticism towards being associated with user-generated content. On the one hand, this aimed to avoid embarrassing or damaging mismatches, on the other, it protected companies from being linked to infringing material (McDonald 2009, 391–2). As the years passed, and with new features made available by YouTube, “piracy” has become less of a problem and has partly ceased to be a deterrent for attracting advertising. Some companies have figured out that sending take-down notices mostly gives them bad reputation among YouTubers, and may even be against their own promotional purposes. Through the combination of Content ID and YouTube Insight, YouTubers once regarded as “pirates” for posting copyrighted content (in its original format or remixed) can now operate as advertisers and marketeers for the content industry, and the success of their “campaigns” is tracked. “Metadata are not merely a by-product of user-generated content” (Dijck 2009, 49), and hence their commercial importance should not be disregarded. In this context, YouTubers lend a hand in the “sophisticated profiling” carried out by companies through the “appropriation and aggregation of personal information left on sites” (Proulx et al. 2011, 23). For Fuchs, this demonstrates how “[t]he Internet gift economy has a double character: it supports and at the same time undermines informational capitalism” (2009, 81). In his view, “[a]lthough the principle of the gift points towards a postcapitalist society, gifts are today subsumed under capitalism and used for generating profit in the Internet economy” (2009, 81).

These volunteers earnestly promote ads, songs or shows they like and that may bestow credibility in terms of the quality: no-one is forcing or paying the YouTuber to upload that video, he/she has no vested interests and wishes only to share it with his/her friends or make it available to everyone online because he/she thinks it deserves such treatment.
Moreover, there is the possibility to “monetise” such videos, since the copyright owner has the possibility to insert advertising on them and receive the respective revenue. In fact, this seems to have become the preferred option, giving origin to what has been termed “corporation-sanctioned user-generated content,” leading to the encouragement of YouTubers “to use music or video footage in the creation of videos, without penalty, in order to capitalize on YouTube’s viral marketing potential” (Wasko and Erickson 2009, 381).

Has YouTube definitely turned towards the exploitation of user-generated labour (Andrejevic 2009)? Lawrence Lessig describes a hybrid economy as “either a commercial entity that aims to leverage value from a sharing economy, or it is a sharing economy that builds a commercial entity to better support its sharing aims” (2008, 177), and includes YouTube as an example of hybrid economies that build community spaces. Burgess and Green argue “[i]t is the participants in YouTube's social network who are producing much of YouTube's cultural, social and economic value” (2009, 98), and to adequately perform its role as “patron,” YouTube has to “take the collective agency of its core users very seriously indeed” (2009, 99). Given the company's history, I propose YouTube has always been a commercial entity and that much of its sharing character funded on the central role of the YouTube community, as described by Lessig (2008, 195), has been weakened by technological and business options taken along the years, in agreement with the standpoint of several researchers (Andrejevic 2009; Dijck 2009; Kim 2012). At the same time, these options lead me to sustain that YouTube is now taking its corporate partners much more seriously than the YouTubers, with consequences as to the latter's ability to manipulate media images and to make oneself heard.

**YouTube, the website**

Searching for YouTube's homepage in the Internet Archive Way Back Machine, it is possible to access early versions of its interface and how it developed at that stage. During its first few months (before and after its beta launch), the layout suffered several modifications until settling on a steadily changing format that would not undergo any major alterations until 2010, the year of the fifth anniversary of YouTube's creation, beta launch and official launch.

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22 During a conference on remix and sharing, Lessig himself heavily rebuked YouTube on their copyright policy and neglect of fair use, not least because he experienced this first hand as one of his videos on this matter was silenced due to content ID detection (watch TEDxNYED 2010).
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In the first months, not only did they play with the disposition of the various graphic elements, but YouTube creators also experimented with different slogans (see figure 7): “Your Digital Video Repository;” “Upload, tag and share your videos worldwide;” the shortened “Watch and share your videos worldwide;” and finally “Broadcast Yourself,” YouTube's most famous tag line, first together with its predecessor and then standing alone. Not only does this motto call to mind traditional media and their communication model, YouTube's logo and even its chosen name evokes the television set. Therefore, it could be argued that its early period in which vlogging had some centrality (Molyneaux et al. 2008) and a significant percentage of videos was not made for strangers, rather they were intended for one's family or close relations (Wesch 2008), was maybe just a prelude to focusing on gathering a wide audience and profiting from achieving that goal. Already in 2006, in Time magazine's piece on the creators of YouTube, the journalist stated “YouTube is a new kind of medium, but it's still mass” (Cloud 2006).


[Image of YouTube homepage]

Figure 7: Versions of YouTube's homepage automatically collected by the Internet Archive Way Back Machine. Screenshots taken between July 21, 2011 and August 12, 2011.

When the 2010 layout change started rolling out, it first affected individual video pages. In the beginning of 2011, after some experiments and a testing period (users could opt-in to the new layout), it was the homepage's turn to suffer a major redesign. As can be seen in the August 2011 screenshot, “Broadcast yourself” was finally removed from the logo, like had already happened in individual video pages. It only remained in the browser title bar of the videos tab page. From focusing on the individual YouTuber's ability to make himself heard, YouTube now invites non-registered viewers to “[j]oing the largest online worldwide video-sharing community!,” as shown in figure 8.

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Figure 8: YouTube's homepage. Screenshot taken on August 10, 2011.

Changes affected not only the homepage, but also the available tabs while “browsing:” now live events have their own distinct space, while channels and community lost that privilege; Music left the company of other categories and also became a tab. During the transition to the second major change in redesign, Education and News & Politics would follow suit with some alterations. The YouTube videos tab page changed, now to include highlighted videos or playlists on top, followed by Most Viewed Today videos, and finally videos from the different categories (see figure 9).

A noteworthy modification was the elimination from the video tab of the sorting criteria available to users other than Most Viewed: Popular; HD; Spotlight Videos; Rising Videos; Most Discussed (comments); Recent Videos; Most Responded (video responses); Top Favourited; and Top Rated (a five-star voting system). The possibility to choose different time frames also disappeared. Clicking in Most Viewed Today, however, takes the user to YouTube Charts where it is possible to sort through Most Viewed Videos; As Seen On (the website driving more traffic to a particular video); Most Discussed Videos; Most Liked (a binary like/dislike voting system); Most Subscribed; Most Viewed HD Videos; Most Viewed Partners; Most Viewed Users; and Top Favourited. Four different time frames can be equally selected: Today; This Week; This Month; and All Time.
Figure 9: Videos Tab – before and after the layout change. Screenshots taken on February 21, 2010 and August 11, 2011.

In the YouTube Charts page, it is also possible to choose according to category, the only organising criterion which remained unchanged in the videos tab page (although its presentation was altered). Since I have started my empirical observation in 2008 until August
2011, user-generated videos fell under one of the following categories: Autos & Vehicles; Comedy; Education; Entertainment; Film & Animation; Gaming; Howto & Style; Music; News & Politics; Nonprofits & Activism; People & Blogs; Pets & Animals; Science & Technology; Sports; and Travel & Events.

Source: YouTube

Figure 10: News & Politics and Nonprofits & Activism category pages. Screenshot taken on August 11, 2011.

This layout redesign also had effects within almost all categories, except made to News & Politics, which for no discernible reason remained with the old layout (see figure 10). A possible rationale for this may be connected with its transformation in the second change to the layout, mentioned below. In the new layout, videos are divided into Popular Around the Web (“videos with the most views when embedded on other websites. Updated daily”); and Most Viewed. On the right-hand corner, a video is given special attention, and below a list of Popular Channels is presented.

A Channel is the profile page of registered users. The information made available on the YouTuber, his/her connections and his/her videos is defined by him/herself in the Channel settings. There a user can choose from an array of options: for example, if the channel is visible or not; its title, tags, and type (youtuber,23 musician, director, comedian, guru,

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23 Although “youtuber” is a type of channel, I employ this term throughout this thesis to designate someone who takes part in YouTube, be it by watching, uploading or commenting on videos hence the difference in capitalization. “YouTuber” to designate a YouTube user is often found in YouTube's own discourse (in its official blog, for instance, there often meant as “a member of the YouTube community”) and in the studies of YouTube mentioned in this chapter's introduction. My findings also confirmed that this designation is also employed by YouTubers themselves, in line with previous empirical studies (Adami 2009).
reporter); the details it has on the user (e.g. name, website, town, description, etc.); how and which videos are shown; themes and colours; and which modules are displayed.

Besides the mandatory video and profile information boxes, those modules enable the YouTuber to make use of various features dedicated to interaction. He/she can enable feedback by adding a comment box to the channel itself or “ask for ideas, questions, or suggestions from the community” by using the Google moderator tool, whose value is defined by its Help Center as “in engaging large groups of people in conversation.” “Conversation” is recurrently employed to designate interaction on YouTube, especially by the company and its employees, and in particular when the topic is politics (as I demonstrate in chapter IV). There is also the possibility to create Event Dates and link to a maximum of sixteen other channels, forming a list similar to a blogroll.\(^{24}\) Finally, the YouTuber can choose whether his/her lists of subscriptions, subscribers, and friends are visible. A “subscription” allows him/her to receive updates on another user's videos and public activity. A “friend” is intended to correspond to a closer relation and has more privileges: not requiring pre-approval on comments if moderation is in place, or the ability to send messages to his/her friend despite that being restricted to users in general.

The layout of channel pages did not suffer any major changes, apart from the ones connected with the move from a rating to a voting system and the general YouTube header (see figure 11). However, access to video information became more layered. Contrary to what previously happened, in some channels when you click on a video, you remained on it while the video plays on the featured video box, instead of directing the watcher to its individual page. Since the video ran directly on the channel page, the user could see its title, description (if longer than four lines, to see it entirely one needs to click on “more info”), and view numbers, as well as rate it, choose it as favourite (becomes part of a list which the user can access from his account area and be made visible on his channel), share it (by emailing it, copying the embedding code or clicking on the direct share button for commonly used blog and social networking services),\(^{25}\) add it to a playlist, and flag it.

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\(^{24}\) Blogs' networked structure is created through hyperlinking. This can be established by the blogger through inserting hyperlinks in individual posts, and by maintaining on the homepage a blogroll, i.e., “a list of blogs that they frequently read or especially admire, with clickable links to the general URLs (web addresses) of those blogs” (Farrell and Dreznner 2008, 17).

\(^{25}\) In August 2011, these were considered to be Facebook, Twitter, and Google Plus (before toggling “show more), Buzz, MySpace, Orkut, hi5, tumblr., Bebo, Blogger, and StumbleUpon.
Yet, all other contextual elements present on the individual page were left out, namely tags, category, suggested videos, voting already given, and more importantly in studying online discussion, comments and video responses. It isolated the video more and hid the interaction it may have originated. In addition, one could no longer sort the videos on the channel by “Most discussed,” a criterion replaced by “Top rated,” which gives more focus to popularity instead of controversy, and a less-effort demanding form of interaction (Like/dislike vs writing and posting a comment). Nevertheless, the most significant redesign was to the page of each individual video, as shown in figure 12.
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In the new layout, clicking on “show more” replaced “more info” to view full description, tags and category. All videos have the information just described, in addition to a title, and the four of them are fields the YouTuber should fill upon uploading the video (although they can always be changed). Previously displayed under a “Statistics & Data” drop-down menu, descriptive data on the video’s audience was now available by clicking next to the view count, a number which was highlighted in the redesign through increased font size (see figure 13).

Figure 13: “Buffy vs Edward: Twilight Remixed – [original version],” example of a video page. Screenshot taken on August 2011.

A feature always available to watchers is “flagging,” i.e. to indicate to YouTube staff that the video violates “YouTube Community Guidelines.” In 2011, videos could be flagged
as: Sexual Content; Hateful or Abusive Content; Harmful Dangerous Acts; Child Abuse; Spam; Infringes My Rights (including copyright); and Violent or Repulsive Content. Flagging options have increased over the years, and the inclusion of new subcategories has faced controversy. I will discuss flagging as a “problem behaviour on YouTube” (Strangelove 2010, 120), and its possible effects on political discussion in chapter III.

The video uploader may choose to add more elements to the video itself, namely captions (in one or multiple languages) and annotations (visible in top right-hand corner of Figure 13). Both can be disabled by the watcher. Annotations have been cleverly used in the creation of interactive games, in particular for advertising campaigns that resorted to “choose your adventure” style videos, inspired by the narrative structure of game books where the reader was able to make choices that affected how the story developed.26

The decision to allow or not different forms of interaction through social web tools is also the uploader's responsibility. He/she can let other users rate the video, post text comments, vote on the comments posted, and post video responses. Despite the possibility of being included in the social web family (Lange 2007b), YouTube places video at the centre of its interface. YouTube has increasingly downplayed its own social web features in its platform: there, video is king and increasingly so at each redesign. In fact, “videos (rather than 'friending') are the primary medium of social connection between participants” (Burgess 2008, 102). This study on YouTube has pointed out “in some respects it seems community tools are added as an afterthought” (2009, 105). In contrast, at each redesign there are stronger connections to the social web, namely to websites like Facebook and Google Plus.

The redesign of the individual video page also had consequences for comments: instead of being chronologically displayed from most recent to oldest, after the layout change the uploader's own comments appear first, followed by the top rated comments, video responses and finally the full list of comments. YouTube comments have been studied as part of the analysis of antagonism and controversy on this website (Lange 2007a; Burgess and Green 2008), a topic I will further explore in the next chapter with some examples of my own.

Recent works which have taken a close look at YouTube comments point out that this form of

26 One example is the video entitled “Interactive zombie movie adventure - DELIVER ME TO HELL - REAL ZOMBIES ATTACK” uploaded by HellPizzaNZ, the New Zealand branch of a pizza delivery service present in that country, Australia, Canada, India, Ireland, and the United Kingdom. The person watching the video had to choose between different options to save the pizza delivery man from zombies and have him successfully deliver his pizza.
discussion has not received wide attention from researchers (Jones and Schieffelin 2009; Thelwall et al. 2012). Video responses, in turn, have been available since May 2006. This feature “allows users to interact and converse through video, by creating a video sequence that begins with an opening video and followed by video responses from other users” (Benevenuto et al. 2008). The resulting “asynchronous multimedia dialogs” (Duarte et al. 2007) or “video-threads” are considered “a new practice of interaction” (Adami 2009), often described as promising in the context of political communication (Ricke 2010), as my analysis demonstrates on chapter IV. Along with comments and rating, the ability to post responses is described as “inviting participation and commentary,” thereby summoning “everyday commentary related to any issue presented within its community” (Hess 2009, 414).

Together with the alteration in the ranking order of comments, a major difference in the new video layout was how suggestions of related videos became more prominent than other contextual elements. The latter lose their importance once more, as in playing the video on the channel, this time by moving from being beside the video to below it. If the person watching the video does not scroll down in the new layout, he/she no longer frames what he/she is viewing with information created by the uploader. Rather, he/she receives context information from a list of videos decided and ordered according to an algorithm defined by YouTube, and over which the YouTuber has less power, even though the control over suggestions, and over being featured on suggestions or search results, is not completely outside the uploader's hands.

There are YouTubers who attempt to work around YouTube's design intentions. Some users purposely miscategorize their videos because they know it may be easier for them to gain visibility on one particular category. Or sometimes their intentions are just to mock the system. As described, inserting the video’s title, description and tags as well as its category are the prerogative of the person uploading the video, therefore adding to the subjectivity of this content and allowing for all this information to be erroneous. This misuse of metadata affects YouTube's suggestions and search engine retrieval, thereby originating a form of web spam. 27 The choice of a misleading thumbnail (the image identifying the video visible in the search results and suggested videos list) is another way to deceive users into clicking on a video’s

27 Web spam or spamin dexing “refers to actions intended to mislead search engines into ranking some pages higher than they deserve” (Gyongyi and Garcia-Molina 2005, 39).
link and increasing its view count. Moreover, the ranking systems relying on metrics like rating or voting, comments and responses can and are manipulated, as proved by my exploratory analysis in chapter III.

Nevertheless, watchers are also able to defend themselves and are not oblivious to this fragility of the system. When the hugely famous “Evolution of Dance” video was temporarily overthrown of the “Most Viewed – All time” position, eyebrows rose. The reason for suspicion came from the fact that the new leader was a fan-made music video, featuring a song from the Brazilian band Cansei de Ser Sexy, with unusual statistics. A blogger who looked into the issue points out:

It's accumulated a staggering 89 million views, at an average 265,500 views per day. (Though, as you'll see below, most of those viewers were in the last two months.) Not only would this make his video the most-viewed of all time, defeating runner-up The Evolution of Dance by over 12 million views, but it's also added more views-per-day than any video but Britney's latest single (Baio 2008a).

The video's tags included terms like “ipod”, “hot”, “barack” and “obama”. In a later interview, the creator of the video stated that his intention was not to use misleading tags, but to use the popularity of the video to support Barack Obama (Baio 2008b). Although, the cheating was never admitted or proved, YouTube took down the video from the leaderboard, and after the video got its place back, the creator himself removed it (Baio 2008a). Still, the uploader was successful – even if only for a short period before getting caught by YouTubers and YouTube – in tampering with ranking positions, search results and suggestions. Campaign managers were quick on picking up on this possibility, as demonstrated by the two cases of manipulation of YouTube by Republican candidates in the US Presidential 2008 elections (McCain's and Kucinich's self-responding practices, discussed in the next chapter, and Mitt Romney's war of tags, explained in chapter IV).

When videos are watched outside YouTube, the uploader loses almost all control over the context in which the video is presented. As noted above, YouTube enabled embedding just after its beta launch. Embedding makes the video stand alone with its title and uploader's username, removing all other elements that surround it in its YouTube page (including the metrics indicating its popularity). The “As Seen On” feature brought new

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28 For the company, there is little loss of reference since “[a] YouTube video retains its logo when it is directly linked to and played on other sites, thus widening YouTube’s conceptual reach” (Lange 2008, 89).
challenges to the uploader: although he/she may want the video to reach as many people as possible, and do not mind the new contextualisation it can undergo outside YouTube, he/she may not be happy with seeing his/her video associated with a particular website on YouTube, making the decision to allow embedding or not even more complex.  

Nevertheless, such complexity may be disregarded when faced with the implications of not being outside YouTube. The change in the layout created noteworthy tension: if on the one hand it highlights the videos, and obscures interaction as well as information on the YouTuber, on the other hand, embedded videos gain visibility, privileging viewing and interaction outside YouTube, and as we have seen, in a setting less controlled by the uploader. If the possibility to embed its videos in external websites already made it difficult to think of YouTube as separate of other social web platforms, as early studies on YouTube have pointed out (Wesch 2008), by granting prominence to the “Most viewed on the web,” what matters becomes being watched outside YouTube. The video-sharing website is therefore closer to being more of a video-hosting website, deflecting social web capabilities, contextualisation and discussion to new online locations.  

As 2011 reached its final months, less than a year after a new homepage had been rolled to all YouTubers (YouTube Team 2011a), YouTube presented a major redesign of its website, notably modifying its homepage once again and the Channel pages, as shown on figure 14. This redesign would intensify characteristics noted in the previous transformation, in particular the connection to the social web, by enabling YouTubers to link YouTube to their Google+ and Facebook profiles (YouTube Team 2011b). The videos, channels and interaction (video-responses and comments) discussed in this research work were studied before this major alteration. For this reason, and given that the introduction of the new features seems to confirm the analysis in the previous pages, even though such significant change had to be mentioned in this dissertation, it will not merit a more in-depth description.

29 On the YouTube Help Center it is possible to find complaints regarding the lack of control over the As Seen On feature: one particular YouTuber complaining it was the link to a rival's website.  
30 Early studies on YouTube already pointed out how popularity on YouTube was affected by external websites, since “viewing patterns also fluctuate based on how people get directed to such content, through RSS feeds, web reviews, blogs, e-mails, or other recommendation web sites” (Cha et al. 2007, 7).
Figure 14: YouTube’s second redesign of its homepage. Screenshot taken on February 14, 2012.

However, one major change has to be highlighted in the context of this dissertation: the fact that News & Politics ceased to be listed among other categories and became a tab, alongside Videos, Live, Music and Education, as described above. This separate space became only “News,” without the “Politics.” When uploading videos, as of July 2012, YouTubers could still choose “News & Politics” as a category for their videos.

YouTube is constantly changing. Features are rolled out – sometimes publicised, sometimes launched in beta, sometimes they just pop up – and then taken without any announcement, especially the ones with business connections (e.g. paid downloads, the launch and relaunch of YouTube Rentals). Besides exploring its options, the company “has also encouraged its advertisers to try different tactics, hoping that someone will initially hit on the magic formula for making money from YouTube’s millions of users” (Wasko and Erickson 2009, 378). Although redesign and new features are introduced in phases, so as to receive feedback and adapt accordingly, YouTube’s website changes do not seem to be the product of
a democratised innovation process (Hippel 2005). YouTubers do not change code, they do not change algorithms, all this is in fact kept secret (T. Miller 2009). Even concerning personalisation, their options are very limited, unless they have a brand channel, which is only for those who have marketing purposes. In terms of listening to the needs of its users, YouTube seems to be more attentive to its corporate partners than to the YouTube community. Copyright controls, for instance, restrict alleged innovation in cultural practices carried out by YouTubers; as Clay (2011) points out, corporate media are not interested in changing roles in cultural production.

Even if savvy YouTubers can learn how to “game the system,” meaning to manipulate it to their own advantage, after each transformation, decisions made by YouTube have major consequences for most YouTubers in terms of which content they have easier access to and what happens to the videos they upload. Popularity metrics are not just indicative of what is popular or mere measuring tools. As put by Burgess and Green, “these metrics also take an active role in creating the reality of what is popular on YouTube: they are not only descriptive; they are also performative” (2009). Changes such as the previously described replacement of “Most discussed” for “Top Rated” as a sorting option for videos on channels, give emphasis to popularity in detriment of controversy, and therefore direct attention to videos that generate distinct forms of interaction (voting vs commenting). Gillespie notes in the conclusion of his article, regarding all said platforms:

As with broadcasting and publishing, their choices about what can appear, how it is organized, how it is monetized, what can be removed and why, and what the technical architecture allows and prohibits, are all real and substantive interventions into the contours of public discourse. They raise both traditional dilemmas about free speech and public expression, and some substantially new ones, for which there are few precedents or explanations (Gillespie 2010, 359).\(^{31}\)

The absence of prioritization of the videos is only an illusion, and said monetisation is behind some of the existing differentiation on YouTube, “[b]ecause media companies and their advertisers want to draw attention to their content, YouTube categorizes its videos, among other designations, into Promoted Videos and Spotlight Videos” (Wasko and Erickson

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\(^{31}\) Gillespie (2010) describes in his article how restrictions put in place to “sexually suggestive videos” in 2008, causing them to suffer technical demotion, and not appear in the “Most...” rankings in YouTube's front page, shape how videos are found.
These labels (the first referring to paid content, whereas the second to quality content) help videos see their numbers exponentially grow, enabling them to reach YouTube Charts. For Elizabeth Losh, “YouTube is often a cultural engine of popularity instead of populism, in which the power laws by which it functions largely protect the status quo rather than challenge it” (2008, 111–2), while to the researchers just cited categories such as “Most Viewed,” “Most Popular” or “Most Discussed” are promotional devices rather than indicators of popularity (Wasko and Erickson 2009, 382).

**Conclusion: The co-optation and commodification of YouTube. Questioning citizen empowerment**

Habermas (1994 [1962]) noted that the voter – furnished with knowledge and critical capacity – is expected to “take an interested part in public discussions so that he might help discover what can serve as a standard for right and just political action in rational form and with the general interest in mind” (1994, 212). However, Habermas is very skeptic and a detractor of what he perceives to be a recent replacement of rational debate by forms of consumption, tied to acts of individual reception, and the commodification of discussion.

Put bluntly: you had to pay for books, theatre, concert, and museum, but not for the conversation about you had read, heard and seen and what you might completely absorb only through this conversation. Today the conversation itself is administered […] the rational debate of private people becomes one of the production numbers of the stars in radio and television […]Critical debate arranged in this matter certainly fulfils important social-psychological functions, especially that of a tranquilising substitute for action; however, it increasingly loses its publicist function. (Habermas 1994, 164)

This represents the transformation of the public sphere into a media spectacle, leading to its own subversion and eliminating of its critical character. The primacy of commercial interest has been tied to the process of concentration of media ownership, intensified by the turn of the century's trend of mergers and acquisitions in that business area (J. L. Garcia 2009a).

As the activities linked with e-commerce increasingly assumed the main pole of attraction online, concerns were voiced regarding the transformation of “the Internet into an aseptic environment where consumers (both adults and children) can enter as into a huge shopping mall, without ever running the risk of being distracted from their consumer
activities” (Rodotà 1999, 134). A possible loss in the public nature of the Internet, caused by its growing privatisation, may have consequences to the affirmation of an electronic citizenship: “a commercial Net creates global economic ties; a civic Net can create global civic ties - if given the chance” (B. Barber 2003, 46). In other words, “what place can we find for political commitment within the playful environment of the Net, when we can so easily switch off or move on to something more fun if we feel bored?” (Dahlgren 2001, 52).

The colonisation of cyberspace by market forces has become apparent and has run aground the “1980s themes celebrating the arrival of cybernetic freedom and electronic democracy” (Sussman 1997, 283). The consequence would be the privileging of entertainment and profit, causing severe damage to the educative and communitarian potential of the Internet. Commercial activities are feared to deviate attention and occupy the citizen's time, which would otherwise be employed towards information search conducive to better civic literacy and, as a result, to more active and informed participation in public discussion. This political and economic transition is designated by Dan Schiller (2001) as “digital capitalism,” whereas Fuchs (2008) employs the term “transnational informational capitalism.” This author supports that “there is a commodified Internet economy and a non-commodified Internet economy” (2009, 80), a position akin to Aigrain's (2005c) two worlds (see the previous chapter); yet, in his view, competition trumps participation and cooperation.

YouTube has undergone significant changes since its beta launch in May 2005. From sacrificing potential revenue from pre-roll ads so as to preserve its “mythological community-driven status” (Cloud 2006), to a business model based on multiple advertising formats and savvy marketing strategies, YouTube's character as a company strongly concerned with making profit can hardly be disputed. Kim terms this process “the institutionalization of YouTube,” in which professionally-generated content gained prominence and YouTube was transformed into a “media milieu where content and advertisement flow smoothly” (2012, 63). YouTubers have their own economic interests: “[a]lthough YouTube and many other video-sharing sites carefully nurture the concept of amateur home-made content, the actual myth driving this concept is the popular belief in ‘rags to riches’ stories” (Dijck 2009, 52–3). In fact, the success of YouTube's Partner Program is a sign of how many users look forward to a paycheck for their user-generated creations.
The Politics of YouTube

The relation between communication, culture and democracy is a long standing sociological topic (Subtil and Garcia 2010). Critics point out that equating Barack Obama, Paris Hilton and Britney Spears hardly seems a new age of politics (T. Miller 2009, 430). Given the route towards increased commodification followed by the company, is there still room for the empowerment of YouTubers and hopes of online video helping achieve more participatory forms of democracy?

This is one of the questions I will recurrently attempt to contribute to clarify, although a definite answer cannot be achieved by this research alone. In the next chapter, I will present an overview on political videos on YouTube as well as some the key issues addressed by researchers who turned their attention to this website from a political perspective.
III.

News & Politics and political video genres

Having established a general theoretical framework for analysis, followed by the examination of YouTube both as a company and as a website, I will now describe my exploratory research and explicit how it led to the case studies described in the following chapters. Following this account, I will tackle theoretical and empirical studies on politics on YouTube and the politics of YouTube, while presenting a few considerations that can already be drawn from studying YouTube videos. Finally, I will lay out an overview of the political video genres most commonly uploaded on this website, whose discussion is resumed in the appropriate chapter. In chapter III, I hence intend to reveal the complexity of studying the political aspects of YouTube and YouTube videos.

Choosing the videos: Exploratory research

Faced with the difficult question of what made a video “political” or not, I decided to start by following the users' own decision in categorising their video and hence direct my glance to the category News & Politics. Following a first criterion of volume of participation, in this exploratory work I decided to focus on this category instead of Nonprofits & Activism, the other category which could have been fruitful in searching for political videos but that has a poorer performance in quantitative metrics.\(^1\) Moreover, the latter could be understood as more restrictive in terms of the topic of the videos uploaded, which could explain the lower figures.

Categories are chosen by users, therefore it does not necessarily mean that they correspond to the video in question. In fact, it is fairly common to find videos in inadequate categories so that they achieve visibility more easily, especially in categories with low view numbers, thereby gaming the system. Moreover, even if one considered that there was no deliberate miscategorising, one should bear in mind that categories can be somewhat fluid.

\(^1\) Comparing categories in June 2008, my collected data showed a significant difference between these categories: in Most Viewed (Today) – 2049707 (News & Politics) vs 1006904 (Nonprofits & Activism) views; in Most Discussed (Today) – 1337081 (N&P) vs 119472 (NP&A) comments; and in Most Responded (Today) – 6862 (N&P) vs 128 (NP&A) video responses.
The Politics of YouTube

dpiece of news about something that happened to a musician could be considered News & Politics, Music, Entertainment, or even Comedy, depending on the perspective of the uploader.

While the first report was dedicated to online video in general, a second Sysomos (2010) study was dedicated solely to YouTube videos, focused more on content, and distinguished between categories on YouTube.² With respect to popularity, Music is the number one category with 31% of all analysed videos, followed by Entertainment (15%) and People & Blogs (11%), while News & Politics only reaches 7%. However, blogs with a high authority score (wider audience and reach) are more likely to include links to News & Politics videos, than blogs with low and medium authority. Regarding age groups, there are also differences: older bloggers are more interested in the News & Politics category, reaching second place (slightly under 15%, in the 61 and over age group), as opposed to its lack of popularity among teenagers (less than 5% of total links). The use of tags revealed a similar pattern: for the older bloggers, the top names in video tags almost all belonged to politics.

Looking at video metrics such as views, as well as what Sysomos calls “engagement parameters,” namely average counts for rating, favourite, comments and views, some revealing numbers can be found, as shown on figure 15.³ In the News & Politics category, and comparing to the categories here described in detail,⁴ in terms of averages, videos have the longest duration (over a minute more than overall average), they have the second lowest rating (still in the 5-star system) as well as the lowest count in rating, favouriting and views (in the last case they are still above overall average). Yet, the “comment count” is the highest of all these categories, and significantly higher than average. Sysomos believes this “suggests that news and political videos tend to attract a lot of discussion” (2010). YouTube is hence said to provide a forum for debate through the comments prompted by online video (Hunt 2007), in addition to “promoting a reflective engagement with a shared culture” (McDonald 2009, 402).

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² This study had a smaller sample and a longer time-frame: 2.5 million unique YouTube and the respective blog posts embedding or linking them, from July to December 2009.

³ For YouTube's own analytics tool, Insight, views are considered separately, while “community engagements” include sharing, in addition to ratings, comments, and favourites.

⁴ The following categories are not featured on this table: Autos & Vehicles, Comedy, Education, Film & Animation, Gaming, Howto & Style, Nonprofits & Activism, Pets & Animals, Science & Technology, and Travel & Events.
The Politics of YouTube

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Music</th>
<th>Entertainment</th>
<th>People &amp; Blogs</th>
<th>News &amp; Politics</th>
<th>Sports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>4' 12&quot;</td>
<td>4' 4&quot;</td>
<td>3' 55&quot;</td>
<td>4' 15&quot;</td>
<td>5' 19&quot;</td>
<td>3' 4&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>3.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating Count</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorite Count</td>
<td>396.5</td>
<td>986.5</td>
<td>813.0</td>
<td>678.3</td>
<td>326.2</td>
<td>1514.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comment Count</td>
<td>179.4</td>
<td>336.0</td>
<td>436.0</td>
<td>298.4</td>
<td>561.3</td>
<td>490.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View Count</td>
<td>99,160</td>
<td>224,448</td>
<td>190,827</td>
<td>162,252</td>
<td>105,044</td>
<td>285,571</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: sysomos.com

Figure 15: Average counts for “engagement parameters” of YouTube videos, according to Sysomos. Table featured in the study Inside YouTube Videos, posted in the company’s website in February 2010.

It is important to recall that News and Politics were joined in the same category, which means that not all videos concerned political issues or discussion. In fact, on the front page of this category, the default setting for the Videos tab was to “Top News,” showing videos with a great breadth of topics. Therefore “Politics” was often overshadowed by a particular event, often linked to entertainment television, like Susan Boyle’s performance on Britain’s Got Talent or the incident in the 2009 MTV Video Music Awards between Kanye West and Taylor Swift, two music celebrities: most of the videos featured on the following day concerned these cases. At times, these “News” do cross over to the “Politics” side, as in the example of the latter event, which, in one instance turned into a meme also touching the political field. As described before, this category stopped being listed among all others, and became a tab with a more autonomous presence in the website’s layout; however, the “Politics” part of the category’s name disappeared and can only be found in the uploader’s interface.

The Internet meme is described as “a faddish joke or practice (like a humorous way of captioning cat pictures) that becomes widely imitated” (Burgess 2008, 101). This designation draws inspiration from Dawkins’ concept “Mimeme,” abbreviated as “meme,” “a

5 This default setting could still be verified in 2011.
6 “MTV VMAs Remix: Kanye West Interrupts Obama’s Speech (HD)” is a mash-up bringing together the VMA episode with Congressman Joe Wilson’s interruption of President Obama’s speech on healthcare.
name for the new replicator, a noun which conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation” (Dawkins 1985, 206). It is argued that Dawkins' approach gives prominence to the forms of propagation, “how it can be enhanced or, in the contrary, hindered” (J. M. Rosa 2001, 298), rather than to the content being disseminated. “Meme” is often used in the same context as “viral video,” described in the next pages. Jean Burgess states that these “very loosely applied biological metaphors” are “appropriated from the various attempts to develop a science of cultural transmission based on evolutionary theory that have been unfolding for decades” (Burgess 2008, 101). Internet memes, humour and the YouTube meme in specific have been the focus of Limor Shifman's work (2011; Shifman forthcoming; Shifman and Thelwall 2009). I will further address the case of memes and YouTube political videos in chapter VI.

The whole category of News & Politics was still too large to develop an exploratory search, therefore I made a second decision: to create a sample of extreme cases. Following the argument made by Sysomos that high numbers in comments mean “a lot of political discussion,” an assumption that is also held by many others, including politicians (as is pointed out in chapter V regarding the European Commission), I chose to look at the “Most Discussed” and “Most Responded” videos in this specific category, two ranking possibilities available to sort videos in all categories at the time of the data collection.8

Burgess and Green, on their book Youtube, discuss a 2007 content survey based on a sample of videos from the Most Responded and Most Discussed sorting options, as well as Most Viewed and Most Favourited. In their study, “user-created” videos were considerably more common than “traditional media” both in Most Discussed (751 user-created vs 276 traditional) and Most Responded (683 user-created vs 308 traditional) (Burgess and Green 2009, 42).9 In my 2009 analysis of the top 20 in Most Discussed and Most Responded videos

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7 A scientific journal was launched in 1997 specifically on the inchoate field of “Memetics”—Journal of Memetics: Evolutionary Models of Information Transmission. It had nine volumes and eventually closed in 2005. Dawkins' concept of meme became the basis of the work of authors from different fields outside biology, for instance in philosophy and cognitive science (Dennett 1991). “Viruses of the mind” would be the title of a later essay published by Dawkins in a collective book dedicated to the work of Dennett and the criticism it received (Dawkins 1993). In the 1970s, in Electronic Revolution, William Burroughs (1971) had already offered an analogy between words and virus.

8 As I have shown in the previous section, and since News & Politics is the only category which has not changed, these options were still available in 2011, as were the time frames previously mentioned (Today, This week, This month and All Time).

9 These results were the opposite of what was verified in Most Viewed (277 user-created vs 717 traditional). In the case of Most Favourited it was more evenly balanced, with a slight advantage to traditional media videos.
in News & Politics, non-amateur content had a stronger presence: Associated Press, Al Jazeera English, CSPAN, an American radio show and a Japanese television company featured one video each. There was also one video from a research centre, two videos from the official channels of American politicians, and three videos made by professionals of the entertainment industry (music and comedy). In addition, although posted by YouTubers, three other videos corresponded to content produced by television (2) and a small party (1). Moreover, nine videos were excerpts from documentaries, and five videos were either uploaded by activist organisations or were content produced by them. Two of these were remixes of television material. Regarding content posted and created by YouTubers, it was possible to find three vlogs (see below), one contest, five remixes (two were early and simplified instances of the format, i.e. slideshows), one animation, and one recording from a hand camera.  

Based on the examples I had already seen when I began browsing YouTube in a less oriented fashion, my conjecture was that “a lot of discussion” was a complex description that required qualitative verification in light of the objectives of this research. I had come across user behaviour that could be designated as “spam practices” and need to understand how much of the system was “polluted” (Benevenuto et al. 2010). According to YouTube's Help Center spam causes what is deemed “a negative user experience,” and my objective was to ascertain if it also negatively affected discussion on politics.

Therefore, I analysed what was considered to be discussion on videos, or, as I will demonstrate on chapter IV, “conversation,” namely comments, but also video responses, the previously mentioned “new form of interaction” specific to YouTube. Since comments require less expertise and effort, they exceeded video responses by large numbers (see figure 16).

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(466 user-created vs 511 traditional).

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10 One video posted by a YouTuber was removed by himself before I analysed it, therefore I do not know whether it was professional content, or user-created, and in this case, which genre.

11 Spam has raised great concern regarding email, as the title of 2003 Pew Report clearly shows: “Spam: How it is hurting email and degrading life on the Internet.” A commonly accepted definition describes spam as “unsolicited commercial email from a sender they do not know or cannot identify” (Fallows 2003, 9) As their popularity increased, and considering spam “merely an unfortunate – but frankly predictable – example of Internet's success not failure” (Crocker and InternetWorking 2006), spam also invaded search engine results (Benczúr et al. 2008), tagging systems (Koutrika et al. 2007), blogs, (Mishne et al. 2005), and social networking websites (Heymann et al. 2007) as well as mobile phones and voice over Internet protocol (OECD 2006).
Figure 16: The distribution of comments in Most Discussed videos (on the left) and video responses in Most Responded videos (on the right) in News & Politics, All Time. Charts calculated from the respective lists in February 2009.

The high number of comments and video-responses did not indicate pluralism in them. In fact, both cases, the Most Discussed and Most Responded videos, included the participation of not that many different users. Therefore the quantity of discussion pointed out by Sysomos' study does not correspond to diversity in its participants. The repetition of the same usernames revealed how easy it was for a few users – even just one – to “game the system” on YouTube, and therefore manipulate rankings on YouTube, as in the “Cansei de Ser Sexy” example recounted in chapter II.

In the Most Discussed and Most Responded videos, the tampering with rankings on YouTube might not be obvious at first glance, but in other cases it is not hidden at all, presenting itself in fact as the sole purpose of the video. For instance, many contests could be found on YouTube, particularly in the “Most Responded” section, where uploaders tried to increase their response count as well as subscriber base in exchange for some kind of prize, which could be a consumer good, like an ipod, but also a shout-out (a reference made on video) or the supposed winner's possibility to see his own number of subscribers rise.\textsuperscript{12}

Looking at the Most Responded/All time list referring to all categories, besides these

\textsuperscript{12} One of the requirements for being a YouTube Partner, and hence share some of advertising revenue (besides other benefits), is that “You regularly upload videos that are viewed by thousands of YouTube users,” as stated in YouTube's Help Center regarding “Partner Program Basics: Criteria for partnership.” Therefore to increase the subscriber base and view numbers might have financial returns. There was a specific “Contests” area on YouTube, but it was mainly used by companies.
contests, most videos had an inflated number of responses, due to a large number of videos from the very creator of the video which is being responded to. Some users even posted all of the videos they already had as a response to the new one. In the case of the News & Politics this was not different and as can be seen in the graphs above, the Most Discussed and the Most Responded videos had a disproportionately large number of comments and video responses, respectively. In both cases, a very strong power law distribution was present, with a quick drop in numbers, stabilizing after the first five top positions. This type of distribution had already been witnessed regarding general popularity in terms of views, in early research on YouTube (Cha et al. 2007; Santos et al. 2007).

On a closer analysis the the News & Politics Most Discussed/All time video, “Macedonia is Greece,”13 no comments were found completely unrelated to the video and to the ongoing discussion. Nevertheless, many were posted by the same users and sometimes even the same comment: one particular user posted the same comment as much as four times in a row. Another important observation was that comments were filled with attempts at provoking outrage (also known as “trolling”) and gratuitous insults or, more generally, hostile behaviour (generally called “flaming”), which I would find again during my research. A concept which originated in popular discourse and was quickly picked up by the media, flaming commonly represented the dark side of online social relations. “While contributing to both policymakers’ and the general public’s anxiety about the negative consequences of the Internet” (O’Sullivan and Flanagan 2003, 71), this notion equally framed academic work on the topic. However, focusing strictly on the message, neglecting the context of the interactions, in addition to problems in the operational definitions mobilised in empirical studies, has led to differences in the interpretation of this behaviour, “[w]hat an outside observer might perceive as hostile language could be perceived by one or both interactants as a routine reminder, an attempt at humour, a deserved reprimand, a poorly-worded but well-intended suggestion, or an intentional use of non-normative language for specific interactional goals” (O’Sullivan and Flanagan 2003, 72). In brief, flaming could therefore even be understood as a bonding mechanism, rather than always having a negative effect. Such complexity in the description of online discussions is addressed in chapter V, while analysing

13 Information collected on February 23, 2009. Comments were ordered chronologically from oldest to most recent. This video is no longer available due to a copyright claim, according to what is displayed on its former YouTube page. YouTomb states it was taken down after being watchable for 1 642 days.
comments to the EUTube channel.

Antagonistic behaviour has been the specific object of inquiry in the context of YouTube. Lange's study contradicted previous speculation on online hostility, by verifying that to see one's face and body did not prevent its manifestation on YouTube (2007a, 1). According to this researcher, “offline analogues of conflict such as bullying and normative technical critique are not automatically addressed through increased identity information,” and even if hateful comments were mainly expressed in text form, “interviewees mentioned that hate videos are common on YouTube” (2007a, 25). Burgess and Green affirm that, at least for popular videos, the behaviour of haters and trolls is now considered as normal. In their view, “the comments section of any highly popular video's page is a playspace for the audience as much as it is a means of the uploader getting feedback” (2009, 96). These researchers also discuss how flaming is often playful and part of interacting on YouTube, as in the case of “flame wars” or “YouTube dramas.” Still, these discussions around controversy are often linked to tensions within YouTube, namely between community-building and profit-making.

Contention took other forms besides verbal attack. Marking as spam and negative rating were used to deliberately render invisible comments with which one disagreed. Hidden comments included heavy insults, but so did a lot of the comments unharmed by spam identification or demotion. Most comments with negative votes refuted the argument made in the video. This revealed that not only spam, but also the controls in place to prevent it, can be exploited to hinder discussion, or at least its plurality, and the same applies to rating.

The fact that the Most Discussed videos in News & Politics only achieved this status through wrongful interference does not mean that they are without interest in the study of political discussion on YouTube. Despite the fact that videos related to hot topics on the USA occupy most of the list, the top three Most Discussed videos concern regional issues (Greece-Macedonia, China-Tibet, and Spain-Catalonia, by number of comments), which do not reflect

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14 Studies dedicated to text-based interactions often argued that in computer-mediated communication there was a process of filtering of non-verbal cues, as opposed to face-to-face communication. This technological constraint ultimately facilitated flaming, as social forms of behaviour restraint were hence weakened. Such assumption of a “channel effect” has since been called into question (c.f. O’Sullivan and Flanagin 2003). Lange had proposed the rejection of the term “flaming” altogether. The anthropologist had stated “[t]he term itself means too many things to be useful at this juncture;” in her view “[a] more productive approach is to examine the interplay between specific accusations of hostility, criticism, norm violation or other relevant phenomena under scrutiny and analyze the cultural and social consequences that such moral struggles have for” (2006).
the geographical portrait of YouTube, nor the focus of YouTube's News & Politics editors, as will be shown in the next chapter. The fact that people purposely tried to bring these videos to the top (and succeeded), or that they were a fertile ground for trolls, is meaningful in itself.

Regarding the Most Responded videos in News & Politics, one also notices a disparity between the top video and the rest, which can be explained by most of the responses coming from a small group of very engaged users. In February 2009, 26 YouTubers were responsible for 840 out of 8 353 videos, with an average of 32,3 videos per user (see figure 17).

![Video responses to the video “Éric and the Army of the Phoenix (1/5).” Screenshot taken on April 9, 2009.](image)

The video, entitled “Éric and the Army of the Phoenix (1/5),” was posted on August 26, 2007 and was part of a documentary divided in five parts on YouTube, probably due to the general restriction of ten minutes maximum to most videos, in place at the time. This video,

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15 The top three countries by percentage of viewers were the United States – 23,2%, Japan – 7,6% and Germany – 4,7%. Greece, for example, represented 0,9% of viewers (http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/youtube.com, retrieved in May 2009).

16 This limit was introduced in 2006 to avoid copyright infringements. At first, users with a Director account were able to upload longer videos, but eventually all profiles obeyed that restriction. In 2010, only users with very old Director accounts or Partners were able to exceed the ten minute rule. In July that year, the maximum was extended to 15 minutes, and later in December YouTube allowed selected users to upload videos without a time limit. The reason for removing this control mechanism was attributed to “the continued advances in our state-of-the-art Content ID system, as well as our other powerful tools for copyright owners”
spoken in Catalan and subtitled in English, told the story of a Catalan teenage boy who was accused of terrorism by the Spanish authorities due to an email perceived as threatening. Part 2 and 3 were also on the top Most Responded videos/ All Time.

Many videos refer to the culture of Catalonia, while other responses have no relation to the video posted. Videos are often less than 20 seconds long and even 10 seconds long, and have a very low number of views, no comments, responses or ratings. The channels of their uploaders have a basic layout and there is a lack of interaction with other users (subscriptions, subscribers, friends, comments). This may lead us to believe they are “ghost” users, created only to be used to post these responses. They may all be the same person. They may not even be human.\(^{17}\)

It is arguable that these videos should not be able to count as legitimate video responses, and affect the Most Responded ranking. As a result, a first reaction could be to consider they are completely without interest and a contribution “to amplify the problem of information overload on the Web” (Benevenuto \textit{et al.} 2010). They seem to fit almost perfectly YouTube's own definition of spam, “massively distributed, repetitive, untargeted content or communication of little or no interest” (YouTube n.d.), except in one aspect – they are targeted. The fact is that the massive spamming enabled issues to come out that would have great difficulty in finding visibility otherwise.

As with the Most Discussed videos, and with the USA having a YouTube audience 8 times bigger than Spain,\(^{18}\) it is not negligible that three videos – including the number one – on Catalonia's autonomist issues were at the top of the Most Responded videos on YouTube. Four videos concerned regional issues (3 regarding Spain-Catalonia, 1 concerning Russia-Georgia), while other four were meta-discussions on the Internet and YouTube itself (especially focusing censorship). Closer to the end of the list, being questionable whether it should be on the News & Politics category, one finds an inspirational video asking YouTubers “Why do you wake up each day?” This user is possibly carrying out a thorough moderation of responses. It is probably the closest videos on this list come to the “conversation” constantly

\(^{17}\) Internet bots are applications programmed to impersonate an actual user. In social networking sites, these fake accounts can be worth money, their price depending on how many “friends” and “followers” they have been able to gather (Eston 2009).

\(^{18}\) Spain occupied the tenth position with 2.7% (http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/youtube.com, retrieved in May 2009).
praised in chapter IV, although there is not a chain of video responses, the “back and forth.” The analogy to the informal face-to-face exchange of opinions is one of the common metaphors mobilised by the company to describe interaction in YouTube, particularly on political topics.

Just two videos regarding the US 2008 election cycle reached the Most Responded list, a campaign in which the Internet reputedly played a decisive role. One was from a candidate running for Democratic nomination, Dennis Kucinich, and the other from the Republican candidate to the US Presidency in 2008, John McCain. Both videos reached this position by resorting to the same tactics as some of the other most responded videos: they “spammed themselves.” An overwhelming majority of the videos responses to Kucinich’s video come from the same channel posting the original video (Kucinich2008), whereas in the case of McCain, all the video responses originate from his official channel JohnMcCain dot com, the same that posted the responded video.

Commenting heavily, posting the same video-response over and over, posting all of one's videos as responses, 10-second videos, using bots to add responses with multiple usernames, all this can be considered what has been described as “system gaming,” and therefore allowing for videos to achieve higher ranking than they would otherwise. However, as Burgess and Green tell us about user-assigned elements (e.g. tags), “misuse” is sometimes more interesting than “proper” use (2009, 8). Manipulating rankings can also be a form of political action, since the manipulation of “Most...” lists is here found to be used as a strategy to give visibility to one's political battles: media visibility, social visibility, endeavouring to become recognition (Voiron 2005). Even a political actor like John McCain (his campaign staff, that is) saw advantages in using such methods to reach more people.

**Studying YouTube and politics**

YouTube has changed through time, and its focus on politics along with it. As a company they progressively began to focus more on politics, from creating a channel dedicated to this domain (Citizentube), which later was supplemented by a blog, to establishing partnerships with news media (e.g. CNN, PBS, Euronews) and organizations (e.g. World Economic Forum). Revolutions had a live feed from the ground that did not come from news companies, “gotcha moments” made worldwide news, mainstream media resorted to
YouTube for footage, and politicians, as well as institutions, started to open channels on this website. In the Nieman Reports, a quarterly magazine on journalism and news organisations, Steve Grove, then editor of News & Politics at YouTube, highlighted a few points on his praising of the political potential of YouTube which were equivalent to the perceived benefits of Information society and electronic democracy (see chapter I). First, the end of mediation, or in more compelling words, the rise of a media environment in which “average citizens are able to fuel a new meritocracy for political coverage” (Grove 2008). Second, the irrelevance of the frontiers of space and time. Third, interactivity, through commenting, replying, ranking and sharing. Grove warned news organisations that online video was reshaping political coverage and even politics itself; therefore, if they chose to ignore it was “at their own peril.”

Partnerships like the CNN-YouTube Debates in 2007, featuring Democratic (July) and Republican (November) candidates in the primaries for the US 2008 Presidential elections, are regarded as a path to gaining audience share, “by offering a level of audience engagement — with opportunities for active as well as passive experiences” (Grove 2008). These debates are considered as an important milestone in the relationship between YouTube, news media, politicians, and citizens. YouTube itself highlighted both events in is timeline (YouTube 2011a).19 This collaboration between an icon of old media power and an icon of new media power has been described as an “attempt to work through the still unstable and 'untried' relations between these different media systems” (Jenkins 2009, 189). Such model would see more instances. YouTube created YouChoose08, aggregating official videos from candidates, and partnered with PBS, the US public broadcasting television network. Giving structure to a practice detected in 2006, YouTube and PBS urged US citizens to video and upload their vote, an initiative further discussed in chapter IV. Despite this focus on US politics, YouTube also tried to branch out to other countries. In Spain, it partnered with RTVE asking for questions from Spanish voters, allegedly with some success. In the last video uploaded in the Elecciones '08 channel, RTVE claimed having received more than 600 videos and 13 000 votes on these questions, which were then selected to be placed to the candidates to the Spanish Parliament.

19 Except for the launching of Non-profit channels (September 2007), all marks in the timeline concerned political topics relate to USA politics, namely, the Debates here discussed, the launching of Congress and President channels (January 2009), and the global Live stream of President Obama's YouTube interview (February 2010).
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Although research had been done on the 2006 election cycle in the USA, mainly in terms of future prospects (Gueorguieva 2008), the reference to the US 2008 election cycle as an example and study object can hardly be avoided: all books on YouTube comment on it, several standalone articles have been published dedicated to the topic, and a conference was held that would later become a special issue in the Journal of Information Technology and Politics (JITP). In its introduction, the guest editor argues that “[i]n many ways, YouTube can be thought of as an important example of not only contemporary trends in information technology and politics, but also broader patterns in media and society as well” (Xenos 2010, 89). The special issue includes, besides Wallsten's (2010) and Karpf's (2010) contributions discussed below, articles concerned with different aspects of the videos of the 2008 presidential campaign (Church 2010; Robertson et al. 2010; Ricke 2010), as well as of the campaign for the US Senate (Klotz 2010) and Congress (Gulati and Williams 2010), and a review essay especially dedicated to Obama's online strategy, in light of an e-democracy theoretical framework (Carpenter 2010). In addition, it features two methodological articles: one dedicated to software supported data collection on YouTube (Shah 2010); and the keynote lecture of the conference, delivered by Richard Rogers (2010), given his groundbreaking work on Internet research (R. Rogers 2009b).

Despite this US bias, not the least for the candidates' pioneering practices, other studies of how the social web and YouTube have played into campaigns across the world have also been published in JITP: midterm elections in the Philippines (Karan et al. 2009); Finland's national elections (Carlson and Strandberg 2008); Norwegian local elections (Kalnes 2009); Israeli municipal elections (Lev-On 2011); and presidential elections in South Korea (Lee 2009). Regarding the Philippines, the researchers argue that the videos got lost in the crowded platform, while in Finland, Norway and Israel findings revealed YouTube had little relevance in the respective campaigns. Lastly, in South Korea, high expectations for the 2007 elections seemed to be unfounded, despite the e-democracy promises left by the 2002 cycle.

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20 The YouTube and the 2008 Election Cycle in the United States Conference, organised by Stuart Schulman and co-chaired by Michael Xenos, took place on April 16-17, 2009 at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Due to the gracious support of FCT and Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, I was able to attend this event.

21 It is important to remark that South Korea is a very common case study on the use of new media, in particular regarding the role of citizen journalism, enjoying wide presence in official reports (OECD 2007) as well as scientific works (Joyce 2007; Kern and Nam 2009).
Outside this journal, other examples include a study on the Canadian case, namely the Ontario election in 2007, focusing on a “rogue” website and YouTube account in which one party satirized an opponent (Devereaux 2008), and a reflection on the French elections, specifically on the interaction between the candidates' image created by their own campaign and the image produced on YouTube and Dailymotion by voters (Yanoshevsky 2009). Regarding the latter, the observed videos were mainly parodies (of the candidate, his style or campaign), and more negative than positive in tone. The author also emphasizes how candidates have lost the unilateral control over their own image, in the sense that “the image of the candidate would hence depend not only of the panoply of images offered by the official sites, but also of the interaction of these representations and those projected by the internauts on the video website” (2009, 60).

Elections and campaigning have been a strong drive for online political video, and an opportunity for creativity, with the appearance of several “viral videos,” either in intent or in actual reach. This term commonly describes “videos which are viewed by a large number of people, generally as a result of knowledge about the video being spread rapidly through the Internet population via word-of-mouth” (Burgess 2008, 101). Burgess defines “viral video” in relation to “viral marketing,” which is in turn “the attempt to exploit the network effects of word-of-mouth and Internet communication in order to induce a massive number of users to pass on marketing ‘messages’ and brand information ‘voluntarily’” (2008, 101). However, the effectiveness of the instrumentalisation of viral video remains an open question for the author.

An analysis of the video “Yes We Can” (discussed in chapter IV), grounded on an agenda-setting and agenda-building theoretical framework, predicted that “a viral political video is most likely the result of a complex and multidirectional interplay between the actions of Internet users, bloggers, campaign members, and journalists” (Wallsten 2010, 165). Nevertheless, the influence on a video's “virality” is different, giving blog discussion a more determinant role than mainstream media coverage. In fact, a less seen political video may attract bloggers attention, but “a large audience seems to be a necessary condition for journalists and campaign members to devote time and energy to discussing an online political

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For Burgess, however, this definition focuses on the marketing potential of videos as “messages” or “products,” whereas she chooses to emphasize their status as “the mediating mechanisms via which cultural practices are originated, adopted and (sometimes) retained within social networks” (2008, 102).
video” (Wallsten 2010, 173).23 Still, the findings of this case study point to “a unique and influential position in determining the whether an online political video goes viral” (2010, 174) held both by bloggers and campaigns, differentiating the latter from journalists, who follow more than lead in this process. Regarding the role of campaign members, it has been noted that the infamous “macaca” moment and similar instances,24 often described as examples of the citizens being able to influence the outcome of elections through YouTube, were the product of the work of staffers (Karpf 2010; T. Miller 2009). Moreover, although Karpf recognises YouTube contributed to increasing the knowledge of the story and to extend the media cycle, this author states in the conclusion of his article:

the most important effects of the candidate gaffes came not from their easy accessibility via YouTube, but from the various ways that a new type of political association used them to influence politics. We do not care about Allen’s racially tinged statements because they were viewed online; we care because they became a recurring campaign theme and a rallying cry for his opposition (Karpf 2010, 160).

Steve Grove himself stated, “online video bubbles the more interesting content to the top and then TV amplifies it on a new scale” (2008). To be considered truly famous, YouTube videos need to reach traditional mass media and grab their attention, which indicates that “UGC is firmly locked into the commercial dynamics of the mediascape” (Dijck 2009, 53). This seems to be even clearer when one takes into account that despite a majority of amateur content on YouTube, popularity is skewed towards TV programs and music videos (T. Miller 2009), a tendency that may increase as professional content creators establish their presence on YouTube. Despite YouTube remaining “a vast medium, with plenty of citizens creating their own, often innovative, content,” a study found that “with the exception of an occasional big hit, few have large sustained audiences” (May 2010, 503). Instead of focusing on an electoral period, this study focuses on what happened after elections, namely the 2008 US elections: the results of this research point to an increased presence and dominance of professional organisations like Associated Press, very much in line with a more general

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23 This researcher recognises the specificities of this video – specially the strong presence of celebrities – may make it a special case that does not allow generalisations. The relevance of the size audience for bloggers may, in other cases, be stronger and become the very motive for discussion (Wallsten 2010, 174).

24 During the 2006 United States Senate election in Virginia, Senator George Allen called a volunteer from the opposing campaign “macaca.” The expression “macaca moment” became associated with politicians' embarrassing moments with consequences for their political career.
pattern on the Internet, as well as the expected disappearance of politicians' YouTube channels, once the campaign ended.

However, at times, the uploading of content not made by YouTubers or strongly based on content made by either campaign staff and political institutions or the content industries can be perceived as a political act. Parody, for instance, is claimed to allow their creators “to find a shared language of borrowed images that mobilize what they know as consumers to reflect on the political process” (Jenkins 2006, 293). Uploaded to a worldwide repository, the videos are accessible to (almost) anyone with an Internet connection. These images hence become part of communication, not of broadcasting, or even narrowcasting, but of an imagetic commons, allowing them to be reused, remixed, reinterpreted.

European copyright law explicitly covers the use for the purpose of caricature, parody or pastiche (European Parliament and the Council of the European Union 2010), among its exceptions and limitations to copyright. In the USA, one of the various justifications for the application of fair use includes “situations when the copyright owner would be unlikely to authorize, such as parodies and critiques” (Litman 2006, 128). The argument was that “[t]he social interest in allowing uses that criticized the copyright owner’s work, for example, outweighed the copyright owner’s reluctance to permit them” (2006, 128).

In line with Litman's statement that copyright has progressively turned towards being a form of control instead of a “bargain” between the public and the author (see also chapter II), Hunt stresses a tension between copyright’s role to foster creativity and content owners view of “the public's distribution power as a market threat” (2007, 208). This researcher argues that the protection of derivative works based on its transformative use of copyrighted material should be extended to unaltered clips. Not only remixes, but also unaltered clips are hence seen as original and carrying critique potential, and “should be thought of as a communal work, consisting of the foundation clip, user discussion, video responses uploaded by other users, and outside commentary which embeds the clip” (Hunt 2007, 214). The discussion that follows, for example, clips of “gotcha” moments illustrates how YouTube is more than a “community of pirates,” rather it is a forum for debate. For instance, Hess (2009) gives the example of how YouTubers reposted YouTube videos made by a US governmental agency,

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25 We can find in these words the emphasis on framing the videos within the contextual elements that surround it, as pointed out regarding the methodology sustaining the research work that led to this dissertation (see Introduction).
since its staff had disabled the ability to respond in any way to the videos on their original upload. Nevertheless, if this agency chose to place a DMCA claim, none of this would matter:

YouTube’s system effectively places the power of judgement mainly on automatic recognition of infringement and disregards the context of social and cultural sharing in which the copyrighted material might exist. [...] By erring on the side of the rights-holders by default, even when the remix may be legal under fair use provisions, YouTube’s rights management systems are heavily weighted in support of commercial culture (Clay 2011, 223).

The politics of YouTube are themselves a topic of debate, inside and outside the website. It is possible to find several videos on topics such as censorship on YouTube resorting to flagging, for instance, including by governments, as in “WARNING Government are using software to false flag videos too.” As noted in chapter II, flagging options are not consensual and, like rating and marking as spam, may be prone to misuse. Strangelove notes “it is a common censorship strategy within YouTube and highlights the corporation's uneven application of its content policies” (2010, 120). The inclusion of the subcategory “promotes terrorism,” within the larger category Violent or Repulsive Content, raised once more the debate between the balance of controlling YouTube's content to prevent criminal activity, and the violation of free speech rights. While Senator Joe Lieberman was quoted praising the decision, law experts were cited for holding the opposite position and worrying for how that specific phrase was “more subject to interpretation” (Bennet 2010). Bloggers also pointed out the indeterminate nature of the expression, “[w]hat may seem to one person as religious expression may come across to another as being pro-murder,” in addition to a concern for YouTube's choice to shift responsibilities in monitoring the content present on its website, “the main thing we learn when we trust the 'wisdom of the crowd' is that the crowd doesn't have much wisdom” (Ferraro 2010).

A notorious form of control employed by governments is blocking YouTube altogether. In February 2008, Pakistan blocked YouTube due to “anti-Islamic content” (the Danish cartoons found their way to the video sharing website), reportedly resulting in a near global blackout of the website for at least two hours (Malkin 2008). This country would again be in the news for the same reason in 2010 (Kleinman 2010).26 I have already mentioned

26 Blocking YouTube (and Facebook) for “hosting un-Islamic content” generated different reactions among Pakistani people, from support to opposition, and even the preference of a middle-ground option – partial or
China's blocking and how that led to the rise of Chinese own alternatives in video sharing. Iran also blocked YouTube and other social media networking during the protests surrounding the 2009 elections, even if videos still managed to reach the website. Restricting access to videos – for political reasons, but also due to copyright restrictions – can be bypassed by applying some of the obfuscation tactics described in chapter I, namely by resorting to a proxy server in a different country to filter your actual origin, or by using Tor, a software that creates a circuit of encrypted connections through relays on the network. YouTube News and Politics' editor, in his channel Citizentube (see chapter IV), dedicated a post to reveal how “savvy dissidents can sometimes find ways around the blockage” (Grove 2009).

In his introduction to the *Legacies of Tactical Media*, Eric Kluitenberg states “[n]o longer the tool of a distanced media professional capturing the event, the camera is now literally held in the hands of thousands if not millions of protesters as the action unfolds (2011, 7).” He continues, “[t]his massive presence of the camera enables a radical multiplication of singular perspectives – captured, mediated, remediated, stored, archived, embedded and mashed-up – to be distributed in near real-time in a virtually endlessly diversified and differentiated networked media landscape” (2011, 7). For Naim (2007) this is what fuels the “YouTube effect,” the rapid dissemination of video clips throughout the world. The former editor in chief of the magazine *Foreign Policy* points out that video web sites are diverse and show everything from comedy sketches to videos posted by terrorist organizations, human rights groups, and U.S. soldiers in Iraq. Frivolity is paired with seriousness, whistle-blowing and truth with disinformation and lie. His description, nevertheless, has a positive tone:

All are part of the YouTube effect. Fifteen years ago, the world marvelled at the fabled 'CNN effect.' The expectation was that the unblinking eyes of TV cameras, beyond the reach of censors, would bring greater accountability and transparency to governments and the international system [...] But the YouTube effect will be even more intense [...] they [CNN, BBC and other international media] will never be as omnipresent as millions of people carrying a cell phone that can record video (Naim 2007, 104–5).

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27 The conceptualisation of “tactical media” claims to be indebted to de Certeau's opposition of tactics and strategy (stated in D. Garcia and Lovink 1997; and noted in later works on tactical media, such as Boler 2008; and Kluitenber 2011).
In this sense, YouTube is part of a system of video “sousveillance” (Mann, Nolan, and Wellman 2003) that empower citizens against abuses of power. Still, how to handle the inevitable tsunami of video generated by this omnipresence of cameras? The answer given is often that the openness of markets and democracy enable them to a good job of filtering the bad from the good, even if they are not perfect in this task (Naim 2007, 105).

Notwithstanding the line of discourse followed by YouTube, Everitt and Mills strongly contend that companies like Facebook, Yahoo or YouTube “are not distributed networks, but centralized, controlled, owned and policed corporate systems” (2009, 761). Activists have stated their concerns for the reliance on corporate entities to support their activities, host their content and to promote engagement, instead of following the previous path of building their own infrastructure, as had happened, for example, with Indymedia (Lowenthal 2011). The case of the financial blockade of Wikileaks has been presented as symptomatic of the consequences of that choice. In December 2010, Amazon removed their content from the company's cloud servers and Visa, Mastercard and Paypal froze donations to Wikileaks, which supposedly led to their suspension of activity ten months later. Criticism of this course of action did not depend on supporting Assange and the activities of his organisation, just on the fact that it had not been charged or convicted of any crime: “[i]f they [Visa and Mastercard] are allowed to cut off payment to lawful organisations with whom they disagree, the US's first amendment, the European convention on human rights' article 10, and all other legal free speech protections become irrelevant” (Ball 2011). 28

The “architectures of participation” so praised by O'Reilly are not the product of collaborative work. It is doubtful that allowing access to an interface library fully qualifies as endorsing an open source ethic. Regarding Facebook and Yahoo, one should bear in mind that “neither offers any power over the actual direction, intentions and content of the companies behind the initiatives, and – in the case of Facebook – only limited control over legitimised modules within the website” (Everitt and Mills 2009, 758). Similarly to these two

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28 The actions of these companies did not result from a direct request from any government, or at least that was the official claim. John Muller, PayPal's general counsel, came to public to state that their restriction over the Wikileaks account respected their obligation to comply with the law. In his own words “[o]ur only consideration was whether or not the account associated with WikiLeaks violated our Acceptable Use Policy and regulations required of us as a global payment company”(Muller cited in Addley and Halliday 2010). The decisions made by Amazon, Paypal, Visa, Mastercard and other companies resulted in “Operation Payback,” which consisted of distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks allegedly carried out by the already mentioned Anonymous.
corporations, YouTube also makes its application programming interface (commonly known as API) available, while not relinquishing control over major technical (and commercial) decisions. Enabling the production of third-party applications extends YouTube's reach both in terms of notoriety and technical functions. However, the “community” does not directly build the website's technical infrastructure: they provide the content that supports YouTube's existence and concoct ways to bypass technical restrictions imposed by the company. Strangelove (2010) and Burgess and Green (2009) see the latter as a sign of the autonomy of YouTubers. I am, however, more skeptic, given the limitations of such form of resistance in face of a more corporate-oriented YouTube, more concerned with profit, and less with enabling YouTubers to “Broadcast Themselfs” (see chapter II).

Why would a mainstream media company upload their news content to YouTube? Simply put, it's where eyeballs are going. [...] If a mainstream news organization wants its political reporting seen, YouTube offers visibility without a cost. The ones that have been doing this for a while rely on a strategy of building audiences on YouTube and then trying to drive viewers back to their Web sites for a deeper dive into the content. And these organizations can earn revenue as well by running ads against their video content on YouTube (Grove 2008).

Grove's enticement of news organisations shows how the attractiveness of YouTube is sold in connection with the expectation of profit, even if “democratic benefits” are also described, as we have seen in the beginning of this section. The article of the News & Politics is hence a reflection of YouTube's will to cater to everyone, observed by Gillespie (2010). While it offers citizens the ability “to distribute their own political content” (Grove 2008), bypassing gatekeepers, and candidates unmediated access to voters (more so than politicians to citizens), it also promises media companies more profit (by adding advertising revenue to the savings derived from using YouTube as a cost-free source) and journalists the continuance of a key role in democracy as a necessary critical voice, as the much complimented “wisdom of the crowd” is described as valuable and trustworthy, but insufficient.
An overview of YouTube's political videos

Videos on political issues are not much different from videos on other topics that can be found on YouTube. By browsing YouTube, it was possible to identify some patterns in the different videos watched, and therefore classify them into certain genres. A genre “will share a specific set of meaningful objects and locations and, in the case of movies for example, have a limited set of narrative problematics” (G. Rose 2002, 19). Even though it is not an attempt at categorizing YouTube – I do not ignore that defining genres has been described as a “theoretical minefield” (Chandler 1997) – the goal of this list is to give a brief overview of videos dedicated to political issues on YouTube. The genres I here present are not mutually exclusive; there are cross-overs, which will be further commented upon in the relevant chapters of this dissertation.

Repurposed content

It is probably the least demanding and least expensive content for YouTube, since it was not purposely made for YouTube and it consists of simply “borrowing” from another medium, that is, the repurposing of television or institutional audiovisual material. However, these videos are not necessarily put up by their protagonists, like in “Video electoral” (figure 18), an election video from the Spanish Party PSOE, but uploaded by a channel dedicated to news.

Source: YouTube

Figure 18: “Video electoral.” PSOE election ad for the Spanish 2007 election cycle. Screenshot taken on August 29, 2011.
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In addition, picking up on a trend started by the individual YouTube user, meaning the upload of footage from mainstream media, and in this particular case news footage, news agencies and television networks followed suit in the uploading of clips of their own programs. Interestingly enough, it is not difficult to find YouTube videos of a news show featuring YouTube videos. For instance, the video “Deadly clashes rock Iran - 27 Dec 09” (Al Jazeera English) is almost entirely made up of excerpts of YouTube videos.

Public appearances

Particularly concerning Heads of State, but also other representatives and parties, YouTube has been widely used as an archive for public appearance of politicians. Videos such as “The Queen visits Oxford” (The Royal Channel. The Official Channel of the British Monarchy), or “Angela Merkel: 'Wir haben unser Wahlziel erreicht’” (CDU.TV) represent this kind of practice (figure 19).

![YouTube video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQw4w9WgXcQ)

Source: YouTube

**Figure 19:** “Angela Merkel: 'Wir haben unser Wahlziel erreicht',” video uploaded by the channel of the German party CDU. Screenshot taken on August 29, 2011.

This practice of archiving speeches and official visits is, along with repurposed material, the most common forms of content found in politicians and political organizations’ channels. As described in chapter V, this reveals a communication strategy still very focused on a broadcasting model, which is intensified by options such as the disabling of social media features, in particular comments.
Music videos

As previously noted while presenting statistic information on YouTube, music occupies a prominent place on this website. Two of the best known videos of the 2008 US Presidential campaign were “Yes We Can - Barack Obama Music Video,” featuring Will.i.am and several other celebrities (figure 20), and “Crush on Obama,” where music played an important role.

Chapter IV elaborates on the importance of these two videos, and how they became a milestone affecting the concept and representation of online political videos.

Vlogging

“Vlogging” is the short form of “video blogging.” Speaking directly to the camera is the preferred method for many YouTubers: in their bedrooms or living rooms, from the most to the least camera shy, a range of users uses video to let the world (wide web) know their thoughts, challenge other people or let out steam. In “Appeasing Islam” (figure 21), the tone is closer to a rant, where a YouTuber talks in declamatory manner, usually on an issue they feel strongly about. We watch this user speaking his mind for over seven minutes, carrying out what is commonly known on YouTube as a “rant.”

This “method of presentation” is considered to be “an acceptable way to critique other people, as opposed to unproductive and unspecific hating behaviors,” even if comparisons are drawn between the two (Lange
Still, vlogging is not always intemperate, in videos like “The Economy is Getting Worse, Let's Start Networking!,” a libertarian American vlogger calmly describes a series of current events regarding the economic crisis and reaches out to YouTubers. Some vloggers were able to attract media attention, as for instance James Kotecki aka EmergencyCheese. The Kotecki’s trajectory, presented in chapter IV, is particularly revealing of the relation between the so-called YouTube celebrities, news media and popularity on and offline.

“Gotcha” or “macaca” moments

Unfortunately, remarks or actions by politicians that once were only witnessed by people present at the occasion, or at most watched a few times if a news team was present and then featured them, are now available on YouTube for everyone to watch as many times as they please and to pass on to other people. Some “gotcha” (colloquial short form for “got you”) moments are said to have cost politicians their reputation or a political race, like the infamous “macaca moment,” discussed above. Different politicians have suffered this type of exposure, as for instance Gordon Brown: his overheard insult of a woman he had met on the streets originated multiple YouTube videos, some of which also included his confrontation with the recording at a radio show, while others exhibited the reaction of the offended woman (figure 22).

2007a, 22).
This has made politicians weary of cameras and even reluctant to being filmed. The video "Congressman Baron Hill (IN-09): This Is My Town Hall Meeting. I Set the Rules" is close to being a meta-gotcha moment, where a representative is caught on camera defending his prohibition of filming during a town hall because he does not want to find compromising videos of himself on YouTube. The discussion on this type of video will resume in chapter IV and chapter V, regarding its "user-generated" character and its prevalence over sanctioned videos of politicians, respectively.

Live streams

Recently, the promotion of live streams has become more popular, which is interesting from a website which had as one of its strengths the possibility of watchers managing their viewing schedule. There seems to be a return to praising simultaneity, resulting in a sense of community grounded in the shared experience of watching an event. On December 15, 2009, in a partnership with CNN, YouTube live streamed a debate on climate change, broadcast from Copenhagen, through this meeting's channel, Cop15. Live interviews would soon follow, to which viewers could contribute by previously posting questions (figure 23).
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Figure 23: José Manuel Barroso’s Live Interview on YouTube. Screenshot taken on October 6, 2011.

As mentioned previously, live streams considerably increased in the turn of the decade and earned a higher profile in YouTube's interface design.

Witness videos

If in “gotcha” moments the main goal is to embarrass politicians, in witness videos the aim is to expose a particular situation, usually involving repression and violence.

Figure 24: “Iran - 18 Tir protests - In Tehran,” video of the protests following Iran’s 2009 elections. Screenshot taken on August 29, 2011.
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Demonstrations and protests are the most common context, and police brutality is often the object of exposure, to present evidence of abuse, as in “27.05.09 Polizia in P.zza Dante (2),” in an inversion of the big brotheresque surveillance of citizens, or, as mentioned above, a form of “sousveillance.” The intended audience of the denouncement may be outside one's country, as in the case of “Iran - 18 Tir protests - In Tehran” (figure 24). As will be described in chapter IV, these videos are intent on capturing the attention of the international community, and being often uploaded in great numbers by multiple people, contributed to the development of the practice of curation on YouTube.

Animation

“Film & animation” corresponds to one of YouTube's categories (see chapter II). However, as in the case of music, animation may be intended to be a contribute to political discussion. This is the case of the RSA Animate series, in which lectures with leading experts are translated into animation and have been uploaded to YouTube. “RSA Animate – The Internet in Society: Empowering and Censoring Citizen?,” for example, is the adaptation of a talk delivered by author and journalist Evgeny Morozov. Institutions also resort to animation to make their projects known or to raise awareness, for instance, as in “A place for everyone” (figure 25).

Figure 25: “A place for everyone,” video posted by the European Commission on its YouTube channel, raising awareness on racism. Screenshot taken on November 10, 2010.

In chapter V, I will point out how the European Commission started uploading more
and more animations on its channel. I argue that the preference for this format may be connected to the need to address a multilingual audience in a clear way, besides lightening the tone of the messages produced by this organization.

**Remixes and parodies**

Remixes, also known as mash-ups (two terms initially describing musical practices), designate any transformative work entailing a mixture of different elements, sound, image or text. “Gesto de Manuel Pinho - Versão Desenhos Animados” (figure 26) exemplifies how diverse and seemingly unrelated content, here a cartoon and footage from a Parliament session taken from news media, can be joined together. This video was conceived and put together by only one person, the most frequent situation, still, remixes can also result from collaborative efforts, as in “THE BIG FAT GAY COLLAB!,” a joint work by different YouTubers.30

![YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQZJvJmJz0)

Source: YouTube

**Figure 26:** “Gesto de Manuel Pinho - Versão Desenhos Animados,” satirical remix of a parliamentary session with cartoons. Screenshot taken on August 30, 2011.

Remixes are frequently humorous, as in the examples above. Parodies, mimicking

30 This video is a response to “haters” and to their abusive behaviour, a common topic of other collaborative videos, including “Being a Chick on YouTube,” discussed by Burgess and Green (2009), and which has since been removed. For these researchers, such videos attempt “to shape social norms and reflexively negotiate the ethics of online behaviour, and emerge from the position of grounded, insider knowledge,” and may prove more effective than enforced regulations (Burgess and Green 2009, 97). According to Lange’s previous research on online communities, “[t]he interplay between flame claims and flames is the process by which participants maintain, challenge, and negotiate cultural norms that are constantly in flux and potentially at odds” (Lange 2006).
television ads, shows, or videos made by politicians, are used to launch a critical look on political issues, often in a satirical way. In chapters IV and V, humour is identified as having a strong presence in political videos. Chapter VI is entirely dedicated to the topic of satire in politic remix.

The centrality of elections notwithstanding, YouTube videos on politics cover multiple issues and geographical locations. They are also diverse in terms of format as well as their creators and/or uploaders (as we have seen, they might not be the same people).

**Conclusion: YouTube and politics. A few first impressions**

Despite the expectations presented in early studies on YouTube and politics, the professionalisation of campaigning and political action on YouTube brings the making of political videos closer to the realm of political marketing, rather than to the actions of individual citizens speaking up in an alternative venue to mainstream media. During the 2010 US election cycle for the Senate and the House of Representatives, together with several other races, YouTube presented YouChoose2010, a campaign toolkit. This particular toolkit included YouTube Campaign Tools (YouTube Politician Channel, Moderator on YouTube, and YouTube Insight), Paid Campaign Tools (Promoted Videos, Call-toAction Overlays, and TV Ads Online), and Additional Resources (YouTube Political Tip Sheets, and Google Campaign Toolkit). In chapter I, it was pointed how one's financial capacity conditioned the access to the media and, consequently, to reaching the public with a particular political message. It seems new media may turn out not to be an exception: the services YouTube now provides in campaign advertising can be seen as another step away from levelling the playing field in the access to the public sphere, contrary to e-democracy promises.

In addition, concerns have raised as to YouTube's trend towards “generating the hyper-discipline of TV,” as well as an increasing role in promoting “the usual policing norms of public life” (T. Miller 2009, 430). In addition, although “Google and YouTube have also positioned themselves as champions of freedom of expression” (Gillespie 2010, 356), and despite the existence of escape routes, blocking and take-down practices by governmental

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31 Applications for a Politician channel are restricted to the USA, and to registered candidates, that demonstrate an active campaign effort and “have a measurable level of public support for your campaign”, i.e., “the existence of volunteer staff, traction in the polls, and media coverage” (YouTube 2009).
order have contributed to dent YouTube's self-promoted image as a partner of activism and subversive action.

Regarding Internet blocking and online censorship in general, it is not just nations that are commonly perceived as lacking democratic character that engage in such activities, and that is already patent on YouTube. YouTubers in the United Kingdom have found that not all YouTube videos are accessible to them, and that the decision to prevent them from watching those videos came from their government, as in the example of the video “ENGLISHMEN ARREST AN UNLAWFUL (COMMON LAW) JUDGE AND SEIZE HIS COURT (OLERON LAW),” shown in figure 27.32

Figure 27: “ENGLISHMEN ARREST AN UNLAWFUL (COMMON LAW) JUDGE AND SEIZE HIS COURT (OLERON LAW),” example of the message on YouTube for blocked videos due to government removal request. On the left, screenshot taken on May 25, 2011, by a friend in London; on the right, screenshot taken on August 30, 2011, by myself in Portugal.

Online accounts pointed the finger at YouTube as much as at the government issuing the request: “You Tube is complying with thousands of requests from governments to censor and remove videos that show protests and other examples of citizens simply asserting their rights” (Watson 2011). According to Google's Transparency Report regarding Government (2011), user data and content removal requests have increased in most countries, and many have started sending a significant number of requests in recent years. In the period from July to December 2010, although for some countries Google did not comply to any of the content

32 As noted previously in this chapter, the British government seems to be very receptive to the control of content and actions on the social web.
removal requests (Belgium, Malta, Mexico, Norway, Pakistan, Singapore, and Vietnam), in nearly half of the cases this company complied with all of them (Argentina, Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand, Panama, Russia, South Korea, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand, and Turkey). Even if by proxy, YouTube seems to be closer to the transformation into “authoritarian tyrant,” leaving behind its role as “village cop” (c.f. Strangelove 2010, 106–109).

How much of a contribution can YouTube be to the process of deliberation within democracy? Hess (2009) notes several limitations to its role in this respect, namely the production of two illusions: firstly, a perception that there is freedom of speech on this medium, while inducing a belief that this form of participation replaces forms of political expression such as petitioning or protests; secondly, a feeling of satisfaction for being able to speak one's mind through online video, even if there is no audience. For Hess, YouTube may allow the dissemination of messages, but is not successful in creating an organized community. Sunstein (2007) notes a second obstacle to consensus building: group polarization. When balkanisation takes place, out-of-context clips may contribute to the distortion of the understanding of some issue, person or practice: “[YouTube] allows people to bypass general-interest intermediaries to show their own video clips, and to choose among an astonishing number of possibilities. Like-minded people can, in a sense, congregate to discuss and focus on one or more of those possibilities – not least when the clip casts ridicule on a particular person or point of view” (2007, 49).

In the following chapters, I intend to carry out a deep reflection on this relation between entertainment and political discussion on YouTube. Though one may be critical of their promiscuity in online video, it is impossible to ignore that a significant part of the “political conversation” on YouTube is marked by the resource to humour, music and references to popular culture.

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33 According to Google, there are several different reasons for content removal requests, including allegations of defamation, or of violation of local laws prohibiting hate speech or pornography. The company notes that “[l]aws surrounding these issues vary by country, and the requests reflect the legal context of a given jurisdiction” (Google 2011).
IV.

YouTube on YouTube and politics: Studying Citizentube

This chapter focuses on understanding how YouTube conceives – and conveys that conception – political video as well as its role in political communication and citizen engagement. Citizentube reflects to some extent the mainstream trends on YouTube, since it is kept by its “Political team,” meaning, YouTube's staff in charge of choosing the videos that are highlighted in News & Politics. Therefore, it not only includes the topics at the top of the YouTube agenda, but also showcases uploading and watching trends, followed and reported on by said YouTube's political team. Finally, it gives me access to meta-discourses on YouTube and politics, due to the reflexive nature of some of the videos posted on this channel.

From the analysis of this channel and its videos, it became clear that YouTube's effort towards legitimization implied reaching out to “traditional” political actors and media, instead of maintaining an “alternative” posture. In a mutual co-opting movement, television channels and politicians established a presence on YouTube, while the latter sought to gain credibility by associating itself to more serious partners. However, the main practices of online video highly praised by YouTube focus on turning to music and humour to promote political debate and engage citizens. Consequently, it may be concluded that YouTube was not just striving to escape the “entertainment only” label, rather, it was simultaneously promoting the inclusion of entertainment within politics, placing it in fact at the centre of political communication strategies. In chapter V, I will study the other side of this equation, namely politicians and political organisations' entrance into YouTube, and how they also looked for “lighter” ways to engage citizens.

Welcome to Citizentube

At the time of its launch, “YouTube's political vlog” was Citizentube's description associated with its logo. In the end of June 2009, this channel had 121 videos uploaded (see Annex I). These included interviews, calls for videos, reviews of sets of videos, backstage and campaign trail footage, as well as announcements, promotion of other channels, new features and explanations on how to use YouTube. Most videos are presented by Steve Grove, YouTube's head of News & Politics, but they also include other people who work for YouTube on related issues, or for this company's partners in certain initiatives.

Citizentube, the YouTube channel, started working in close relation with Citizentube,
the blog, launched on April 23, 2008. As far as motives for adding it, Grove states in the opening post, “WELCOME TO (the new) CITIZENTUBE!”:1 “So far we've been chronicling some of that activity on our video blog, but today we're launching Citizentube the blog to do a more timely job.” Actually, Citizentube, the blog, is much more constantly updated, than its predecessor ever was. Concerning expected content, Steve claims “we'll link out to the latest and greatest in YouTube politics as we see it unfold.” In the blog one mainly finds embedded videos presented or explained. YouTube's choice to preferably discuss News & Politics, not through just video, but through video commented on and contextualized resorting to text was a prelude to the vlog's turn toward curation in 2011.

The main subject of the vlog was US Politics, in particular the 2008 Presidential elections. This channel was created precisely when the primaries where gathering momentum, and that is evident while browsing through its earlier videos. Even if in shy appearances, there are references to Australian, United Kingdom, Spanish and Croatian politics, and international affairs are not completely absent. Some issues are connected to the USA, as is the case of videos on Iraq, with others focusing on human rights, like the discussion on Darfur, and Zimbabwean Politics. The Davos meetings of world leaders in 2008 and 2009 were also covered on this channel.2

Reviews are the first genre of videos I will describe. This particular type is insightful as to YouTube's definition of politics on the website, and political videos in general. Some of the reviews are assessments, distinguishing what is the correct and wrong method of fostering political engagement through online video. A review consists of a mash-up of videos previously posted, chosen according to temporal and/or thematic criteria (besides the political focus common to all in this channel).

In these reviews it is possible to find all the genres described in chapter III, namely “gotcha” moments, animations, parodies and remixes, music videos, public appearances, vlogging, witness videos, live streams and repurposed content. The first videos uploaded on Citizentube already featured such videos, including in early reviews like “YouTube Politics” or “A short history of YouTube politics.” This seems to indicate that there has not been a

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1 The title of the post is a direct reference to the video “Welcome to citizentube,” further analysed later in this chapter.
2 A month after, in December 2009, a call for participation regarding Davos 2010 would be uploaded on the Davos Question channel.
significant transformation in the general overview of political videos in terms of format, even if many other changes have occurred on YouTube as a website and as a company.

Entitled “YouTube Politics,” the first uploaded video dates from March 15, 2007 and, according to its description, it offered “A brief look at U.S. politics on YouTube...[sic].” This video is composed of a series of short clips featuring candidates to the primaries of the US presidential election 2008. It is a mixture of news media interviews, footage from campaign coverage, an actual campaign ad and two parodies. Most of video implies some way of mocking the US primaries campaign or the candidates themselves. The two gotcha moments featured in it exemplify this: the clip of the “I Feel Pretty” video, where John Edwards was filmed fixing his hair, and Hillary Clinton singing the national anthem off-key.

The collection of excerpts making up “YouTube Politics” aims to make an overview of what was considered to be politics on YouTube, looking at uploads before the creation of this channel. Other videos are dedicated to this, as “A short history of YouTube politics...” and “YouTube Politics 2007 :: A Year in Review,” which can be described in much the same way as the first review and share a few of the video clips. Both restrict their focus to US politics and mostly feature candidates to the 2008 presidential elections. “A short history...” is described as “[a] montage of significant moments in YouTube political history...” and in brief 4:12 minutes, besides the Edwards and Clinton videos, also presents other videos that became famous or infamous: for example, Senator Allen's “macaca moment,” mentioned in chapter III, which is said to have compromised any chance for him at the primaries; the “Vote different” video, considered to be the 2008 election first viral video generating a lot of discussion; Obama Girl's appearance, that set the tone to other videos in this campaign. I will return to both these videos later in this chapter, given their importance to the discussion on the role of user-generated videos in these elections. There were also announcements from candidates, “I want to hear from you” messages, videos made by “regular users” and celebrity vloggers, as well as a clip from the CNN/YouTube debates.3

“YouTube Politics 2007 :: A Year in Review” has more editing work than the

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3 On Citizentube there were entire videos dedicated to covering the campaign trail, announcements, and videos from the backstage. The latter referred mainly to events and/or initiatives in which YouTube was involved, very often in partnerships with news media and political parties, and with an explanatory tone either in terms of what will happen or what happened. CNN (Cable News Network) is a U.S cable news channel created in 1980 by media mogul Ted Turner. It earned its place in media history by being the first to offer 24-hour news coverage.
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previously two: it features background music, and has a title and end sequence. This “highlight reel of YouTube politics in 2007” features most of the clips present in “A short history...” plus a few others added, mainly from YouTube interviews with the candidates and from the debates. It includes a snippet of the melting snowman question at the Democratic CNN/YouTube debates, which gave rise to Republican reluctance regarding these debates. While analysing this initiative, Henry Jenkins quotes Mitt Romney, the voice of such contempt: “I think the presidency ought to be held at a higher level than having to answer questions from a snowman” (Romney cited in Jenkins 2009, 188). Many bloggers were also not pleased with this, holding that it reinforced the stereotype that the Internet is only for entertainment, and not serious discussion. Still, some analyses extolled the virtues of the CNN/YouTube partnership, refuting criticism and seeing this as a sign of the redefinition of political participation. In such view, “[t]he debates provided a venue for public deliberation and gave the public a voice in a political institution where historically those voices have been silenced” (Ricke 2010, 211).

“The 2008 election, on YouTube” resembles these overall reviews and, once again, includes popular videos. Some already mentioned, like “I Feel pretty”, “Vote Different” or Obama Girl's, and others that followed: Joe The Plumber's confrontation with Obama or the “Yes We Can” music video. Among the clips, the following sentence flashes: “YouTube politics, more transparency, and more dialogue than ever before. The CNN/YouTube debates, the 2008 conventions, video your vote, your voice, your country, YouTube politics,” and one can see excerpts taken from videos from each of these events and initiatives. As the previous one, it shows more editing, with music as background sound, a title and an end sequence.

Two reviews of the primaries are more analytical. “You Choose '08 primary review: Republicans” and “You Choose '08 primary review :: The Democrats” not only show clips from videos, but these are also commented upon by Steve Grove, analysing the performance of each candidate, how they used YouTube, their uploading trends and characteristics. Regarding the Republicans, there were some considerations on personality and how that reflected on YouTube: McCain's "straight talk" and Huckabee's "personal, friendly, style" are said to make them naturals for this medium. Even if these characteristics can sometimes be double sided, as in the case of McCain where it also made “him a natural target as the 'bomb
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bomb Iran' video of last year demonstrated."

While praising candidates who ran successful series of videos or responded directly to YouTubers, Steve condemned several practices: poor use of celebrity endorsement, making few uploads, not talking directly to voters, having the same video highlighted throughout the whole campaign, and not linking back to the campaign site. In his criticism of candidates who mostly upload television ads, he argues “it is important for message dissemination, but it didn't really start conversations around their content by uploading original stuff to the site.” In turn, Mitt Romney is pointed out as a good example, in part because this candidate interacted with YouTubers by prompting video responses and responding to them. He also mentioned how Ron Paul, a hot online candidate, had a poor YouTube channel with long videos that still generated a high number of views. As for expectations after the primaries, the News & Politics editor claims “the video warfare that takes place in the next 7 or 8 months will truly test the campaigns YouTube medal.”

The Democrats received more overall compliments. Steve stated that low budget campaigns were the ones which had to gain the most from the YouTube opportunity, such as Christopher Dodd's. Mike Gravel was praised for being “the most artistic candidate on YouTube,” Bill Richardson for his viral video, the mock job interview, Denis Kucinich for making shout-outs and hiring vloggers, Joe Biden for responding directly to other candidates and to users, while John Edwards was said to have made use of YouTube early and often.

Hillary Clinton used YouTube to show a lighter side of herself, for example by asking YouTubers: “what do you think our campaign song should be?” Compared to other approaches, this can be seen as slightly patronizing, since it may indicate that Clinton viewed YouTube as a medium for light issues. Despite the fact that the Obama campaign made what is considered good use of YouTube, Steve Grove considers than the most exciting were the videos users made about Obama, like the “Vote Different” ad, or the “Yes We Can” music video. One should keep in mind that these videos were not quite made by the average citizen, even if they are still YouTube users. Rather, they are closer to being “supporter-generated” (Wallsten 2010). I shall analyse these videos from this perspective in the final section of the chapter.

Other elections were analysed, as is the case of the 2007 elections in Australia,

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4 McCain was caught on camera singing “bomb bomb Iran” to the tune of a famous song at a campaign stop (Gonyea 2007).
showing clips from Australian politicians, where they use each other's videos for mutual attack, the “back and forth” described below by Kotecki, the vlogger. After discussing how the Australian campaign had developed, including the Prime Minister's refusal to hold a YouTube debate, he mentions a gotcha video with the opposition leader. It is a response to “YouTube Politics hits Australia,” an announcement made on Citizentube (which in turn is a response to “Welcome to Australia Votes!,” uploaded under the username australiavotes).

Reviews also resulted from previous calls for videos.5 Five of these videos are dedicated to the elections. Two are very similar and concern questions submitted to both CNN/YouTube Debates, Democratic and Republican: snippets of questions, music as background sound, remix style, people from different races and ages, different formats, but mainly people talking directly to the camera. Oddly, and making one question the video as a review of citizen contributions, the Republican video is the same as the one used to make the respective call for videos. Regarding his YouTube research, Strangelove (2010) states, “[m]eanings are communicated through video titles, descriptions, visual and audio content, and written commentary” (2010, 156). The fact that I decided to list one as review, and another as a call for videos is in fact due to the difference in title: “The CNN/YouTube Republican Debate - Great Questions” vs “CNN/YouTube Debate: Submit Your Question Today!” Such distinction prompts the reflection on the possible implications of contextual elements, such as the title, tags or About on how the video is watched and understood. Two other reviews consist of clips of videos that were shown at the Republican and Democratic National Conventions – “Why Are You a Democrat in 2008?” and “Why Are You a Republican in 2008?” These videos came from a contest promoted by Citizentube, originating these mash-ups. The fifth review of a call for videos includes clips from videos of users casting their vote on the “Super Tuesday,” submitted to the Supertuesday channel, featuring rap songs and music videos, a coverage highly praised by Steve Grove.

Issues outside US politics were better covered in the four reviews which followed time criteria, indicating a date. These consist of three weekly videos uploaded in June 2007 and a later one posted on November the same year. The first three are part of a series called “Citizentube This Week,” described on the first episode as “a look at what's happening in

5 The first video that fits this description was not connected to the elections, but to the expectations users had on Citizentube, “Re: Welcome to citizentube.” I shall describe this video later in “Discussion on Citizentube,” connecting it to its call for videos to look at interaction through video-responses.
YouTube News & Politics,“ in particular “the most interesting, most powerful, most entertaining videos coming across the Tube in Politics with a special focus on the content you're [points to the camera] posting to YouTube.” All videos featured and the winner of a “Citizen of the Week” award (which besides the feature is a YouTube t-shirt) are listed on the About section of each episode.

On the first episode, after discussing viral videos on the US presidential election, Steve Grove moves to Croatian politics, namely “gotcha” videos from Croatian users, and a video discussing the issue of world poverty. In the end of the video, the first “Citizen of the Week” award is granted to Davis Fleetwood, a vlogger covering the primaries. The second episode draws the attention to Democratic candidate Mike Gravel’s “Rock” and the discussion it started, while Fleetwood meets the candidate he supports. Also on US politics, but not restricted to the presidential elections, two sides of the discussion on immigration laws are shown: a user applying for a YouTube challenge on public policy, and Newt Gingrich, former speaker of the US House of Representatives, known for his use of YouTube. The winner of the week posted an animation about world peace. The last episode highlights a confrontation concerning the election, and the “Citizen of the Week” was a young woman who posted replies to every presidential candidate on youchoose08’s spotlight, getting answered back by candidates. There was also reference to videos used to affect local politics, as well as on UK politics in terms of the expectations on Gordon Brown stepping into Tony Blair's shoes (showing videos both from N.10 Downing Street and a young man). This was the last video of the series, and there is no indication that it was not going to continue.

The final one of this set of dated reviews is called “Political snapshot: 11/6/2007”. Like in the weekly series, different videos posted on News & Politics are analysed. These are from US Democratic and Republican parties, but also from the Spanish PSOE, which leads to Steve welcoming Zapatero on YouTube. Individual users are equally featured, the video finishes recommending three vloggers, and seven channels are listed in the About section. Within the videos analysed in this research, there were no more date-specific videos.

“Iraq videos – highlights” was the first review dedicated to events taking place outside the USA, but still at the centre of the political discussion being held in the country. Steve Grove describes the videos featured as making it possible for people to “actually see

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6 This YouTuber was at some point hired by this Democratic candidate, Kucinich, as the vlogger for his campaign. Fleetwood is featured in several of the review videos on CitizenTube.
how life is like in Iraq as a whole.” The two videos focused share not only their geographical location, but also the presence of music: in one a group of journalists searches for a band, while in the other, two US soldiers rap.

Already in June 2009, “A note about videos coming in from Iran,” on the other hand, resulted from the flooding of YouTube by videos of the protests in Iran during the aftermath of the 2009 presidential elections (an example of such videos is shown in figure 24, chapter III). This was not particularly visible on videos produced or uploaded by YouTube's political team (except for this one), but it could be seen in the videos chosen to be on Spotlight in News & Politics, as well as in playlists created on Citizentube that brought together videos on this subject (see figure 28). This was Citizentube's first experience in curatorship and the channel continued following the situation in Iran, creating new playlists throughout 2009. This practice would later become the centre of the channel's activity, especially since 2011, when YouTube established a partnership with Storyful, a company dedicated to real-time web curation and provider of content for professional news organisations.

Figure 28: Citizentube's playlists in 2009, all dedicated to the protests in Iran after the 2009 elections. Screenshot taken on December 29, 2009.

In June 2009, Steve Grove claimed that “YouTube's importance has risen as one of the only visual windows into the streets of Tehran and we take that responsibility very seriously.” Believing that this coverage has “documentary value”, YouTube allowed videos

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7 The last video created and uploaded by Citizentube dates from March 16, 2010. After that, the vlog features only curated videos.
which are “too graphic” in terms of their community guidelines, and would normally be taken
down otherwise (some actually were, either by YouTube or the uploader).

While foreign media were forced to leave the country and videos of protests in Iran
started being uploaded to YouTube, Citizentube's attention turned to that side of the globe.
Uploaders were asked to tag videos “citizentube” and “iran” to make them easy to find
through YouTube's search engine. Although some featured their title and textual information
in Persian, an extremely large amount had these elements in English or English and Persian,
implying that the intended audience stretched well beyond the borders of Iran. These videos
often had poor quality: they were mostly short unedited captures, in which a sea of mobile
phones filming can be picked out in the crowd's outstretched arms (see figure 24 in chapter
III). There are some videos that were uploaded more than once by different users, sometimes
changing the title. It was around this time that Citizentube's slogan changed from “YouTube's
political vlog” to “Watching Video Change Our World,” both in the YouTube video channel
and the respective blog, described above.

Human rights organisation WITNESS' manual for activism is indeed called “Video
for change” (Gregory et al. 2005), and it emphasises the production side, more than that of
consumption. WITNESS' members claim they integrated video in their advocacy activities
due to its particular set of capabilities, even if it is not adequate to all campaigns and
organisations:

We recognised that video could elicit powerful emotional impact, connecting viewers to
personal stories. It can illustrate stark visual contrasts and provide visual evidence of abuses.
It can be a vehicle for building coalitions with other groups working on an issue. It can reach
a wide audience since it does not require literacy to convey information. It can help counter
stereotypes and assist you in reaching new, different and multiple audiences, particularly if
broadcast is a possibility. And it can be used in segments of varying lengths for different contexts (Caldwell 2005, 2).

Video as evidence has deep roots. In Video for change several examples are given of
how “[v]ideo can be a powerful source of evidence for lawyers and advocates to right wrongs
and create change” (Pillay 2005, 209), still, it is pointed out that the filming needs not be

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8 A few videos had a sort of opening image, others annotations or captions pointing to specific details. Confusion prevailed, the sound was almost always background sound: screaming, shouting and even singing can be heard.
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directly done by either. Examples range from film evidence introduced by the countries that established International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, to the footage of Rodney King being beaten down by the police in 1991. The latter has been given as an example of how the surveillee is also able to surveil the surveiller, and how this helps him/her to gain control over the control that is exercised over him (Mann, Nolan, and Wellman 2003). Recent descriptions of videos coming from Middle-Eastern and North-African countries, as well as showing protests in all over the world, give emphasis to the new possibilities of sousveillance opened up by online video.

Discussing the transformations occurring in journalism and the specific case of Wikileaks, Yochai Benkler states that “individuals play an absolutely critical role in this new information ecosystem.” In addition to “the distributed force of observation and critical commentary,” and blogging from experts, “there is the sheer presence of millions of individuals with the ability to witness and communicate what they witnessed over systems that are woven into the normal fabric of networked life.” Yet, he points out that “[t]his is the story of the Iranian reform videos, and it is of course the story of much more mundane political reporting, from John McCain singing ‘Bomb Iran’ to the tune of a Beach Boys song to George Allen’s Macaca” (Benkler 2011, 378–9). After this video, Citizens posted two videos entitled “YouTube the Digital Matchmaker” (Parts 1 and 2), introducing YouTube video volunteers, a channel linking nonprofits and causes, to people who want to make videos about the respective issues. Two other videos taught YouTubers “How to use YouTube for Politics” and “How to Catch the Latest News on YouTube.”9

As described above, the review videos brought together several different approaches to online video, even if “entertaining” stands out as the proper adjective for many instances. They were sometimes easy to mix up with calls for videos, since both often featured clips from various videos. I considered it was closer to a call for videos, when emphasis was put on the appeal for more videos, instead of on the portrait of already existing content, and those videos are the object of the next section, together with the response to one particular call.

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9 These were the last videos analysed in this study. After June 2009, the three next videos continued to be a How to video, and the presentation of new features.
Calling for videos

Calls for action are therefore mainly characterised as being requests for participation directed at YouTubers, or – employing the preferred expression on Citizentube – conversation starters. “Citizentube focus: War in Iraq,” for instance, ends with Steve expressing anticipation for receiving feedback, followed by the indication of Citizentube's email. This video mainly shows footage on the USA, namely of the war protests, a support-the-troops gathering, a military analyst and Hillary Clinton. However, the News & Politics editor declares they will feature “both what's happening on the ground there and what people think should be happening on the ground here.”

This video is part of a very short series which counts only two videos. The other one, “Citizentube focus: Darfur,” is a video response to “Darfur: Tell President Bush to Take Action Now,” from the Enough Project, whose aim is to “prevent genocide and crimes against humanity” (as described on their channel). Steve Grove urges YouTubers not to stop the video, “I know that learning about genocide or mass atrocities isn't exactly the most enjoyable YouTube experience you can have,” trying to emphasize its importance as a counterweight. There is hence an assumption this is not a subject attractive to YouTubers and that they require some convincing so as to not move on to another video. He then proceeds to a very brief summary of affairs in Sudan, following then to prompt watchers to help by going to the Enough Project channel, watch their videos and respond with videos on the subject, “to get the conversation going on what's happening over there and how we can help make a difference.”

“WHAT IS CITIZENTUBE” preceded the “Citizentube focus” series as this channel's first call for videos. The second video posted on this channel, just the day after “YouTube politics,” is a welcome message from Steve Grove (here only “Steve,” since in this video no last name is given, nor is it present in the description of the channel). Wearing a t-shirt with the company logo, he praises YouTube's role in political discussion and strongly appeals to the contribution of users: as original producers and as a sort of quality control of his work. In this vlog post there is an attempt to mimic videos sent by viewers, which also takes place in other videos. An indication of this effort is the theatrical quality of the speaker turning on and off the camera, visible in figure 29.
Figure 29: “WHAT IS CITIZENTUBE,” different frames of the video demonstrating the enactment of a conversation taking place (sequence left to right, top to bottom). Screenshots taken on June 1, 2012.

It is also supposed to be a personal conversation – the same word Steve used describing Citizentube. However, there are visible cuts, which indicates some editing. It has a very enthusiastic tone, particularly complimentary, almost adulatory, of YouTube's role on
promoting political discussion, specially one in which anyone can intervene. The channel Citizentube is described “as a place where we can examine somebody's conversations and ask questions to get new conversations started,” establishing an analogy with face-to-face exchanges of ideas. There is a very strong emphasis on anyone-can-post and the existence of a “same level playing field.” Steve confesses his excitement for being part of a “truly revolutionary political environment” and for “what YouTube is doing for our ability to communicate with each other around the world.” He asks YouTubers for their help, specifically by sending him “your videos, your thoughts” to his email address at YouTube, with his promise to feature as many videos as he can on the Citizentube vlog, as well as on the News & Politics category page. In addition, he gives some personal information talking about his hometown and his journalistic background, at the same time instating familiarity, and introducing professional credentials. Similarly, the video “My trip to come to work for YouTube: February 2007” displays a clear effort to establish a rapport between the editor and YouTubers, besides the explanation of what is to manage the News & Politics page. Atypically, it was first posted on Steve Grove's personal account.

Like “WHAT IS...” and “My trip to...,” “Can YouTube improve politics” addresses politics on YouTube as a meta-discussion. It does not indicate how the users should reply with their videos, but in December 2009 it had listed nine video-responses that were concerned with the question asked. In this video, Steve Grove partly blames distance from politicians for a negative perspective on politics – echoing the discussions on the perception of a democratic deficit (see chapter V). To contradict this, Steve mentions the increase in accountability of candidates, “part of what YouTube can do is to give voters and candidates more direct access to one another, to generate a more authentic public dialogue,” illustrating this with clips from US presidency candidates, again giving prominence to the conversational potential. By the choice of words like “candidates” and the clips, it seems to highlight campaigning.10

Tony Blair is also featured, and although identified for his position as Prime Minister, the video refers to the presentation of the Labour channel. This is an early video of the Citizentube channel and it transmits a positive perspective: “Well if US presidential hopefuls and the Prime Minister of England can use YouTube to connect to people, it's only going to get better from here [sic]” (he later apologies in the About section for saying “England” and

10 The previously mentioned “How to use YouTube for Politics,” reportedly aimed to help users “get the most out of YouTube politics,” also focused on promoting “a candidate or issue.”
not United Kingdom). Regarding the responses to this video, there are a few aspects worth mentioning. A very simple one is that since “England” was mentioned, there are two responses from British users: a YouTuber who succeeded in having a question answered by Blair, and a politician. Secondly, two other videos bring to attention the fact that although politicians may be using YouTube, they are not necessarily doing it following the expectations carried by social web or taking advantage of the medium's differences in comparison to “regular news.” For example, that is noticeable when speeches are given instead of responses through YouTube, as well as when comments are disabled or deleted on their channels. In chapter V, it will be shown how these accusations hold true regarding the common practice of many politicians. Interestingly enough, Citizentube had at first a comment box in their channel page, which was later removed.\footnote{As can be seen in the page kept by the Internet Archive - Wayback Machine, referring to May 2007: \url{http://web.archive.org/web/20070505092144/http://youtube.com/citizentube}, this box is filled with spammed hate speech.} This would eventually be the European Commission's option in its own channel, as also detailed in the next chapter.

The latest response on the list (still from June 2007) is an interview with Chad Hurley and Steven Chen led by Chris Anderson from Wired magazine. Entitled “Is YouTube Changing Politics,” the description is very clear on how YouTube is perceived – “with YouTube, Hurley and Chen created a new way for millions of people to entertain, educate, rock and shock one another on a scale we've never seen before. YouTube is a platform for everyday people to broadcast their perspectives to the masses” – that is, not so different from personal television channels, mass media in terms of audience, if not of the producers, where entertainment comes first.

However, this topic of discussion was not the most common. Similarly to the reviews and videos on Citizentube during that period, most of the call for videos concerned the 2008 presidential elections. From asking for users' opinion on “The first VIRAL VIDEO of the 2008 election” (original emphasis), “Vote Different,” to direct interaction with candidates through the YouChoose ’08 Spotlight, to the Democratic and Republican CNN/YouTube Debates, caucuses and primaries, Super Tuesday, contributes for the Democratic and Republican National Conventions, to election day with the “Video Your Vote,” in partnership with PBS.

There is an effort to create a sense of community at the national level around this
election, even when they are state level decisions: “The caucuses may be in Iowa, but through YouTube we can all have a front row seat,” “The first presidential primaries may be in New Hampshire but on YouTube we can all get in on the action.” The videos uploaded concerning Super Tuesday voting were mashed-up with a Google map, to give geographical perspective on their origin, once more taking advantage of different tools owned by the mother company. This would also be used in the “Video Your Vote” event to “document your experience.” In this regard, YouTube went so far as making legislation available for users regarding filming in poll stations, since there were variations on this issue countrywide. After the elections, citizen suggestions regarding US government kept being requested. “How should Congress work?” fits this description, and this time another synergy was explored by testing Google moderator to rank contributions.\(^1\)

“Call-out for 4/29 Presidential Press Conference” is the second case of a video asking for video responses to itself (the first is “Welcome to citizentube,” described below). It is not presented by Steve Grove, but by Olivia Ma, News Manager on YouTube (who joined Steve Grove in 2008 in this area). It both announces a Presidential Press conference delivered through live streaming on YouTube, and asks for the YouTubers' views on it. This video makes strong use of annotations, linking directly to the White House channel, where the conference was going to be streamed. Captions in English could also be turned on. On December 2009, it included only one response, “OBAMA: The first 100 Days,” a sarcastic congratulations video.

The only issue specific call for videos is “Change,” a video “asking you to answer the Davos Question: What do countries, companies, or individuals need to do to make the world a better place?,” that would be discussed in the 2008 Annual Meeting organized by the World Economic Forum. Steve Grove finishes the video with a famous quote attributed to anthropologist Margaret Mead, “never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world, indeed it's the only thing that ever has.”\(^2\)

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\(^1\) “First steps towards an interactive Congress” was the resulting video dedicated to reviewing this experience.

\(^2\) According to the website of the Institute founded by Mead, which presents a shorter version of this quote in its header, “Although the Institute has received many inquiries about this famous admonition by Margaret Mead, we have been unable to locate when and where it was first cited, becoming a motto for many organizations and movements. We believe it probably came into circulation through a newspaper report of something said spontaneously and informally. We know, however, that it was firmly rooted in her professional work and that it reflected a conviction that she expressed often, in different contexts and phrasings” (Institute for Intercultural Studies 2009).
During the meeting itself in 2008, Steve Grove posted two videos with backstage images and described how world leaders watched the mash-up made with users' responses and then replied to them. In 2009 there is no call for videos on the Citizentube channel, but still there was coverage. Probably the request for the participation of YouTubers came directly through the Davos Question channel (as was the case with the video “Be part of the Davos Debates 2010,” the following year). The involvement in this initiative was extolled by Ed Sanders, the then Head of Consumer & Partner Marketing, Europe, Middle East and Africa at YouTube. In the video “The Davos Debates” uploaded in 2009 to Citizentube, it is noted how, after the US elections, figureheads like the Queen of Jordan, the Queen of England, and the Pope joined the website. “YouTube is a place for real democratization,” by allowing interaction between YouTubers and political and religious leaders, YouTube is “making a difference.”

I still have not mentioned one very specific type of call for videos, which constituted part of the call for questions for the named “YouTube Interviews.” For the first interviews, questions were requested to be made as a comment, which then evolved for a comment or a video-response, and finally to a video on another channel. Given the close connection between the calls for questions and the interviews, they can be better analysed in tandem. Despite their strong focus on the US Presidential elections, these interviews and the “Citizentube interviews” point to a reflection on the role of YouTube in the political field, and mirror common conceptions on how video is/should be used in politics. The fact that for some “politics” means campaigning is not without interest. Interviews will be described more thoroughly later in this chapter.

However, before looking into these interviews, I would like to illustrate how discussion through video responses took place when prompted at Citizentube, and for that I will describe one particular example. Despite four previous videos calling for contributions, “Welcome to citizentube” was the first in which it was asked for users to upload video responses to it directly. Only one other video asks for this explicitly, “Call-out for 4/29 Presidential Press Conference,” as just mentioned. In the first videos, the method chosen was email, while most of the calls for videos asked them to be posted on other channels, and a couple requested they were given specific tags.

In “Welcome to citizentube,” the description prompts YouTubers: “What issue
matters most to you?” The highlights of the responses were used to make a second related video, with the title “Re: Welcome to citizentube” (a review I briefly mentioned above), mimicking the default title format of responses. I shall use both these videos, and the video response chain generated by them, since this is almost the only example in which a direct sequence of video responses is constituted, therefore generating the closest instance of a conversation – to once again resort to Steve's expression – carried out in video found in this channel and in all other cases I analysed.

The “Welcome to citizentube” video is very simples: it starts with the message “welcome to citizentube,” the then Citizentube logo, “What issue...,” flashing issues, and “... matters the most to YOU? Post a response. Make your voice heard. People are watching,” all this in white captions against a black background. In around 20 seconds, 57 topics are listed, ranging in scope from the worldwide to the next door; in comprehensiveness, from the general to the very specific; and in currency, from the timeless to the hot topics of this century's political debates. Their order is not completely random, being possible to find connection between some of the consecutive subjects. It is then followed by a sequence of images of videos and pages on YouTube, ending with a repetition of the Citizentube logo. It is reinforced by strong instrumental music as background sound.


Figure 30: List of issues presented on “Welcome to citizentube,” in order of appearance, transcribed from the video.

In November 2009, there were 20 video responses (although 22 were indicated). This number had progressively diminished since March 2008, when I first collected data on this video and its responses (31 at the time, 33 were indicated). The remaining videos were dedicated to different issues and had diverse styles. Two were posted by an International Human rights organisation, Breakthrough, and were dedicated to injustice towards immigrants: the lack of support for a former military suffering from Post Traumatic Stress
Disorder told by his sister and an interview of the director of a “documentary about the immigration struggles for lesbian and gay couples” (description of the video). Both refer to the need to change existing legislation. “A Military Man Behind Bars” directly addresses viewers and asks them to “Call your senator and congressman”. The video “Alabama Mothers Deserve Midwives” is also an appeal to engagement: it instigates people to contact their representative as well as to visit specific websites to get more information and find out how to get involved. This is a more amateurish video, sharing characteristics with home-videos, featuring people – almost all pregnant women, but also children and men – speaking directly to the camera presenting the problem.

As was just described, a format chosen by various YouTubers responding to “Welcome to citizentube” is the slideshow, probably due to its simplicity. As the years went by, video editing tools became simpler and less expensive (often free), enabling other forms of joining images together, closer to actual video, making slideshows much less common. In these responses, two users resorted to it to promote voting on a politician (Republican Senator Chuck Hagel, concerning the 2008 USA Presidential elections), adding footage of a speech, and on a party (Australia Green Party, there were Federal Elections later in 2007), in which the user added music as background sound. A third YouTuber joined elements of both videos: starting with a slideshow presentation, then using images from the Discovery Channel, all of this accompanied by music. This video had a much stronger and more aggressive tone. In the About section it reads “THE WORLD IS COMMANDED BY BUNCH OF KILLERS” (original caps), followed by Nick Cave's lyrics to “Release the Bats,” the song playing as background. A lot milder is “Belief,” a video dedicated to freedom, also using the slideshow format and music mixed with the voice of a young woman (probably the YouTuber) reading a manifesto on this issue.

First person testimonials, vlogging, with the webcam as the weapon of choice, were equally present in the list of responses, with varying degree of proficiency, technically and rhetorically. One of the videos cannot even be understood, as it is poorly filmed and has no sound. The About section states “Video Cam Direct Upload” and the title is the basic “Re: Welcome to citizentube,” so nothing can be known about the topic of this response. A second “Video Cam Direct Upload” from a different user was more successful, even if he displays some unease in speaking to the camera (he keeps averting the eyes), highlighting consumption
as a problem in the USA. A third user shares this bit of discomfort in addressing the camera, despite directly addressing viewers, asking them to suggest a new amendment to the United States Constitution. It was not uploaded directly, and the user performed some minor editing adding a simple title sequence which repeated in the end of the video.

The following two responses are from users who are much more comfortable with speaking to the camera. Speaking about “Double Standards” in terms of how countries are treated differently (he opposes Iran to Zimbabwe and Sudan), the uploader confesses it was not his intention to make political videos. A user responded to this admission on the comments by pointing out: “Funny how YT can turn us more political than we intended, huh? The Vloggerhood here is political in a very healthy way, I think.” This video also has a title sequence and the user added an afterthought, similar to the Star Wars opening crawl, closing it.

“Soundbite Politics and YouTube” is a video from James Kotecki as EmergencyCheese, the particularly savvy YouTuber mentioned for his vlogging in chapter III and for his two Citizentube Interviews below. At first glance, the video could look like a simple webcam upload from home, but looking closer one can identify edits. Moreover, there is an opening caption with his name, and a final one promoting his website. In “Soundbite Politics and YouTube,” Kotecki claims that “the key issue is getting as many people as possible engaged in the political process, and I think YouTube is a powerful way of doing that” (as stated in the description). While criticizing what he calls soundbites which “have been carefully watered down to appeal to the broadest cross-section of voters,” he places hope on YouTube's capacity of promoting “multidirectional face-to-face conversation” through video responses. For Kotecki, the shortness of YouTube videos is compensated by the fact that “we can talk back and forth for long periods of time and give complex issues the attention they deserve.” In his view, “this type of political discourse empowers the individual to set the agenda and share their opinion” and closes his not so long video with the highly quotable sentence “after all, democratic government is the original user-generated content.” His video is one of two responses which overtly mention “Welcome to citizentube” and directly address Steve, as if it were truly a conversation.

“Citizens we are” is the second one. It described by the uploader as a mash-up and features images from the original video, other footage from YouTube, and the YouTuber
rapping in close-up. The lyrics are displayed in the About section, together with a thank you to Steve for allowing the mash-up. In “climbing the berlin wall,” the user also films himself. However, in this case he is not speaking to the camera, but performing an action with metaphoric intent: the overcoming of barriers between people. It is a short video with poor quality, filmed at night time, and it cannot be determined whether it is the actual Berlin wall.

In the realm of performance, finally, we can find parody in four videos, an indication that humour is one of the languages chosen to make political videos. In “Graphic News at 11” two young men pretend to be anchors in a TV news program. It is a home-made video, basing its humour on continuous swearing and it does not discuss any political issue.14 “America: Sweet Freedom” is a highly sarcastic video, criticizing the United States in favour of “the international world.” Candy is used as a metaphor to describe each issue he addresses: consumerism, variety (especially in news media), patriotism, and bipartisan politics. It has a title sequence, the user added music as background sound, and it has noticeable editing even if the YouTuber is talking directly to the webcam. What is distinct from the first person testimonials of the vloggers presented above is that he does so in a very theatrical fashion. This user had over 3 500 subscribers in November 2009, showing he had some success in capturing a loyal audience interested in keeping up-to-date on his videos.

Two videos are parodies depicting mock candidacies. The first one, “Running for President – Hines ’08,” makes fun of the stereotypes in political campaigns. It pictures campaigning as simply firing a lot of buzzwords and empty rhetoric, where the main character speaks to the camera, literally runs around, and sings with a band (in a college campus). The second one has become private since my first exploratory research endeavours, and the same applies to the last two videos present in this list of responses.

“Re: Welcome to citizentube” features clips from three videos one can longer find in the list of responses and Steve also states that “a lot of users asked me ‘Is YouTube going to be about National Politics, American politics,’” a topic which is not addressed in any of the videos analysed, nor in the comments to the original video. From the videos just analysed, there are short excerpts from “Belief” and “Alabama Mothers Deserve Midwives,” while almost half of this video (1:50 of 3:58 total) is from “America: Sweet Freedom,” closing it.

Both videos and the responses to the first one did not reach a very high number of

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14 The only remotely political reference is mentioning the list of forbidden words issued by the USA’s Federal Communications Commission.
views, except precisely for “America: Sweet Freedom” (displaying only non-private videos). In figure 31, the top “Re: Welcome to citizentube” refers to the video posted with the highlights on the channel Citizentube, whereas the bottom three concern responses described above.

![Image of bar chart]

Source: YouTube

**Figure 31: View count of “Welcome to citizentube,” non-private responses and “Re: Welcome to citizentube,” on November 12, 2009.**

Only three responses had responses themselves, namely, “Running for President - Hines '08,” “Soundbite Politics and YouTube,” and “America: Sweet Freedom,” two of which had only one response. The first one was responded by a private video, called “International Call in Sick Campaign.” Kotecki, who praised the potential of video responses for dialogue, also received only one video response: a joke about Bill and Hillary Clinton, “Bill surprises Hill.”

“America: Sweet Freedom” has four video responses. The first response is from the same user and is called “America: Sweet Freedom (an explanation).” It is almost entirely a slideshow with captions, and music added as background sound. The YouTuber rebuts criticism made to his original video through text comments, as well as shows a small clip from the original video to illustrate his arguments. This video, in turn, received two responses. Again, one from himself with a video he mentioned in the previous one, which is, in turn, responded by a sort of making-of of this video; and another, self-described as “comment
rant,” giving support to the creator of “America: Sweet Freedom (an explanation),” sharing his view and claiming that undeserved criticism or worthless comments are very common on YouTube. This sequence of responses is represented by the sub-chain in the bottom right-hand corner of figure 32.

Two videos have the basic title: “Re: America: Sweet Freedom.” In one, the user is speaking in a close webcam shot. The second is a “Video Cam Direct Upload,” very short, and does not make sense. The last of these four responses is “Re: Transylvania: Sweet Freeblood,” a private video, that may be a joke playing on the original response (at least the title so suggests it).

![YouTube Response Chain](https://example.com)

*Figure 32: Response chain to “Welcome to citizentube.” Each video is represented by the YouTube logo, on top is the original video “Welcome to citizentube,” all the others are represented in relation to it.*

“Re: Welcome to citizentube,” by Citizentube, has one video response: “Barack Obama Good Judgment On The Environment.” It is a documentary style video, featuring a few celebrities, and it aims to promote hemp, arguing the beneficial environmental consequences of its adoption. It states that Barack Obama as a State Senator for an Illinois
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supported an industrial hemp bill, however, the video carefully closes with “This message has been endorsed by no one, but you can vote in 2008.” The final shot is a prompt to buy the tracks that are part of the video's soundtrack on iTunes (from Willie Nelson and Bob Marley).

Strangelove notes “it is is rare for conversations within YouTube to persist over a series of multiple video replies” (2010, 121); still, this researcher believes that in time video-based dialogue will become more frequent. From this analysis, one can argue that despite being an attempt at promoting dialogue through video responses, and giving recognition in a second video to the contributions made by users, “Welcome to citizentube” did not generate a video conversation, at least in terms of what Kotecki describes it to be: an exchange of views that makes up for the shortness of the videos. Only “America: Sweet Freedom” elicited a chain of responses, and even in that case the YouTuber is responding to text comments, instead of videos, and maintains a presence in every link of the chain (he is in fact the only presence in the last link). Even in terms of text comments, that demand a lot less effort than a video response and are a preferred medium for giving feedback, there were only 217 comments to “Welcome to citizentube,” an extremely low number.

Following this analysis on calls for videos and the response they generated, in the following pages I am going to study some of the discourses on YouTube and politics, specifically by analysing interviews made for the Citizentube channel.

(Inter)Views on YouTube and Politics

Interviews were in fact an important part of the videos in this sample. Ten YouTube interviews were made to politicians, and a second series comprehended fourteen interviews, Citizentube interviews, that had a more diverse participation. These two sets are going to be the focus of this section. Three other interviews were carried out not connected to a series: two involved two presidential candidates on the campaign trail, and the remaining one was to a reporter, Kevin Sites, known for his solo multimedia coverage of world conflicts.

The YouTube Interviews were all made by Steve except for two: one was made by Olivia Ma, and the other by Ben Smith “of YouTube's political team.” They took place in a studio set, sometimes referred as being inside the Googleplex. All YouTube interviews featured US Politicians: eight were made to presidential candidates (two Republican, five Democratic, and one independent), and, after the elections, two included Speakers of the
House (the one in office and the previous).

Questions from YouTubers were at first read by Steve and then videos started being featured. Only one YouTube interview did not have a “Got a question for...” video, which was the first one to Senator McCain, even if Steve asked questions supposedly from the audience. The proportion of user questions varied, in some cases they only started being asked two thirds into the interview, in others the interviewer led off with a video from a YouTuber. Ron Paul's was announced that it was “going to be different, instead of me [Steve] asking the questions you'll ask every single question,” making it entirely an interview from users, a format that did not continue in the following ones. After a point, some of the interviews identified in the About the users whose questions were featured. Not all videos featured in the interviews appeared as a response to the respective call for question. One possible explanation is that they may have been taken down, or that they were sent some other way. In several of the interviews, there is a final round of quick-answers, “under 15 seconds” (Paul), “Privilege or Right” (Edwards), “Hope or Nope” (Obama), “Thumbs-up or Thumbs-down” (Nader), “Yay or Nay” (Pelosi), or another special ending, a rant (McCain), the explanation of a particular video (Gravel), or a game (Gingrich).

McCain's interview is mainly focused on YouTube's political significance, its advantages and shortcomings. Once more, his “straight talk” leads him to be characterized as “a candidate that is made for Youtube.” Despite his “Bomb bomb Iran” gotcha video and the coverage it received, the Senator gives praise to YouTube, “what you guys have done is remarkable and phenomenal.” McCain replies to the offer of a YouTube t-shirt stating that his “early twenties, late teens and middle teens” children will be pleased. In the end, already up from the chair, while they are thanking each other, the candidate remarks “and thanks for your continued destruction of the American political system,” which received a general laugh as a reaction.

Ron Paul characterises the Internet as a “political equalizer,” adding “no-one can fully understand yet how the Internet may affect a whole generation. Right now I'm so excited about young people being involved.” The candidate is complimented on the fact that he has the biggest subscriber base of any of the candidates (up until that moment, as the election continued), and Paul describes himself as a grassroots candidate, in a behind the scenes ending. The number of video responses the call for questions had seems to validate his online
success: in December 2009, there were 24 responses, more than twice as much as the second most responded call for questions (for Nader's interview). It is possible there could have been more, since of three video questions featured, one is not on this list. This happens in other cases, such as Christopher Dodd's, where the two users identified in the interview are not responsible for any of the six responses of the call for questions on the same date.

While Ron Paul includes himself in the grassroots candidates, Governor Bill Richardson is depicted as an underdog in the campaign, and discusses YouTube's role in it the following way: "YouTube is a way voters connect with candidates. There is the traditional media, they have their polls, they have their celebrities and rock stars [...] YouTube can see candidates on the issues, can make them see if they have got passion and commitment, can bring people together, and are sincere and passionate and regular human beings besides being qualified." This candidate was known for his "job interview" videos, which, according to the interviewer, gave him “YouTube star” status.

Obama was also asked his view on YouTube's political implications, and declared that his attitude towards facing technology and its usage for transparency would go on when he formed government. When asked if he would have a Whitehouse YouTube channel, he admitted not having thought about it, but that he would have “twenty-first century chats” where he would speak directly to citizens through video streams “because it allows me to interact directly in a way that enhances democracy and strengthens our government.” The WhiteHouse YouTube channel ended up being created after the elections – in January 2009, together with the Congress channel – and Obama carried out live streamed meetings, conferences and speeches.\(^{15}\)

The two interviews following elections were, as said, to the previous and the incumbent Speaker of the House. Newt Gingrich has had for some time an established presence on YouTube, which is why Steve states that the interview "only makes sense, you're an YouTube celebrity." He greets Gingrich making reference to this politician having videos with over a million views, various YouTube channels, and to his launching of a contest. In fact, the first reference to Gingrich on CitizenTube, which is also one of the first videos of the

\(^{15}\) Obama’s use of YouTube was soon criticized, even if the US President was careful enough to upload in multiple platforms. Despite still live streaming events such as the annual State of the Union address through YouTube, in January 2010 the White House had its own player, instead of embedded videos from external platforms (http://www.whitehouse.gov/video). These videos were available for downloading and classified as “Public Domain.”
channel, was a video welcoming him and talking about another contest he was promoting. Two of the four responses posted as reply to the “Got a question...” video were featured.

In December 2009, the call for questions for the interview with Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi had the same number of responses. One was featured, and a user video question is referred on the interview that does not appear on this list. Congress reportedly changed their regulation so that all congresspeople could have individual YouTube channels. Asked about how Congress could use YouTube to make government more transparent, Pelosi declares “we have to communicate with the people in the manner which they communicate, and especially to a younger generation,” seeing it as “a situation where you have an opportunity to say a little more than somebody might say on TV or the rest.” She lists examples that, as she described them, range from very specific to general in terms of Congress actions, and makes reference to the interactive potential of YouTube. As a sort of demonstration of this, the first two questions asked are done so through video. The remaining were sent as comments. The interview ends with Nancy Pelosi asking citizens to share their thoughts, “it's two way”, and not just Congress posting. Members of the Congressional Research Service have stated that the functioning of the US Congress has always been affected by the development of new technologies and that YouTube is included in the most recent trends (Shogan 2010).16

Moving on to the “Citizentube Interviews,” four of them were made as if they were a video conference, with Steve Grove speaking from YouTube's headquarters, and the interviewees in different settings: James Kotecki (EmergencyCheese) in his dorm room, a common setting for his vlogging, David Cameron (UK politician) on a field in Wales, Victoria Brown (BigThink) is filmed against a white background, and Matthew Sheffield (Newsbusted) is sitting in a room, looking like he is talking to the webcam.

The first interview was, as described by Steve, a “special interview with one of our more active political users, Emergency Cheese, aka James Kotecki.” Kotecki is the only person who was interviewed twice on Citizentube (later due to this professional affiliation). It is a very light topic interview, resorting to humour, and although it is made to look live, it sounds scripted: speech is rigid, displaying a mechanical rhythm. This YouTuber, who

16 The adoption of the most recent communication technologies is highly praised, “[o]n the heels of the e-mail revolution, [...] members of Congress are now able to use social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook, and on their official Web sites they can post links to YouTube. Members have used these new tools in different ways, and several are pushing the envelope” (Shogan 2010, 231).
commented on US Presidency candidates, became well known outside YouTube, namely on traditional media. Receiving a lot of exposure from the latter did not reflect much on his YouTube popularity, although it contributed positively to his career. Despite being considered a YouTube celebrity as well as having been interviewed by CNN, Fox, National Public Radio and featured on the Washington Post's front page, his videos do not have such an overwhelming number of views, nor he has an extraordinarily large subscriber base.\(^{17}\)

Besides this focus on his crossing over from YouTube to traditional media, Kotecki was also asked his motivations for starting posting political videos:

I have this webcam so I thought why not start posting videos to YouTube. Everybody else is doing it and they all seem to be having a really good time. And I have always been interested in politics, since seventh grade, so I decided to talk about that. And then I noticed some presidential candidates had their own videos on YouTube that people were not talking about, commenting on very much, so I decided I would talk about that. And the rest is history. James Kotecki (transcribed from the video “Citizentube interview: Emergency Cheese”).

The lack of comments on politician's videos will be reviewed on the next chapter, as this equally applies to the case of European Commission and European politicians.

Regarding advices for other users he suggested having a plan of what is going to be said before the video, and making videos that one is very passionate about. Not long after the video “Soundbite Politics and YouTube” (April 5, 2007) and this interview (April 23, 2007), Kotecki's YouTube presence (with this alias) would be analysed in the journal *Film Quarterly*. In the author's view, there is an “almost complete absence of any discernible political stance from the hundred-odd videos posted on his YouTube channel, EmergencyCheese, since the beginning of 2007” (Walters 2007, 60). For Walters, Kotecki's analytical interest, assessing “good” and “bad” political videos, makes his approach more journalistic than political, even if he succeeded in receiving personal online responses from politicians and was visited by one candidate (2007, 60).

The second interview was focused on the opposite side, the politician's. Steve praises David Cameron as an example of good use of YouTube, since he “reaches out directly to

\(^{17}\) James Kotecki most viewed, and most famous, video was “Congressman Ron Paul Visits My Dorm Room.” It appeared several times on Citizentube's reviews, and was nominated for the Best of YouTube 2007 Video Awards in the Politics category (it did not win). However, in December 2009, more than two years and half of being posted, it counted 427 194 views. A low number if compared to fellow 2007 nominee, “Crush On Obama,” with 16 223 445 views on the same date.
voters, answers their questions and gives a behind the scenes look at his life.” In turn, Cameron describes YouTube as a “a great medium for communicating with people.” By enabling politicians to leave their “bubbles,” “I hope using things like webcameron [his channel] or YouTube, people can see a bit more of what it is that makes politicians tick, and what they do, what they believe in and that we're not some kind of race apart.” Nevertheless, his later channel as UK's prime-minister would not be very interactive, as is explained in chapter V. This interview is a video response to “UK Politics Have Your Say,” a video posted by UKYouChoose, a channel supposed to be dedicated to UK Politics. Although this video has 43 responses (some repeated users), it is the only video present in said channel.18 The video is a clone of the “Welcome to citizentube” video: the difference is where the Citizentube logo showed, the UK politics logo appeared instead, and in the sequence of images there were UK related videos and channels.

More recently, two interviews were dedicated to channels on YouTube. Big Think is said to aim at taking the voice from the talking heads to “regular people,” creating “thoughtful content,” distancing themselves from mainstream media by not focusing on petty affairs, and trying to make issues accessible to the audience. Their methodology is described as consisting of long interviews with experts, dissecting those clips into ideas, and allowing the public to watch and rank them, as well as to submit ideas of their own. According to Victoria Brown, they felt there was a need for engaging content that could be commented upon, instead of just users uploading videos in response to nothing. They propose to catalyse the discussion with ideas from great thinkers. This is farther from the ideal of a bottom-up agenda set by YouTubers, since it allows the participation in the debate, but restricts the ability to start it. The second interview, with Matthew Sheffield, will be discussed in the final section of this chapter, given its focus on humour and politics.

The remaining ten interviews took place at an event organized by Google and the National Journal, an US weekly magazine, about “The 21st Century Campaign,” between the previous two pairs of interviews, and all uploaded together. Six interviews were led by Olivia Ma, while four were by Steve Grove. In all cases, the interviewer was identified in the About

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18 Since this channel was analysed part archive, part real time, and this video predated the beginning of my empirical analysis, it is difficult to ascertain the motives for the apparent lack of success of the UK experience, compared to the Spanish example mentioned in chapter III, for example if part of its failure was due to half-hearted efforts, or if in fact more videos were uploaded, but have since been taken down.
section, and we can only hear her/his voice, since she/he is speaking behind the camera, regardless of the settings. In terms of the latter, a few interviews were carried in a prepared set (against a backdrop of both companies' logos), while others were more informal, standing in a hallway or even outdoors. The people interviewed come from different backgrounds, and hold different stakes in terms of the general topic of this meeting.

Members of two Republican candidates' campaign staff, McCain's and Romney's, considered mobile technology and convergence the future of campaigning. Both focus on technological possibilities, and not social, continuing a top-down, push, approach, even if Mark Soohoo (McCain) claims that “people are becoming a lot more empowered to be involved in the conversation that's out there.” Kevin Madden (Romney) discloses one of their methods “to dominate the market share of information out there:” they countered attacks by tagging with the same words as the opponents used, subverting the advices by Citizentube. In “How to use YouTube for Politics,” Steve suggested common tagging to enable one's video to appear in search results close to similar videos; in this case, tagging aimed to drown out opposing views. As pointed out in chapter II, this shows knowledge of how YouTube works as a technical infrastructure, and how it can be exploited in one's favour, here by manipulating search results.

People from well known news media also attended this meeting. Christopher Hitchens from Vanity Fair has a somewhat negative perspective on new media. He claims the difference brought by technology is the fact that people approach him, not about his latest book or publication, but about a video of him on YouTube (and this is said somewhat derogatorily). Hitchens gives as almost the only advantage the “free factor” of new media. Mark Halperin from The Page, a political blog associated with Time magazine, argues that the increase in velocity was the great change ushered in by new media, and with it came more responsibility, more pressure, as well as less time to check. Halperin declares in his interview: “No human being can do the same quality work, more frequently and faster, it just doesn't compute, so there are some real risks there as well as opportunities.” He believes there were no entirely new trends in the 2008 campaign, just accelerating and multiplying of previous ones: a lot more video, a lot more sites, that built bigger audiences, even if not like television. An aspect of new media Halperin considers unappreciated is their use of old media to widen the audience, and, for him, the ideal future of journalism involves the adoption of the
watchdog ethos by new media.

Mary Katherine, from the *Washington DC Examiner*, created her own YouTube channel, HamNation, motivated by the belief that it was an opportunity to stand out. She claims that not only there were not many people making political videos, but there was a movement towards more video compared to the previous presidential elections: “when you made a viral video in 2004 it was rarely going to go anywhere, because there just wasn't the infrastructure to move it.” Zoe Stagg, from Citizen Sugar, a subsection of a website dedicated to content for women, ages 18-49, argues that politics was sexy again, and that the enthusiasm would continue after the election: it would not be minute-to-minute, and depending on the outcome, people would remember they were involved and continue to be.

No longer as an individual vlogger, but as part of Politico's staff, a political journalism organization based in the USA that distributes its content through various media, Kotecki is interviewed a second time, “like an outsider becoming a little more of an insider,” even if he holds that “the ethos of outsider continues.” Recognising that high ratings does not mean quality content, and that great for business is not equal to good for democracy, James Kotecki admits to want to be watched. As he noted on his first interview and like Halperin argued, he endorses the view that new and old media do not exist nor function in opposition or in a separate way. The Internet was not the role responsible for his fame: it was also getting picked up on mainstream media, which in turn made him more famous on the Internet. It is not necessary to be the most popular person on YouTube, “I sure wasn't, but I did have something to say that the mainstream cared about and that's how I got more on the public eye, so it was a glorious combination of all media.”

Overall, mainstream media do not seem to have been pushed aside, in fact there is a belief that the best results, in terms of visibility at least, are achieved by symbiosis between different new media (blogs and video, for instance) as well as between “old” and “new” media. While explaining his concept of the “YouTube effect,” Naïm claims it suffers the amplification of a double echo chamber that demonstrates such process of symbiosis: “One is produced when content first posted on the Web is re-aired by main-stream TV networks. The second occurs when television moments, even the most fleeting, gain a permanent presence thanks to bloggers or activists who redistribute them through Web sites like YouTube” (Naïm

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19 In December 2009, the link for “Citizen Sugar” redirected to “Très Sugar”, whose tagline was “Smart. Sexy. Fun.”, uniting in the same tab “Sex & Culture.”
2007, 105). Videos of the protests in Iran fit the first example, whereas politicians' mistakes witnessed by news channels correspond to the second.

These interviews display some shared perspectives on YouTube: first and foremost, that YouTube has a role to play in politics; and second, that it is a mainly beneficial role, be it for citizens, giving them a means of interaction with representatives or even a voice, be it for politicians, in terms of more effective campaigning or closer relations with citizens. YouTube is said to allow access to information not previously available, both by offering a different insight into political life, and by helping previously drowned voices to be heard, escaping the monopoly established by only a few. Moreover, YouTube allegedly enables the engagement of those formerly disenfranchised or pushed away from participation in the political debate. For some of the politicians here interviewed, YouTube is an ideal path for engaging the young generation, leading at times to the privilege of light issues and to attempts at bringing humour to political communication.

Online video and political humour

The link between humour and politics was not created by YouTube or the Internet, even if their connection is explored in this context. Humour is part of humanity's history, and satire in particular seems to thrive when it is demanded as a form of expression by both society and individuals (J. Gray, Jones, and Thompson 2009, 15). Still, during the same historical period, or the same discipline, there are multiple understandings on the role of humour. Reflecting the standing discussion on politics and popular culture, humour is seen either as promoter of the status quo or as catalyst of subversion. The former appraisal is one way of reading its characterization as a “safety valve,” that in this sense makes it allowable and even desirable for authorities (Homem 2007; Bremmer and Roodenburg 1999). In the huxleyan warning put forward by Neil Postman, expressing his concern with the redefinition of cultural life as “a perpetual round of entertainment,” which would lead to the death of culture (1985, 161), humour and popular culture can be found as protagonists of such path.

Mass culture or the culture industry – to resort to Horkheimer and Adorno's concept (2000 [1947]) – have been described as responsible for an alienated audience, and as contributing to obedience, subordination and weak political engagement. The television's privilege of iconic symbols over text means a more primitive form of language is preferred.
As the frontiers between image and reality are reduced, image is taken for reality, and as the proximity of television is mistaken for community-building, the growing distance between men is masked (Adorno 2003b [1952-3]). Many authors supported that television and the way it became important in electoral campaigns reinforced and intensified the spectacular side of politics (Woodrow 1991, 126). In this context of “video-politics” (Sartori 2000), information was given the back-seat, while entertainment was privileged. Hallin and Mancini (2004) argue that commercialization has affected a previous emphasis on public affairs content by the European public service, while political content is migrating to more entertainment-oriented forms, a process “with uncertain consequences for the net flow of political ideas and information” (2004, 34).

The opposing position argues that “humor is always at least potentially transgressive [...] Far from being solely light, frivolous, and wholly apolitical, humor is able to deal powerfully with serious issues of power and politics” (J. Gray, Jones, and Thompson 2009, 11). In his analysis of news and the tension between information and entertainment, Fiske critically describes how this distinction carries on it a judgement of value, in which the former are seen as “good”, and the second as “bad:” “information is objective, true, educational, and important, whereas entertainment, by opposition, is subjective, fictional, escapist, trivial, and, frequently, harmful” (1989b, 184). According to this author, these characteristics of information are exactly what makes it distant, made of closed texts, which cannot be popular and do not establish relevance with people's everyday life, contrary to entertainment. In the early twenty-first century, news programs seem to have lost part of their prestige to satire shows:

For those invested in the ideal that a news press should serve the democratic function of informing its citizenry, Jon Stewart’s nightly-broadcast news parody The Daily Show (TDS) offers a touchstone of sanity. The glimpse of a reality more in tune with the experience of many Americans stands in sharp contrast to the otherwise surreal media coverage by “mainstream” media sources (MSM) (Boler and Turpin 2008, 383).

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20 According to authors such as Sartori – responsible for the concept “video-politics” – television not only conditions electoral processes (who are the candidates, how they campaign and even who wins) but the very options made by governments, what they can and cannot do, and what they actually do (2000, 57). Said “video-politics” is said to have changed the structure of parties, even if it did not make them disappear. He characterizes television as an instrument of and for candidates, and no longer for parties, which means there was no more need for strong, thinking parties (2000, 100).
As we have seen in this chapter, humour – satirical humour and parody in particular, but also pop culture and entertainment in general – were commonly referenced in the videos posted on Citizentube. This was the case, for instance, while covering the online video performance of both Republicans and Democrats. One example of how humour is highlighted as a campaign strategy was the praising of Huckabee's endorsement video by Chuck Norris in “You Choose '08 primary review :: Republicans.” It is described as “the most viewed video of any of the candidates uploaded on the YouChoose platform, clocking more than a million and a half views” (once more, success is tied to the presumed size of the audience). “HuckChuckFacts” features Chuck Norris listing Huckabee's campaign arguments, while Huckabee quotes Chuck Norris Facts, an infinity of remarks hyperbolically and god-like characterising Norris that became widely popular on the Internet (and outside it, eventually becoming a merchandising dream and even several books). According to Steve, a heavy and diverse uploading practice, and this kind of video in particular, made Huckabee a great YouTube candidate. This platform is considered “a natural medium for Governor Mike Huckabee. His personal, friendly, style is a good fit for a more intimate medium of online video.” Therefore, despite the technological mediation, there is a suggestion of “closeness,” impossible in other media such as television or newspapers.

In turn, I already mentioned how Senator Mike Gravel was described as “artistic” in “You Choose '08 primary review :: The Democrats.” The video “Mike Gravel – Rock,” created and uploaded by two young art teachers in southern California, aimed to be a metaphor for Gravel's approach to politics: after a minute-long stare at the camera, Gravel throws a rock at a pond and slowly walks away, fading into the trees. Misunderstood, not understood at all, or seen as a jest, the “Rock” became itself a joke, giving rise to several parodies – something that was picked up on Citizentube in the review just mentioned. Responding to clarification requests and given the popularity it reached, Gravel's campaign channel uploaded “Mike Gravel Explains 'The Rock' video.”

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21 Besides this video and a respective blooper's one, Chuck Norris is present in many of Huckabee's videos uploaded on YouTube. But not always as a joke: on a special series of “webisodes on Conversations with Chuck Norris and Mike Huckabee,” the candidate and the actor discuss issues they consider of pivotal importance in a rather serious tone (namely, immigration, taxes, Iraq and faith).

22 It is considered a “meme,” as defined in chapter III and exemplified in chapter VI.

23 In addition to the online attention it gathered, the popularity of this video was linked to it being featured on The Daily Show's “Moment of Zen” (A. Johnson 2007). This was not the only appearance of “Rock” on The Daily Show: it was featured in a segment called “Virtual Hangouts” in which Jon Stewart analysed the candidates' online strategies (Comedy Central 2007). This was brought up in Gravel's video explanation of
The Politics of YouTube

Being the object of a parody on YouTube is seen as a sign of success and popularity: taking the time to parody a video is a display of interest in it, even if mocking is the sole purpose of that action. Being too composed as to avoid “macaca moments” and making videos hard to parody can actually backfire, since they are not able to stir up discussion, are quickly forgotten, and may even be less effective in their communication goals, as journalist Virginia Heffernan points out regarding over-carefully planned videos from Obama: “Yes, the strategy gives parodists no fodder. But it also gives no fodder to anyone. There was nothing to say or do with that debt speech. It offered not even a stuttered word or off-the-cuff joke” (2011). “Whether one approves it or not, fantasy and spectacle have become the lingua franca of our time,” and this is the argument of authors such as Duncombe in favour of re-imagining politics in order to increase its audience (2007, 9). In this case, the left – part of which highly critical of popular culture and entertainment – is exhorted to learn how to “build a politics that embraces the dreams of people and fashions spectacles which give these fantasies form,” how to “manufacture dissent” (2007, 9). Duncombe's wordplay is undoubtedly a reference to Lippmann's (1998 [1922]) “manufacture of consent,” the form of public opinion manipulation that would later be criticised in Herman and Chomsky's (1995 [1988]) book Manufacturing Consent.

In “You Choose '08 primary review :: The Democrats,” it is important to point out how it ended stating the most compelling videos that supported the future President were not uploaded on his channel. Allegedly user-generated videos such as “Vote Different” and “Yes We Can” are object of higher praise, despite candidate Obama's good YouTube practice. In this regard, Steve makes reference to “YouBama,” an online website created by two Stanford University students to be a home for “The Citizen Generated Campaign,” compiling unofficial online videos. “Yes We Can” is in fact the most popular video featured on this website, counting the highest number of votes (May 16, 2011).

With American musician will.i.am as the frontman, and accompanied by several celebrities, this Emmy-winning video remixed the then Senator Obama's speech delivered

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24 Referring to one of the most watched videos on the Internet (actually pre-YouTube, but eventually uploaded to this website), known as the Numa Numa video, Strangelove (2010) claims remixes and parodies have attracted millions of viewers. In his view, “[p]arody is a sign of fame and perhaps a necessary process for the creation of celebrity status and large audiences” (Strangelove 2010, 136).

25 For a comparative analysis on Lippmann, Lasswell and Dewey see (Subtil 2006).
after his narrow defeat in the New Hampshire primary (see figure 20, chapter III). Even if these celebrities are without a doubt citizens and can also be seen as “users” or “YouTubers,” their participation and the fact that this video has two producers (will.i.am himself and Mike Jurkovic), and a director (Jesse Dylan) makes it at least not a product of amateur hands. In his study of the video, Wallsten characterises its unique dynamics and describes its quick rise to fame:

After debuting the video on ABC News-Now’s “What’s the Buzz” on February 1, the video’s producers released the video on YouTube, 24 Dipdive, and a newly created site dedicated exclusively to the video, http://www.yeswecansong.com, early on February 2. Versions of the video quickly spread across YouTube and, within three days, there were over 50 different postings of the video on the site. By the time Obama secured the nomination, the video had been viewed over 20 million times on various Internet sites, inspired a number of widely viewed spoofs, and been awarded an Emmy (Wallsten 2010, 169).

This “supporter-generated” video, in Wallsten's words, is distinct from user-generated in the most common sense of the term, and at the same time it was not the result of an intended action by a campaign. Nevertheless, as in this case, “campaigns can make all of the difference in transforming supporter-generated videos from undiscovered white noise to a viral video phenomenon” (2010, 173).

The instances of remixing political speeches are often not as flattering to the politician as in the case of Obama’s, but the video uploaded almost a year before and that Steve describes as “The first VIRAL VIDEO of the 2008 election” can also hardly be designated as user-generated, at least as opposed to professional content. “Vote Different” is a remix of footage from a speech delivered by Hillary Clinton and from the “1984” Apple commercial, which in turn was inspired by Orwell's homonymous satirical work. The creation of a previously inexisten link manipulates the perception of the target of criticism and changes the goal of the original content, “[t]he visual track, which originally was meant to highlight the liberatory power of the Macintosh is re–coded in the mashup as potential 'voters' listening to the 'doublespeak' of Hillary Clinton in slavish fashion” (Edwards and Tryon 2009). It very quickly became vastly popular, “placing it in the category that we like to call here on YouTube 'oh my gosh that's a lot of views',” as a wide-eyed Steve Grove puts it. The

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26 In chapter VI, I will present a few examples that also illustrate this, pertaining to the history of remix and satire.
respective Citizentube video was uploaded in connection to that day's announcement that the video had been created by Philip de Vellis, an employee of Blue State Digital, an Internet company working for Obama's campaign, with previous experience in online campaigning. Besides the revelation news piece (Huffington 2007), the Huffington Post also presented Vellis' own justification for creating and uploading the video:

I made the "Vote Different" ad because I wanted to express my feelings about the Democratic primary, and because I wanted to show that an individual citizen can affect the process. There are thousands of other people who could have made this ad, and I guarantee that more ads like it--by people of all political persuasions--will follow. This shows that the future of American politics rests in the hands of ordinary citizens (Vellis 2007).

Vellis finishes declaring his video is but one among existing and future “citizen ads,” a sign the political game has changed. To reflect on this, it is necessary to look closely at his description of creating, uploading and promoting the “Vote Different” video: “I made the ad on a Sunday afternoon in my apartment using my personal equipment (a Mac and some software), uploaded it to YouTube, and sent links around to blogs” (2007). While this is probably the method many YouTube users would follow, it can be argued that the proficiency of parkridge47 in editing and spreading his work is arguably more developed than many YouTubers, especially given there was not a great deal of experience to draw from before the 2008 primaries. How does one make a video “go viral?” It is not the result of the action of a sole actor, as pointed out in chapter III. Vellis was able to reach the necessary ensemble of “viral-makers” much easily than the common YouTuber.

It would take three more months until Citizentube declared the rise of a second viral video. Steve describes it with excitement: “the biggest buzz on YouTube this week came from a new user, calling herself “barely political.” She posted a love song to Senator Barack Obama [clips of the video] You have to admit it is a pretty catchy song and it's pretty impressive the second viral video of the 2008 US presidential election yet again comes from an Obama supporter.” The video “Crush on Obama” is a 3-minute long music clip with sexual undertones in which a woman confesses her love for the candidate and future President. Starring a woman, but not made by her. “Barely Political” is not a person and this video is even less amateurish than “Vote Different:” it was created by an advertising executive (Ben Relles), it stars a model and actress (Amber Lee Ettinger), the music includes vocals from a
singer with previous success in making viral videos (Leah Kaufman), it was co-written by a producer (Rick Friedrich), and filmed by directors (Kevin Arbour and Larry Strong). Despite the video being shot in six hours and not commissioned by any campaign, the young people involved in this production already had some professional experience in making videos, including online videos, and successful ones. Aimed to look like a “cheesy R&B video” (as described by Kevin Arbour in the video “Barely Political: Our YouTube Story”), it became extremely famous, the object of extensive coverage from newspapers and television, and even merited a not-so-favourable comment from Barack Obama, concerned about the impact on his children (cited in Falcone 2007). Both the videos just discussed can be regarded as examples of astroturfing on YouTube. However, there is research that claims that “the YouTube audience invariably exposes commercial productions that attempt to pass themselves off as amateur productions” (Strangelove 2010, 64), thereby containing this type of effort. One cannot deny that it did not take long to unmask the two videos mentioned, even if that can be tied to the exposure they suffered. This may prove more difficult to do with videos that receive some attention, but do not attract the attention of Internet users, campaign staff, bloggers and journalists.

Much like James Kotecki admits and even emphasises, Ben Relles' creation benefited from being focused on by traditional media and institutional actors. Relles recounts in his CitizenTube Interview how they had been given credit for Obama's rise by pointing out that Dick Morris, Bill Clinton's campaign advisor, stated this video accomplished more than any of Obama's television ads, and that others had made similar statements. Obama had yet to reach the leading position in the primary race, and as the candidate rose in the polls at the same pace as videos were being uploaded, Relles felt like he was part of that “storyline.” That feeling was the declared reason behind posting “Crush on Obama” in the first place: that it would be fun to participate in the role played by the Internet and YouTube in the 2008 elections cycle, and in political discussion.

Regarding this video's impact, Relles likes to believe his video encouraged others to make their own, by showing videos made in one weekend could have success. The creator of this video claims not to have planned for Obama Girl to turn into a recurrent character, nor inspire so many other “Girls” (Ron Paul or McCain Girls, for instance). The growing trend of political music videos had the strongest effect on him: “part of it is this Internet Culture where
a lot of times when something is big online, a lot of the mash-ups and remixes happen soon thereafter. And people get to participate in the process, which is exciting.”

Recognising political satire has a long history, in respect to humour’s role in politics in general, and in this election in particular, he hesitates in claiming it has had more impact. Rather, he thinks there are differences in new media, namely the fact that “there is a lot of conversation around the content.” Besides comments directly posted on YouTube, Relles notes how blogs and social networking sites “participate in it by posting some of this content and sharing it,” which points towards a “participatory nature of online political satire.” In addition, he believes that this allows issues not usually addressed in mainstream media to emerge “even if it's done in a satirical way.” Reels also states that young people are participating in ways unseen before, due to new tools at their disposal such as YouTube, which generates a sense of belonging to the arena of political discussion.

The role humour, and satire in particular, could play in political communication and engagement was discussed in more than one interview uploaded on Citizentube. Matthew Sheffield participated in one of these interviews. Steve presents him as having “built an extremely popular political channel on YouTube, based on faux news commentary, complete with a cheesy set and, yes, a laugh track.” The ability of this channel to attract a large audience is said to be due to their “self-mocking style, kind of a Republican version of The Daily Show that goes totally over the top,” description which Sheffield refuses. He claims neither their budget is comparable, nor their format is the same. Matt Sheffield attributes their success to their link to a network of blogs, Newsbusted.org. Their aim is “to expose bias in the mainstream media,” believed by them to be liberal. To balance it, Sheffield argues that conservatives should be interested in being comedians and not only political commentators, since for him comedy and news “are not that different.”

In addition to online celebrities responsible for humorous videos, given the relevance humour gained in Citizentube's coverage of the 2008 election cycle, it is not surprising that two professionals behind well-known comedy productions were interviewed: The Daily Show and The Onion. Although they did not start off online, their web presence is very strong: The

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27 False news can be regarded as a new form of critique: “At present, it seems clear that the parody of news, and successful daily news parodies in particular, indicate the ongoing tension, or dialogue, between critique and containment, between, in short, various takes on reality. At most, the widespread popularity of such shows, especially with young people, indicates skepticism about the news proper and the authority it channels and supports” (Druick 2009, 306).
Daily Show, for instance, “is watched as much online as through broadcast, and generates extensive online discussion” (Boler and Turpin 2008, 385). Both interviews were dedicated to the discussion on their influence in political awareness and debate.

The Daily Show is a cable television show created in 1996 by Lizz Winstead and Madeleine Smithberg. It is hosted by Jon Stewart since 1999, who has been frequently compared with the court jester, taking the role of speaking the truth to power (J. P. Jones 2005). According to their own website, “The Daily Show has evolved into the sharpest, most incisive satire of politics and the media on television” (Comedy Central 2011). Winstead's interview focused on the relations between The Daily Show, and “actual” news, as well as between this television program and politics. The Show's co-creator notes the object of their satire is twofold: “it's not just about the news,” the medium and its professionals are also the target of humorous deconstruction. Considering “parody aims to provoke reflection and re-evaluation of how the targeted texts or genre works” (original emphasis, J. Gray, Jones, and Thompson 2009, 18), The Daily Show shares many of the characteristics of a satirical parody, since the target is, firstly, intramural (Hutcheon 2000).28 Stewart assumes the role of a self-deflating satirist and rejects his status as a source of authority; he manages to “appear authentic by denying his authenticity” (Morreale 2009, 116). Studies have revealed The Daily Show to be an information source for young people in the USA, especially on politics, and trusted as such even by journalists (Feldman 2007).

This status as privileged information source does not bother Winstead, given that she believes – unlike what could happen in the case of other entertainment shows – “they're getting correct information” and this search for information displays engagement, “so it's a win-win.” Regarding The Daily Show's impact on politics, she states Jon Stewart's interviews and the exposure of hypocrisy and absurdity in their clips – something satire does so well, as will be discussed in this dissertation's final chapter – entice viewers to learn more about the issues at stake. As a closing question, Steve Grove asks if Lizz Winstead thinks if politics are “sexy” again, to which she replies “politics and personal have never been closer and I think that's why it's sexy, because it's this organic thing that comes from you.”

With a fabricated three-hundred year history (Dikkers 2007) or, more factually, since

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28 The authors draw attention to how parody is related to the state of the particular genre being targeted. The turn of the century's increase in news parody “may be signaling the genre's dire need for innovation and maturing” (J. Gray, Jones, and Thompson 2009, 19).
its early days of dorm publication in the late 1980s, The Onion has grown to multimedia proportion: newspaper, website, books, and, in 2011, cable television programs (Onion 2011). For almost a decade, The Onion has been taken very seriously at least in the economic sense (Keighley 2003), even more so with the leap to television series both in the International Film Channel and Comedy Central, in the latter case airing just before The Daily Show (S. Johnson 2011). It has won awards dedicated strictly to online content, namely several Webbys in Humour, and the South by Southwest “Classic” Interactive award (2011), as well as a Peabody (2008, the same year as YouTube), following The Daily Show and The Colbert Report in the experience of being a satirical winner. The difference between them is that “only Onion News Network [...] does fake news – specifically, fake cable news – so deftly that viewers may find themselves doing a double take” (Peabody Awards 2009).29

Citizentube's Olivia Ma interviewed Baratunde Thurston, Web Editor of The Onion, and, as in the two videos described above, relationship between humour and politics was the main topic of this interaction. For Thurston, humour provides “an alternative perspective on what's really going on,” more accessible than accounts from academy or news professionals. Still, he also admits it may be an escape from reality through laughter, one of the perspectives of the safety valve metaphor mentioned above. Like Relles, he acknowledges satire's long standing tradition and therefore the existence of some continuity of the political role of humour. However, instead of focusing the difference of new media in participatory attributes of the technology, Thurston emphasis is on the real-timeness of interactions. Olivia also asked a reverse question, namely if politics had become “a permanent part of popular culture” with this election cycle, and if in that sense politics had fundamentally changed. Thurston's reply is not that optimistic: he claims there are more players, and “some of these tools keep the conversation alive more,” yet he thinks people will “tune back out” after voting.

Regarding the role of new media in general, he points out the transformation in the agents of dissemination of political messages. Information comes from friends, and not just television, newspapers, campaigns and politicians. As to the The Onion or The Daily Show also being a source of information, Thurston questions this conception. In his perspective, “you can't really get the joke, unless you're already informed,” which is in line with

29 The influences behind this approach to making humour may be traced to authors like Erasmus or Swift, who enjoyed confusing readers as to the seriousness or comedy of their works. This will be further explained in chapter VI.
THE POLITICS OF YOUTUBE

c onsiderations of satire as highly demanding (see chapter VI). Therefore, he argues, young people do not get the news from satirists, rather they receive a possible key for interpreting mainstream news media and their content in a different light. In this sense, his view is close to Sheffield's motives for creating satirical videos, even if he does not assign a specific ideological character to mainstream media content.

Despite the praise present in the interviews analysed in this chapter, not all perceive only positive contributions to political discussion by programs like The Daily Show or The Colbert Report. An article called “The Daily Show Effect” describes empirical proof that this sort of television show has a negative influence with political consequences, affecting in particular the young, who are both the main watchers of the show and the most susceptible to such influence. The Daily Show affects people in the sense that it increases their cynicism towards politics as well as lowers trust in the media and the electoral process, with possible political implications on participation levels (Baumgartner and Morris 2006). Joanne Morreale (2009) disagrees with these conclusions. She argues although cynicism is a possible response to satire, The Daily Show's satiric rhetoric is simultaneously deliberative and epideictic which gives it democratic value: “inquiry and provocation are deliberative tools incorporated into an epideictic form to foster critical thinking and invite evaluation of aspects of the social and political world that might otherwise remain unquestioned” (2009, 107).

Addressing other weaknesses of satiric television shows, Colletta (2009) notes sometimes not even Colbert's guests are fully aware of participating in a parody and that irony is not always achieved. Furthermore, the choice of medium – the television – affects the seriousness of the critique being made; rather, it becomes “one big meta-joke”: meaning is lost, and spectacle takes over. “[I]f it were truly effective satire it would make audiences turn off their television sets,” Colletta contends, “[t]he best satire attacks the mediated reality of television itself and its manipulation of a consumer audience that confuses passive consumption with agency and action” (2009, 868). Nevertheless, this researcher recognises a silver lining since in her view, these satirical shows may not prompt citizens to action, but they may enable the acknowledgement of alternative possibilities. For Boler and Turpin (2008), this complicity with the spectacle, constantly admitted and never hidden, is one of the strengths of this form of critique, “[t]he irony, satire, and parody of The Daily Show and The Colbert Report offer a reality check and also hold appeal through their frank admission of
complicity, which stands in stark contrast to corporate news media’s assumed relationship to 'truths'” (2008, 390).

**Conclusion: Online video as political conversation**

As represented on Citizentube videos, YouTube fosters an informal, unmediated form of communication between politicians and voters as well as among voters themselves, which is especially suited to reach young people. Participating in political conversation is equated with posting videos, video-replying and commenting. “Conversation” is indeed the preferred metaphor to describe online interaction in this context, as alluded to in chapter I, and its presence is not restricted to YouTube: Gmail dubs strings of emails “conversations” and, when signing up, Twitter has asked us to “join the conversation.” Communication theory, especially cultural perspectives, has praised the democratic function of “conversation” (as described in Subtil 2006; Subtil and Garcia 2010). Tarde, in turn, argues “there is a close link between the functioning of conversation and changes in the Opinion, of which depend the vicissitudes of Power” (1989, 120).30 For Tarde (1989 [1893]), private conversations and discussions politically trump the conversations and discussions held in Parliament, “the cafés, the salons, the shops, any place where one talks, are the true factories of power” (1989, 122). Yet, conversations vary a great deal depending on many factors, including the hierarchy among interlocutors. In reality, true equality between them is rare, there is always one that speaks more than the other.

For Coleman and Blumler, “[t]he value of political conversation is its inclusive informality” (2009, 37). Conversations are distinct from institutionalised debates in three aspects: reciprocity, i.e. mutual agreement in entering and the protocols of conversation; equality in the right to speak; and the fact that they are informal, unpremeditated and unbound. In their view, political conversation is complementary to formal deliberation, while the latter's aim is “consensual truth,” the former “is more modestly and informally about making, expressing and sharing common sense” (2009, 36).

In the video “How to use YouTube for Politics,” Steve – standing in front of a projection of Iranian protest videos – declares that “in the past few years we've seen our

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30 The “Opinion” is for Tarde “a temporary group of more or less logical judgements, responding to current problems, that have multiple reproductions in the people of a same country, same time, same society” (1989, 76).
political platform fully take shape as an essential tool in online political campaigning and advocacy in the Internet age,” employing the metaphor so criticised by Gillespie (2010), in three of the four senses identified by the author: computational, figurative, political, and architectural (here absent). YouTube is in fact described by Grove as “the largest town hall for political discussion with citizens, politicians and campaigners, all airing their views on the issues that matter most.” The political relevance and efficacy of user-generated video is greatly over-emphasised, even when discussing examples of clear astroturfing, such as the “macaca moment,” discussed in chapter III, or professional contributions like the “Yes We Can” video. Campaign staffs have a more important role than they are given credit for, not only in the uploading of videos to YouTube, but also in assuring their wide circulation and cross-overs to said traditional media, where they can see their popularity exponentiate, off and online. The relation with corporate media, however, does not end in their function as a fame amplifier.

Companies like CNN still have power over which forms of cultural expression merit the spotlight, and which should be stashed away in a more hidden and closed world of Internet phenomena. The CNN/YouTube Debates offered valuable insights into the relations between mass media, new media, and politics. Although CNN requested user-generated content, it was not willing to relinquish moderation to YouTubers, due to the public's presumed fascination with “inappropriate” questions. By managing the selection process – especially by disregarding YouTuber's opinions while doing it – CNN “protected the mainstream media's historical gatekeeping and agenda-setting functions” and turned YouTube into “an act of corporate ventriloquism,” as described in online media (Jenkins 2006, 277). The “inappropriateness” of some contributions made by YouTubers is described as “participatory culture's power to negate,” or, in other words, “[t]ongue-in-cheek questions about cyborgs and aliens allowed many to thumb their noses at the official gatekeepers and their anticipate dismay at being ‘forced' to put such content onto the public airwaves” (2006, 277).

Despite this filtering of more outrageous contributions, especially in partnerships with news companies and politicians, YouTube's representation of its own political role as an informal venue for political discussion, implies that this “virtual townhall” needs not to be serious or boring, rather its participants are encouraged to have fun. In the review on videos coming from Iraq, an example starring soldiers rapping would be complimented by YouTube's
The Politics of YouTube

News & Politics editor for being “a great look at the life of a soldier in Iraq and though it is a little bit irreverent, it is very honest and very creative, which I like.” Moreover, Steve Grove, while describing videos uploaded on the Super Tuesday channel, he would declare that it was “the most diverse and democratic coverage of the US primary process ever”, featuring rap songs and music videos. Song and music are therefore connected to honesty, diversity and creativity in the individuals' account of their experience. YouTube videos which are unusual and bold – but not too unusual or too bold, and depending on who makes them – are praised. It is through this mix of informality, creativity and fun that “grassroots movements” or “underdogs” in campaigns may aspire to break through a mediascape dominated by the powerful. And to question such dominance and offer an alternative take on political issues, nothing seems to be better than parody and satire. These at the same time ensure the targets of mockery remain in the eyes of the YouTube audience.

Exposing dominant political discourse through critical comment is considered one of the political activities of the online amateurs, and humour plays a part in leading that process to the next step: playfulness contributes to the wider success of mobilisation and to grabbing the attention of the media (Flichy 2010, 58–9). However, humour has a dual ideological status; in specific, all parodic discourse suffers from a central paradox – that “its transgression is always authorized” (Hutcheon 2000, 26), presupposing both law and its violation, repetition and difference, traditionalism and transformation, an ambivalence stemming from being driven by conservative and revolutionary forces. Therefore, it is not surprising that The Daily Show or Internet satires and remixes are regarded simultaneously as promoting engagement and intensifying alienation. This discussion will be resumed in chapter VI, as I address humour and remix in political YouTube videos.
V.

Politicians on YouTube and Politics: Studying EUTube

Participation as a concept has progressively gained more importance and strength in public policies concerning Information Society, e-government and e-democracy. In addition, participation saw its definition change: from inclusion, being able to share the perceived benefits of a connected society, to political engagement, meaning the ability to discuss and influence political decisions. From the link to stronger models of democracy, reminding us of conceptions of “participatory democracy” (B. Barber 1984), Internet policies also turn to “participatory culture” (Jenkins 2006), and user-generated content begins to receive more attention. At the same time, to follow the citizens and mimic their online practices are declared as imperatives in order to improve communication and to extend participation.

It is this path that I will describe in this chapter: the move from concerns with digital divide, to the promotion of e-engagement, from paying attention to online users practices to joining in and sharing those practices with them. It presents the case of the European Commission's YouTube channel – EUTube – as an example of an institutional effort to employ social web applications to improve communication and citizen engagement. Key documents are analysed to understand the strategy behind the launching of EUTube and its development, followed by a study of the channel itself, namely the videos uploaded as well as the interactions with and between users.

In chapter IV, it was demonstrated how YouTube approached politicians to legitimise a role in political discussion. This chapter reverses the perspective while confronting official discourse on resorting to online video for those purposes with the actual practices carried out. Entertainment formats are once again believed to be more effective in reaching citizens.

Communicating Europe in the digital era: The outlining of a political strategy

Following the failed approval of the European constitution in 2005, the need to foster a sense of an European identity – an European “imagined community” – grew stronger. In Benedict Anderson's (1991 [1983]) work the novel and the newspaper “provided the technical
means for 're-presenting’ this community for the nation (B. Anderson 1991, 25). Discussing the conservative objection to European integration based on the fact that “a European people does not exist,” Habermas (2009) states that nation-states do not have the prerogative of being able to foster political identity and solidarity. Nevertheless, “the development of a European-wide political public sphere – that is, of a communicative network extending across national boundaries and specializing in relevant questions – is of central importance for the emergence of such a European identity,” even if it should be a weaker form of identity (2009, 87). In his view, a European public sphere is equally pivotal for enabling citizens to monitor the complexity of European institutions and respective decision-making processes. Their lack of intelligibility, as well as the citizens' inability to have a direct interference over them, is commonly perceived as the “democratic deficit” of the European Union (EU). Although institutional changes have been made to enhance the role of citizens and improve transparency in processes, this perception has not waned, due to its cultural roots (Swaan 2007).

In this century, the Internet became the medium of choice in attempts to establish political identity on a wider scale, namely in the process of preparation of one more step towards European integration. A major issue was the online prevalence of Euroscepticism, as was verified, for example, in the analysis of French websites on the referendum for establishing an European Constitutional Treaty (Fouetillou 2008). However, the relation between a transnational institution like the European Union and new media faces several challenges, namely preconceptions, different philosophies and rules, as well as bureaucratic hurdles.

The European Commission (EC) is an institution invested with technical competencies, therefore responsible for studies, proposals and progress assessment in key policy areas. To understand the changes in how participation is construed and is accordingly promoted in its online version leading up to the alleged rise of Web 2.0, I will give special focus to two policy areas – Information Society and Communication – during the period prior to the launch of EUtube as well as its first appraisals. When applicable, I use the code of the document reviewed to identify it, since it is the form of reference used by the EU.

Marking the transformation of Information Society into a policy focal point,\(^1\) in 1999, the eEurope initiative is launched “to ensure the European Union fully benefits for

\(^1\) Cf. the discussion on the metaphor of information society and its rhetorical construction in chapter I.
generations to come from the changes the Information Society is bringing” (COM [1999] 687, 2), comparing them to the ones induced by the Industrial Revolution. It describes the former as affecting “everyone, everywhere” (COM [1999] 687, 2) and not restricted to technological aspects. There is a strong feeling of both urgency and imperativeness in the text, emphasised by a vivid description of transformations underway – “the most significant,” “far-reaching and global,” “huge potential,” “the central economic and social challenge for the Union,” “it will impact profoundly” – and of the timing – “This is a crucial time and a unique opportunity,” “Such chances are rare. They must be seized” (COM [1999] 687, 2). Such sentiments are also demonstrated in the statement of its overall objective, self-characterised as ambitious: “to bring everyone in Europe - every citizen, every school, every company - online as quickly as possible” (COM [1999] 687, 5).

Despite the description of a wide reach, the economic aspect is a major influence in the growing attention directed to the topic of Information Society: this document makes noteworthy a context of economic growth in the USA, largely attributed to investments in the information technologies sector and their contribute to productivity, while highlighting the need to follow their example and speed the pace towards the digital age. This at a time when the new economy still seemed to promise more opportunities than threats, considering that the dot-com bubble burst only took place the following year.\(^2\) However, the disappointment brought on by such an event was not total, lasting or resulted in the abandonment of the pursuit of political and economic options centred on technology. The emphasis on the key role of ICT in fostering economic growth, productivity and competitiveness is present throughout all the texts analysed, which is consistent with critical sociological analyses (e.g. Golding 2000; Mattelart 2003; Proulx 2008).

The definition of the Lisbon Strategy was the answer of European leaders “to the new challenges presented by globalisation, technological and demographic change” (Vilar 2001, 1), discussed during the European Council held on March 23-24, 2000, in Lisbon. By

\(^2\) While introducing her study of the dynamics of bubbles, Perez claims that “the twenty-first century was inaugurated with claims about the advent of a 'new economy' characterized by the flourishing of both those forces [the information revolution and financial markets] and capable of relentless growth” (2002, xvii). This author explores the notion that such crises that mark the end of a “frenzy phase” are recurrent and natural to capitalism: they are in fact a necessary rite of passage on the path to a possible “golden age,” namely through the institutional adjustment previously lacking. The policies for information society here discussed may be seen as an attempt to reach said “institutional adjustment.”
designating knowledge society one of five key areas of policy,\(^3\) information society concerns gained even more centrality to improve the competitiveness of the European economy, assuming a place at the core of development policies, and moving “from strictly technical or market spheres to the complex world of social and cultural life” (Gago 2001, 10).

Building on preparatory works carried out the previous year, the eEurope initiative was presented at the same European Council which laid the grounds for the Lisbon Strategy. The following June, this initiative was structured for the first time as an Action Plan, a strategy document laying out policy measures for a specific domain. Part of a longer term perspective, this plan intended to be directed towards concrete and feasible actions within the timeframe set. Three main objectives were stated in *eEurope 2002 - An Information Society For All*: a cheaper, faster, secure Internet; investing in people and skills; and stimulate the use of the Internet (CEC and CEU, 2000, 2). Reaching its deadline, this action plan was replaced by *eEurope 2005: An information society for all*, aiming this time “to stimulate secure services, applications and content based on a widely available broadband infrastructure” (COM [2002] 263, 2). Again, it is connected with achieving the main goal of the Lisbon Strategy: for the Union “to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion,” as described in the conclusions of the Lisbon European Council (Rodrigues 2003, 16).

Leaving aside for a moment this economic focus, on the specific issue of government-citizen relations, eEurope includes an action on “government online” in its first communication in 1999. A connection is established between the quality of public information, the relevance of the Internet to everyday life, inclusion and its resulting benefits. One of such benefits is said to be to bring governments closer to citizens: the goal is “to go beyond simply publishing legislation and white papers on the web and establish a discussion and feedback forum possibly with independent moderators” (COM [1999] 687, 16). However, this intent is not reflected in the measures outlined in the action plans that followed, namely

\(^3\) The knowledge society area comprehends “increasing Europe’s attractiveness for researchers and scientists, making R & D a top priority and promoting the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs)” (High Level group 2004). The other four areas were the internal market, the business climate, the labour market, and environmental sustainability. For a more comprehensive account on the promotion of a knowledge-based economy in Europe following the Lisbon strategy orientations see (Rodrigues 2003; Rodrigues 2002).
eEurope 2002 and eEurope 2005.

In eEurope 2002, again one finds the action “Government online: electronic access to public services,” integrated in the objective “stimulate the use of the Internet,” whose aims include to “ensure that citizens have easy access to essential public data, as well as promoting online interaction between citizens and government” (original emphasis, CEC and CEU, 2000, 22). Its successor also has an e-government section, using now the designation which became more and more established. In both these documents, interaction between governments and citizens is almost entirely understood in terms of services, procedures or transactions. It therefore helps to explain the reason for this being the most developed field in the beginning of the twenty-first century, as enunciated in chapter I.

In the 1999 communication, eEurope 2002 and eEurope 2005, participation is used as the opposite of exclusion and in terms of enjoying economic benefits of information society, instead of being connected to citizen engagement. The first document conceives “participation” as “taking part of” or “sharing in” very clearly, as for example in the action “eParticipation for the disabled”: “accessible technologies which address their specific needs enable their participation in social and working life on an equal basis” (COM [1999] 687, 13).

The promotion of participation is hence integrated in e-inclusion strategies, which is arguably the more social side of such economically focused action plans.⁴ As part of “Investing in people and skills,” eEurope 2002 lists a set of actions regarding “Participation for all in the knowledge-based economy.” In addition to a specific reference to people with special needs, it is considered that “efforts will be required to address the problems of those who fail to fully benefit from the information society for various reasons, such as poverty or lack of awareness and training” (CEC and CEU, 2000, 17). These are justified since it is believed that “as government services and important public information become increasingly available on-line, ensuring access to government websites for all citizens becomes as important as ensuring access to public buildings” (CEC and CEU, 2000, 17). Terms such as “access,” “accessibility” and “usability” become common in this context. In the eEurope 2002

⁴ The centrality of economy was already present in the unification process of Europe, as Habermas noted, “[e]ven though the founders of the EU envisaged the ambitious project of a United States of Europe, the process of European unification has in fact taken the sober form of the incremental creation of a common economic zone (with a partly shared currency)” (2009, 80). According to the philosopher and sociologist, this bias is responsible for a top-down approach that turned Europe into a elite project, distant from its citizens, and was unfortunately becoming the main orientation in the drafting of the European constitution, therefore perpetuating such division.
benchmarking report, the inclusion objectives are said to be aligned with the Lisbon strategy, in the sense that two of its essential elements were “to give people the skills to exploit information and communication technologies; and, to ensure that no-one is excluded from the benefits of the information society” (COM [2002] 62, 11).

In eEurope 2005, participation continues to be used in the same sense, as can be read in the following statement: “eEurope 2005 puts users at the centre. It will improve participation, open up opportunities for everyone and enhance skills. eEurope contains measures dedicated to e-inclusion in all action lines” (COM [2002] 263, 3). In addition, it is argued that technological developments “will also provide citizens with more convenient access to information and communication tools” (COM [2002] 263, 2), but not explicitly for political use. As noted, even if present in the communication which launched the eEurope initiative, consultation or the promotion of discussion cease to integrate the “government online” or “e-government” action, and are not included in any other category. In the eEurope action plans there are no references to e-democracy implementation, in fact the term - in all its forms and synonyms - is completely absent in the texts.5

Always taking into account competitiveness goals and oriented by an economic assessment, reports on eEurope action plans were very positive and optimistic. Both in the eEurope benchmarking report of 2002 and the eEurope 2002 final report, it is declared that progress was made, even if all had not been yet accomplished: “eEurope has been strong on bringing citizens and businesses online and establishing a framework within which the knowledge economy can grow” (COM [2003] 66, 4). The next steps to be taken included increasing effective use connected with e-commerce, schools, governments and health, as well as the promotion of broadband. The provision of access to the Internet was considered to be progressing at a quick pace, however, concern was still shown regarding exclusion of certain groups. Comparable statements were present in the midterm review and update of eEurope 2005 (COM [2004] 108, COM [2004] 380).

On e-government matters, the benchmarking report states that there were more and better services available online across Europe, which is considered to bring “benefits to consumers and to governments” (COM [2002] 62, 15). There is a brief mention that “in addition to electronic service provision, there is also the issue of governance.”

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5 For instance, the terms present in the conceptualisations analysed by Harto de Vera (2006).
perspective held is that “eGovernment can only be a tool to achieve more open, more participatory, more accountable, more effective and more coherent governance” (COM [2002] 62, 16). In the eEurope 2005 midterm review it was argued that “ICT is seen as a catalyst for administrative modernisation and service improvement. e-Government is at the core of national policies for the Information Society” (COM [2004] 108, 4). Neither in this document, nor in the resulting update to eEurope 2005, the matters of governance or citizen engagement were addressed as autonomous topics.

It is in the communication Challenges for the European Information Society beyond 2005 that the issue of government-citizen relations, besides strictly administrative procedures, starts to gain importance and becomes the subject of wider discussion: “the use of ICT in this area [public services] aims at improving the quality of the services provided, and at increasing democracy and transparency” (COM [2004] 757, 7). In a document prepared to reflect on the strategic framework on Information Society after eEurope 2005, the transformations are said to surpass the technological aspect. In their own words, “the use of ICT entails new ways of communication and interaction between citizens, businesses and the state, leading to new social and economic structures and new ways of governance” (COM [2004] 757, 6). Even so, “participation” is still used with the same meaning as in previous communications. That is, it is integrated in the field of e-inclusion concerns, which continued to be considered a primary issue, particularly in terms of avoiding the emergence of digital divides.

Also as part of the preparatory work for the strategy to be adopted on Information Society “beyond 2005,” a public consultation was launched, accepting contributions from November 2004 to the beginning of February 2005. Despite this issue being downplayed in the eEurope action plans, the engagement of citizens is considered in the political challenges declared by contributors in this consultation process: “the use of ICT is going to enable citizen-oriented decision-making processes, and therefore, serving to citizen empowerment” (EC 2005, 6).

The new strategic framework is officially proposed through the communication i2010 - A European Information Society for growth and employment, in June 2005. Its relevance is attributed to the increasingly important role of ICT in the economy, their potential to change forms of working, living and interacting, besides constituting a pillar for the renewed Lisbon Strategy. In the beginning of the year, Viviane Reding (2005), European
Commissioner for Information Society and Media (2004-2010), had already presented i2010 with the intent “to build on this opportune wave of technological and economic development” (2005, 2).

Besides the modification of designation, abandoning “eEurope,” this initiative no longer has the format of an action plan. Having a broader scope, it is understood as a “strategic framework,” “laying out broad policy orientations” (COM [2005] 229, 3), distancing itself from a piecemeal approach. As its predecessors, i2010 is a document dedicated mainly to economic issues, despite the presence of a societal agenda, including: guidance on e-accessibility and coverage of broadband (2005); adoption of an Action Plan on e-Government and strategic orientations on ICT-enabled public services (2006); launching of demonstrator projects to test, at an operational scale, technological, legal and organisational solutions to bringing public services on-line (2007); setting-up three ‘quality of life’ ICT flagship initiatives as initial steps (2007); proposal of a European Initiative on e-Inclusion (2008). While the term “participation” is still used in this document as a synonym of inclusion, e-government moves from being an item on a list to an action plan in its own right.

Following the proposal of the i2010 framework, the communication i2010 eGovernment Action Plan: Accelerating eGovernment in Europe for the Benefit of All was presented. Regarding the pertinence of this document and the policies it entails, it is argued that there is a “strong link between national competitiveness, innovation strength and the quality of public administrations,” which “means that in the global economy better government is a competitive must” (COM [2006] 173, 3). In addition, it is believed that new challenges and demands are arising which need specific strategies to be dealt with.

The Action Plan sets five main objectives for 2010, which focus on different areas: inclusion; efficiency and effectiveness; key services, such as e-procurement; key enablers; and, citizen engagement, namely public debate and participation in decision-making. The concerns for the growing distance between citizens and governments are stated: the decline in voter turn-out and the feeling of a increased complexity of decision-making. However, it is said that citizens are more informed and demanding to be involved, while governments are making efforts so that public policies are more supported by citizens. The assumption held is that “better decision-making and more extensive involvement of citizens in all phases of democratic decision-making, including at European level, are critical for the cohesion of
European society” (COM [2006] 173, 10).

The list of actions to be taken by the EC on this aim of the Action Plan included: from 2006 to 2010, “test ICT-based tools that facilitate transparency and public involvement in democratic decision-making. Support exchanges of experience”; in 2006, “launch a preparatory action on ICT-based tools for enhanced parliamentary decision-making”; from 2007 to 2013, “set advanced forms of eDemocracy as a priority of the IST research programme under FP7 [Framework Programme]” (COM [2006] 173, 11). Regarding the latter, e-Democracy is here understood as “the interface between democracy, new technologies, new forms of social organisation and governance” (COM [2006] 173, 10). Even though it is declared that in polling most respondents have positive expectations towards e-Democracy, issues such as inclusion or the quality of decision-making are acknowledged as possibly problematic.

The EC is expected to foster cooperation so that progress in these areas is made, especially in eParticipation. The launch of an eParticipation Preparatory Action had been called for by the European Parliament in 2005. This Preparatory Action was intended to last three years, starting in 2006, and funded 14 projects up to 2008. Other programmes featured and/or funded eParticipation. Besides the Research Framework Programme mentioned in the e-government Action Plan, the eParticipation leaflet notes the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme, through its ICT Policy Support Programme (promoting ICT based services, funds pilot actions, involving public and private organisations), and the eTEN Programme (supporting trans-European e-services, including related to e-government). In addition to sharing case studies in the e-practice website, DEMO-NET – described as a Network of Excellence project funded under FP6 – consolidated European know-how in this area, bringing together researchers studying these issues. The adoption of the designation eParticipation instead of the more common e-democracy was justified by the latter having become too associated with e-voting, making it “no longer an interesting term for those who want to use ICT to improve democratic processes” (J. Rose, Grönlund, and Andersen 2007).

In 2008, the actions led by the Directorate-General Information Society and Media were mainly experiment-driven (with the call for projects dedicated to the use of information and communication technologies for citizen engagement), even though the discussion on e-participation was then more at the centre of EU policies. The third review of i2010 comments
on the progress of this Action Plan, with one particular section dedicated to e-government issues. As reported by it, “for individuals, 30% of Internet users have interacted online with public authorities in one way or another” (COM [2008] 199, 51), a percentage which has been growing faster in the case of businesses. The eParticipation initiative is also addressed and said to focus on how the Internet can play a role to facilitate communication with citizens. Nevertheless, the e-government section is very focused on service availability, overlooking participation in terms of engagement.

The term “e-democracy” only appears in the e-government Action Plan and no reference is made in previous policy orientations for Information Society (eEurope 2002, eEurope2005 and i2010), despite being the focus of prior attention in other areas of work of the Commission. Following the Ministerial eGovernment Conference 2003 and the eGovernment Communication (2003), a seminar was held in 2004 by the e-Government Unit (Information Society Directorate General, European Commission) to review experiments carried out in this field. Its report reflected on the subject of e-democracy in general, focusing then in developments in eVoting and eParticipation.

In addition, the issue of participation in terms of active citizen engagement has long been integrated in the discussions on governance, which gained considerable hype since the beginning of this century. In the White Paper on European governance, participation is considered to be one of the five principles underpinning good governance and the changes here proposed, together with openness, accountability, effectiveness and coherence. “Governance” is defined as the “rules, processes and behaviour that affect the way in which powers are exercised at European level” (COM [2001] 428, 8), especially in terms of the five principles mentioned.

In what concerns participation the document states: “the quality, relevance and

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6 The key actions of i2010 are reviewed annually, in confrontation to the evolution of ICT in the European Union. The first annual report was published on May 19, 2006, and indicates the need of a more vigorous response from the EU to avoid a slowdown in the transition towards knowledge economy (COM [2006 215]. The second report, from March 30, 2007, considers that in 2006 the balance was positive. Main indicators are seen as evolving in the right direction, with ICT remaining to be a central factor in fostering growth and innovation (COM [2007] 146). In these documents the e-Government Action Plan is not mentioned in terms of citizen engagement and the project e-Participation is only indicated in a list. However, public consultations held and to be held are mentioned with some frequency.

7 This event was organised by the Italian presidency of the European Union, in Como. It was the second of a series of Ministerial eGovernment Conferences, which had begun in 2001 under the Belgian Presidency of the European Council, in connection with the eEurope initiative. It was followed by meetings in Manchester (UK presidency, 2005), and in Lisbon (Portuguese Presidency, 2007).
effectiveness of EU policies depend on ensuring wide participation throughout the policy chain – from conception to implementation” (COM [2001] 428, 10). In the White Paper, it is mentioned that “information and communication technologies have an important role” (COM [2001] 428, 11), in a very brief reference. Similarly, and as pointed out before, in the documents referring to the eEurope 2005 Action Plan governance and participation are discussed together, but not as part of an in-depth analysis, nor is their connection thoroughly explained.

Despite the past mismatch in these policy areas, in the field of EU communication, resorting to ICT for the promotion of citizen engagement became common in policies and frameworks. A clear signal is the involvement of the Directorate General for Communication – under the responsibility of Margot Wallström, also Vice-President of the EC (2004-2010) – in fostering the use of the Internet to bring European citizens and EU institutions as well as officials closer together. In the Action Plan to Improve Communicating Europe by the Commission (2005), the Internet is seen as an important medium of communication and the EU website is highly praised, even if with margin for improvement. EUROPA integrated the Commission's first initiatives associated with the Internet: launched in 1995, in Brussels, at a G7 ministerial meeting on information society, in 2001 this website underwent a process of improvement defined in the EUROPA II communication; eEurope and the fulfilment of its “government online” objective are linked to it.

On the aftermath of the failed approval of the European Constitution and given the deterioration of public sentiment towards the EU, a Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate is proposed as a part of a period of reflection and aiming to trigger debate on a wide range of issues, going “beyond institutional questions and the Constitution” (COM [2005] 494, 5). In terms of initiatives, there is a declared intent to promote citizen participation and the Internet is considered to have become “an important opinion-forming forum of debate,” therefore justifying why it is essential for the Commission to “explore the use of every interactive communication medium that can facilitate this debate” on the future of Europe (COM [2005] 494, 10).

The already mentioned Action Plan to Improve Communicating Europe by the Commission pointed in the direction of citizen engagement through online tools. This Action Plan announced that a future White Paper would aim to show how these media could
contribute “to develop a European Public Sphere […] as well as a European narrative” (SEC [2005] 985, 3). Actually, and in the context of discussing interaction with journalists, the matter of which image of Europe is transmitted is considered to be very relevant in the White Paper. To improve it, besides a reference to the EUROPA website, it is indicated that “Europe by Satellite supplies video, sound and images to the media on behalf of the three main EU institutions, and the European Parliament plans to open itself up to the public via web TV” (COM [2006] 35, 8).

The White Paper on a European Communication Policy was presented to launch a consultation process on this domain. One should note that communication is described as “a two-way street” and not merely as the supply of information. The establishment of a connection between communication and the quality of democracy is clear in such statements: “Democracy can flourish only if citizens know what is going on, and are able to participate fully” (COM [2006] 35, 2). According to this document, the communication strategy was lagging behind the transformations affecting the EU, and the distance from citizens was growing. The “sense of alienation” invoked in the White Paper is attributed to “the inadequate development of a ‘European public sphere’” for discussion on the EU, the lack of voice felt by citizens as well as the non-existence of an “obvious forum” for these debates to take place (COM [2006] 35, 4-5). The view is that “a pan-European political culture […] is still developing” (COM [2006] 35, 5). We have seen above how the constitution of a European public sphere is regarded as central in terms of fostering a European identity and to bring EU citizens closer to each other and the institution.

A set of principles is listed as pivotal in communication. Besides the due reference to the right to information and freedom of expression, this White Paper highlights diversity (in social and political backgrounds as well as political views), and separates inclusiveness (in terms of language, channels, access and skills) from participation, which here means the opportunity for dialogue, contrary to the previous conception. In spite of the recognition of face-to-face meetings as important for discussion, ICT are seen as being able to “offer new channels for communication on European issues, new forums for civic debate and new tools for cross-border democracy” (COM [2006] 35, 9). There is still a statement of concern regarding the digital divide, in which are mentioned i2010’s efforts towards addressing it.

With the end of the reflection period in 2007 associated with Plan D for Dialogue,
Democracy and Debate, the latter was assessed to prepare the course of development for 2008 and 2009, a period during which the ratification process would take place and European elections would be held. The appraisal was optimistic, legitimising commitment made in this domain. Concerning e-engagement, it is claimed that Internet debates were held in the “Debate Europe” website, while an estimate of hundreds of thousands of citizens participated in Plan D projects through the Internet. In its conclusions, debate and active citizen engagement are considered to be crucial, for the EU to have public support as well as “to achieve its objectives and deliver the right policies” (COM [2008] 158, 11).

As noted before in this dissertation, elements of the ideal of a direct democracy can be found in many of the arguments asserting the democratic potential of ICT, with the privilege and exaltation of a more active and full role of the citizen. One could consider that there is a drifting apart from visions of more closed distribution of political roles, in which citizens were only entitled to elect their representatives – who were the ones prepared to deal with political issues. Nevertheless, EU communications are careful to distance the view of this organisation from visions of extreme “directism” present particularly in early technology utopias, but still noticeable in some perspectives.

The praise of participation is expressed to a certain extent, since the majority of governmental measures for citizen engagement aim to strengthen representative democracy, and not replace its political and institutional mechanisms. In this perspective, even if augmented, citizen participation is seen as solely complementary to parliamentary decision-making. This standpoint is shared by the OECD documents discussed in the next section, here analysed to show how the discussion on participation and information and communication technologies was being framed in a broader forum, which included but was not restricted to the experience of the member countries of the European Union.

An institutional view on participation: OECD's contribution

After the review of the EU's position, it is pertinent to juxtapose OECD's viewpoint on political participation. This international organisation presents participation as one of three forms of engagement, together with information and consultation. Although these three forms of government-citizen interaction are treated as distinct analytic categories, it is said that they are part of a continuum of growing intensity and can be found combined.
Information is defined as a one-way relation, encompassing both the passive access to it, when solicited by citizens, and active government measures to disseminate information to citizens. Given the diversity of the potential public, it is intended that, whenever possible, the content is clear and simple so that it is understood by all, and not only by those who master public administration jargon or legal terminology.

Consultation in its definition includes a higher degree of citizen intervention, as it is described as a two-way relation in which citizens provide feedback to the government. Yet, the centre of the process is still in the government, considering it establishes the topic of the consultation, determines the questions asked and manages the process. The citizens are merely invited to contribute with their views.

Finally, active participation embodies the idea of a partnership with the government, since it implies active citizen engagement in the definition of the process and content of policy-making. Citizens are therefore seen as equals in setting the agenda, proposing policy options and shaping political debate. The underlying assumption is that governments recognise citizens as able to discuss and generate policy in an independent fashion, and that it is essential that this contribution is present in the final results.

According to the OECD, participation implies a broadening of the role of the citizen with the purpose of creating the opportunity for their maximum contribution, therefore being the most complete form of engagement. Citizens can only express their true thoughts if they can make a wide range of choices, and not only choose from a prearranged set of options. In these documents, active participation “represents a new frontier in government-citizen relations for all OECD Member countries” (OECD 2001, 41), which places demands on government behaviour, but also requires citizens to accept a high degree of responsibility, since participation rights also imply duties.

It becomes evident in *Citizens as Partners: Information, Consultation and Participation in Policy Making* (2001) and *Promise and Problems of E-Democracy. Challenges of Online Citizen Engagement* (2003) that the issue of citizen-government relations has gained prominence in the view of the OECD. These documents present a few case studies and a list of several government initiatives in this field.

The 2001 report, *Citizens as Partners* (prepared by Joanne Caddy in collaboration with Christian Vergez), is based in research and analyses by the Working Group on
Strengthening Government-Citizen Connections of PUMA. It is essentially an initial “mapping exercise.” The 2003 document, *Promise and Problems of E-Democracy: Challenges of Online Citizen Engagement*, (also prepared by Joanne Caddy in collaboration with Christian Vergez), was developed as part of the activities connected with the E-Government Project. The two documents are therefore complementary. *Promise and Problems of E-Democracy* builds on issues raised in *Citizens as Partners*, specifically those concerned with information, consultation and citizen participation, while doing a more in-depth analysis of the application of ICT to this field. *Promise and Problems*, despite presenting a comparative review of current practice by Professor Ann Macintosh, responsible for several reports on e-democracy, also includes a more theoretical and critical reflection by Professor Stephen Coleman, a respected academic in the field of citizen engagement and ICT, whose work has been cited in previous chapters.⁸

*Citizens as Partners* notes that citizens and civil society organisations have gained a leading role in terms of intervention, protest and the adoption of new tools to promote their ideas, not only on a national level, but also aiming to influence international policy-making. It is stated that these interactions “represent only the tip of the iceberg in the wider sphere of government-citizen relations” (OECD 2001, 20), mentioning the increasing importance of the role of citizens in contributing to decision-making, future policy-making and the delivery of key services. As this relationship becomes more mature, governments become more aware of their dependence of citizen active contributions to make better decisions and achieve policy goals. In the following document, Coleman also notes a series of changes and “unmissable signs” of the need to modernise “politics as usual,” besides the growing will of the public “for seeing, listening to and trusting itself” (OECD 2003, 148-9). Nonetheless, the researcher also argues that strategies for the modernisation of governance and information society were mutually blind in their early stages of development. Such statement is in line with the recognition of governance and ICT as separate EU policy areas.

According to these documents, the challenges of governance require the mobilisation of all resources in society, and not just governmental, in a process of strengthening representative democracy. Citizen engagement thus appears as a means to react to contemporary pressures and turbulence. This investment in government-citizen relations

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⁸ In 2011, these researchers were co-directors of the Centre for Digital Citizenship, based in the Institute of Communications Studies at the University of Leeds.
would lead to more transparency in policy-making and more accountability through public scrutiny and monitoring, resulting in increased legitimacy of the decision-making processes.

Furthermore, higher levels of implementation and compliance are expected, given the existence of more public awareness concerning policies and participation in their design. Therefore, it is argued that governments are more convinced that the efficacy and success of public policies depend on the understanding and support of citizens, regardless of their quality. When citizens are not involved in the policy-making process and see their role restricted to voting in periodical elections, their relation with democracy is said to be so weak that the latter “becomes symbolic rather than participatory” and politics “largely managerial” (OECD 2003, 147-8).

In terms of involving citizens, the expression “e-engagement” is frequently used, meaning “the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in supporting information, consultation and participation” (OECD 2003, 20). Therefore, it is considered that the three types of engagement may be intensified by resorting to new technologies. Diverse methods and tools are used to allow the achievement of more specific objectives. These range from reaching a wider audience (using technologies adapted to the different competency levels of citizens), supplying relevant information and improving consultation opportunities, to the subsequent analysis of contributions, feedback to citizens, as well as monitoring and evaluating the initiatives (OECD 2003, 33).

In spite of this positive take on e-engagement, one finds that in 2001 e-government more than e-democracy actions could be observed in all OECD countries in general, as stated regarding EU nations in particular and in the studies mentioned in chapter I. As far as the use of ICT for advanced forms of citizen engagement is concerned, even if it is possible to perceive the intent to encourage online public consultation, according to Citizens as Partners it was not a clear common goal in e-democracy policies. There was neither coherence nor integration in the different policies and practices in this area and, comparing to the online supply of information, consultation initiatives were much fewer and often experimental. Regarding active participation, at the time the experience of OECD governments was extremely limited.

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*In addition, the most important consultation initiatives concerned new technologies and telecommunications, possibly since both officials and citizens interested in this domain were more easily motivated to develop and take part in such actions.*
The Politics of YouTube

In *Promise and Problems of E-Democracy*, one of the specific challenges of online consultation resides in “its in-built self-selection of those participants who already have access to new ICTs – thereby raising the risk of over-representation of a small cross-section of the population” (OCDE 2003, 16). It is taken into consideration that an active minority may acquire power to influence decision and policy-making greater than its representativeness within citizens in general.

Both documents note a higher frequency of projects at the local level: citizens appear to become more involved when they perceive a more direct impact on their daily lives. It can be inferred, in contrast, that there may exist more obstacles to national governments with consultation and public participation projects, even if some parliaments had already made some experiences in those fields. Following that reasoning, the promotion of consultation and participation at the EU level would have to overcome even more difficult challenges.

Coleman argues that there has been a growing awareness of politicians of the benefits that may be drawn from a more direct relation with citizens. According to this author, these would include an improvement in the policy-making process (more informed with the contributions of citizens), a new kind of relation between government and citizens (in which citizens listen, learn and share ideas), with the final reward of an increase in public trust in democratic institutions and in governance legitimacy. The praising of the virtues and possibilities of information technologies is not merely a practice of individual governments of OECD countries: it is the very position of the organisation in its E-government project by stating that technologies have a great potential for the adoption of good governance practices. There is a measure of confirmation of this belief in the 2003 report, when it is argued that all indications point to an increase in online engagement, though there is not, methodologically speaking, a defined set of recommendations on how to foster information, consultation and citizen participation through technological tools.

Although there is a generically optimistic view on resorting to new technologies to engage citizens, and even a sense of some inevitability, in these documents there is some apprehensiveness, in particular in what concerns the limits of ICT in promoting democracy and the challenges they may entail, many in line with the criticism enunciated in chapter I. There is an acknowledgement that there are many unsolved issues concerning how to harness the said potential of ICT to engage citizens and that, in turn, their use poses a new set of
questions to governments. In addition, there is an understanding that existing barriers to participation are not technological, but cultural, organisational and institutional. Consequently, a true articulation with traditional, offline, forms of engagement is considered to be essential as well as an adaptation to the culture, tradition and objectives of the different institutions and countries, in order to achieve the best possible outcome in the effort of engaging citizens. Furthermore, all involved have to be capacitated for such activities – on the government side, including civil servants, but also the population in general.

In terms of expected roles, civil servants are described as having more restricted action, which should have clearly established frontiers. Elected representatives, on the other hand, are said to be expected to participate more freely, stating their claims without restrictions. However, they voiced complaints with respect to the demands posed by participation, particularly in terms of time, besides a perceived lack of actual benefits of such involvement. Contrary to utopian views, mediation is seen as necessary so that the intervention of representatives is made easier, namely through the creation of trustworthy summaries of the contribution of the public.

As pointed out, participation also requires commitment from citizens, a stipulation also applicable to participation resorting to ICT. It is a position shared by the United Nations (UN) in stating that “E-participation is the sum total of both the government programs to encourage participation from the citizen and the willingness of the citizen to do so. It encompasses both the demand and the supply side” (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UN 2005, 19). The UN has established an “E-participation Index” that “assesses the quality and usefulness of information and services provided by a country for the purpose of engaging its citizens in public policy through information and communication technologies” (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UN 2008, 17). The survey just cited was not particularly optimistic in this regard, as the results were neither good, nor promising: in 2008, the index indicated slow improvement and that a significant percentage of the countries (82%) still remained in the lowest category of e-participation utilisation (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UN 2008, 60).

In light of the above, even if hopes are placed in new forms of citizen engagement – meaning through the use of ICT – in Citizens as Partners and Promise and Problems of E-Democracy they are not seen as a replacement for their predecessors. The aim is to have
complementariness between engagement options and that is essential to assure that being online is not a necessary condition to have access to services and to participation.

“Technology is an enabler not the solution” (OCDE 2003, 9). This statement implies a wider perspective on the issues surrounding citizen participation: in Promise and Problems of E-Democracy it is considered that one cannot speak of citizen engagement with resort to new technologies without discussing democratic engagement in general. And if the solutions seem not to be purely technological, Coleman also defends that the driving forces behind political transformations in the beginning of the twenty-first century were not linked to the emergence of digital technology. This author considers to be imperative a convergence of the debates on the future of democratic institutions and on electronic democracy, blaming the mutual disregard of developments in each domain for the failure of some experiences in the past.

Coleman finishes his reflection in Promise and Problems of E-Democracy with the following, a perspective that suffered little change in his later work (see chapter I):

Beyond the rhetorical discourse of metaphor, hyperbole and disconnected futurology, there is scope for a radical policy agenda in the sphere of e-democracy. E-democracy should not be conceived as a panacea for all the flaws of political democracy and social communication. But it does hold out hope of contributing to the development of two incomplete historical projects: the Internet and democracy (OECD 2003, 160).

After these overviews of each institution's take on e-engagement and e-democracy, I shall now address both their positions on the “participative web” or “web 2.0” – their preferred terms for what I have mainly designated as the social web – with a special focus on user-generated or user-created content.

Web 2.0: A new ground for institutional actors?

For the United Nations, “[t]he Internet is transformative because it allows anyone to be a publisher” (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UN, 2010, 84), causing profound changes in power relationships in the public sphere, bringing new possibilities to both politicians and citizens, and promoting its richness and diversity. Web 2.0 in particular is praised as allowing citizens to have direct impact on the action of governments. In turn, Participative Web and User-Created Content. Web 2.0, Wikis and Social Networking argues
that “the use of the Internet is characterised by increased participation and interaction of users to create, express themselves and communicate,” in brief, it is becoming a “participative web” (OECD 2007, 17). This conception also implies an empowerment of users, as they are enabled to develop, rate, collaborate and distribute Internet content as well as customise Internet applications.

User-generated content or, as it is here designated, user-created content (UCC), “comprises various forms of media and creative works (written, audio, visual, and combined) created by Internet and technology users” (OECD 2007, 17). Even if there is not a closed definition of UCC, the selection is based on three criteria: online availability, creativity and amateurism. This report lists the following types of content: text, fiction and poetry; photos and images; music and audio; citizen journalism; educational content; mobile content (i.e. created on mobile phones); virtual content (part of an online virtual environment, such as virtual worlds); as well as video and film (OECD 2007, 32).

In this document it is argued that users create content without expecting financial gains from it; rather, their motivation comes from factors such as connecting with peers, self-expression, and the promise of fame, notoriety or prestige. Since money does not a play a role in these exchanges, they are part of a “sharing economy” (see Lessig 2008). Still, this financially unambitious ethos of the user has been challenged, in particular regarding YouTube, as pointed out before in this dissertation. Moreover, the lack of ambition towards profit does not extend at all to the owners of the websites where the content is posted or uploaded.

As noted in chapter I, the report recognises that media and Internet businesses are led by commercial intent while buying more and more UCC platforms (OECD 2007, 18), operating within a “hybrid economy,” once more following Lessig's (2008) definition. This process of monetisation of UCC has been a growing trend, and some models also include paying users for their creations. In terms of economic impacts, Participative Web and User-created Content recognises that such practices may negatively affect professionals, having to face the competition of amateurs, and publishers and broadcasters, who are forced to deal with the use of unauthorised content. Regarding the former, the criticism levelled by Andrew Keen (2007) in his The Cult of the Amateur represents one the best well-known published
works listing the threats posed by the “amateur” to the professional and to culture itself.  

As to the effects of copyright violations, one should note the widespread use of “piracy” as a metaphor, as part of “a moralising discourse that aims to raise awareness among users of the economic risks suffered by the industries of music, publishing and cinema” (Proulx and Goldenberg 2010, 506). It has been argued that “piracy” has become as widespread as the result of a “global pricing problem,” meaning “[h]igh prices for media goods, low incomes, and cheap digital technologies are the main ingredients of global media piracy” (Karaganis 2011, i). “Piracy” encompasses a lot more practices than it did before, when it mainly meant the sale of counterfeit copies. In the new millennium, “any behavior that could potentially cause the same effect as piracy, even if it doesn’t, must also be piracy. Because an unauthorized digital copy of something could be uploaded to the Internet, where it could be downloaded by two million people, even making the digital copy is piracy” (original emphasis, Litman 2006, 129). A common argument against the accusations of piracy regarding digital content is that, contrary to tangible goods, non-tangible goods are non-exclusive and non-rival and hence should not be considered under the same rules of “property.” From this standpoint, information is part of a regime of abundance, instead of scarcity, and the main question is one of recognition of authorship, and not of ownership (A. M. Rosa 2007).

Following a more positive stance, the study carried out by the OECD draws from leading thinkers in the area to focus on the lowering of entry barriers to creation, the decline of distribution and user costs, and an increase in diversity. As a result, passiveness in media receptions seems to risk being pushed aside by a more active user, with a possible “shift to a participatory 'culture’” (OECD 2007, 64) and a transformation in the information and media environment. A direct connection is established between democratisation of media production and improvements in democracy itself: “as users raise questions and enquire, and

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10 At the time of its launch, the arguments Keen puts forward in his book merited a scathing review by Lessig (2007) in his blog.

11 Supported by advocacy associations with ties to technology companies, a recent report on the state of the entertainment industry claims that “for all the reports that people just want stuff for free, and are not willing to spend on entertainment, the actual data shows that they’re spending noticeably more on entertainment today than they did ten years ago” (Masnick and Ho 2012, 2), in fact, “absolutely nowhere is there any suggestion that the overall entertainment industry is at risk” (Masnick and Ho 2012, 4).

12 References are made to authors who have been very active in this debate such as Benkler, Lessig and Fisher as well as to previous work done by this organisation. Henry Jenkins is not mentioned, despite being widely cited for his study of what he termed the “emergence of new forms of participatory culture” (2006, 269).
as new decentralised approaches to content creation are adopted, the political debate, transparency and also certain 'watchdog' functions may be enhanced” (OECD 2007, 65). One of such examples is the rise of citizen journalism, but also “blogs, social networking sites and virtual worlds can be used for engaging electors, exchanging views, provoking debate and sharing information on societal and political questions” (OECD 2007, 12). In addition, it is advocated that this participation “associated with egalitarian cultural development” may cause a feeling of identification among users, contributing to fight alienation in society – a sentiment identified in the European White Paper on communication. Politicians have also started to use these “tools” – as they are designated – in campaigning and governments are seen as having a role in the promotion of online discussion with the purpose of interacting with citizens, besides their condition of producers and users of content.13

Other positive influences of creating and using UCC are mentioned: its contribution to the enhancement of skills, not only ICT related, but also artistic and informational; the fact that “participation in blogs, citizen journalism, critical videos concerning public events or politics and confrontation of different opinions may arouse critical minds and interest in debate” (OECD 2007, 68). Some social and legal challenges are nevertheless acknowledged. Social and cultural fragmentation are feared, namely the increase in individualisation and decrease in shared cultural and national values. Other issues range from concerns with information accuracy and content quality, copyright infringement, privacy issues, safety, to possible adverse impacts of intensive Internet use, some similar to the criticism presented in chapter I. Even so, it is believed that these concerns do not imply a need for a strong control of the Internet, quite the opposite. A balanced approach is required so that “openness and the decentralised nature of the Internet” (OECD 2007, 90) is preserved. In a possible synthesis of the perspective outlined above:

The Internet can be seen as an open platform enriching the diversity of opinions (including product reviews), various political and societal debates, the free flow of information and freedom of expression. UCC is in many ways a form of personal expression, and user/creators are engaging in a form of democracy where they can directly publish and enable access to their opinions, knowledge and experience (OECD 2007, 90).

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13 In the previous chapters it was already mentioned how social software and social networks started being used in campaigning, particularly in the USA. Similarly to the views presented in Citizentube, in this document the OECD also singles out the young vote as one of the main reasons for the investment in new media.
As we have seen in chapter I, these concerns are more timely than ever: the Internet has been losing a great deal of its openness for technological, cultural, political, and economic reasons – and governments have also been behind plugging practices, including democratic ones.

Despite this unfortunate turn to censorship in some countries, “a growing global trend towards listening to citizen’s voices and engaging their participation” is being witnessed, and as part of it “governments are now creating portals on social networking sites in order to reach out to citizens and promote their programmes, messages and policies” (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UN 2010, 84–5). Discussing the relationship between media and democracy, Gunther and Mughan (2000) had noted that “everywhere, in both democratic and nondemocratic systems, politicians have become increasingly aware of the growing importance of the media (especially television) and have sought to adapt its use to their varying political purposes” (2000, 403). In the first decade of the twenty-first century, politicians and political institutions have not remained completely on the sidelines of yet another change taking place in the mediascape. OECD notes how in countries like South Korea blogging and social networking had already become central in engaging the electorate (OECD 2007, 66).14

As discussed above, the European Union, in particular through its bodies the European Commission and the European Parliament, has followed suit in this regard. In 2007, Communicating Europe in Partnership builds on previous findings and orientations. Declaring that “the consultation process on the White Paper has confirmed strong demand from civil society actors for closer involvement in the European process” (COM [2007] 568, 8), it advocates the said needed development of a European Public Sphere with “cross-border communication channels promoting debate and dialogue on issues of common concern while reflecting the European agenda” (COM [2007] 568, 9). A “cross-media publishing policy” is suggested, while new technologies assume an important position in communication policies. In terms of the latter and in their own words: “the Internet is the main medium for combining text, sound and vision and for enabling feedback from and discussion among users,” while being “already the principal medium of cross-border debate” (COM [2007] 568, 11).

In this respect, two courses of action are indicated. On the one hand, transformations

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14 As we have seen on chapter III, South Korea experience with social web campaigning did not live up to its expectations in the elections that followed.
on the EUROPA website, which include “increasing interactivity and improving navigation and search functions,” organising web content following orientations concerned with accessibility and user-friendliness, and also increasing the supply of images, video and audio material (COM [2007] 568, 11). On the other hand, outside the EUROPA website, “supporting websites that devote particular attention to European affairs and stimulate debate on EU policy issues” and being “more involved in interviews and participation in discussions in other sites” (COM [2007] 568, 12).

The communication Communicating about Europe via the Internet. Engaging the citizens, released in the end of 2007, defines these initiatives as well as the framework for a new Internet strategy, stating that the Commission should “embrace the Internet culture and online communication opportunities” (SEC [2007] 1742, 3). This is supported by the assumption that “the Internet has become an increasingly important method of communication and exchange of ideas,” going even further by declaring that “the potential for reaching the public through the Internet is almost limitless” (SEC [2007] 1742, 3).

In respect to Web 2.0, the same view is held, linking being static and falling behind, in opposition to interactivity and participation to success. In the political domain, “governments are beginning to engage in real two-way communication on the Internet as a more direct form of democracy,” especially at the local level (SEC [2007] 1742, 4). On the contrary, not participating in the online debate carries its costs: “the absence of the 'establishment' in the Internet debate may have contributed to the 'no' vote” in the French referendum on the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe in 2005 (SEC [2007] 1742, 5). Moreover, it refers changes affecting bottom-up participation, since it considers the Internet “a powerful means of enabling citizens and interested groups to disseminate information and views, spread awareness, organise action and put pressure on decision-makers” (SEC [2007] 1742, 4), and mentions the increase in “citizen-journalists.”

The challenge announced in it concerned the two fields described in Communicating Europe in Partnership: actions related to EUROPA and outside its limits. Regarding the former, its weaknesses are pointed out, including its lack of recognition, interactivity and navigation simplicity. This third characteristic is attributed to the existing volume of documents, organisation of the information in a logic apart from the interests of the citizens and the great number of sites and sub-sites, “without clear editorial consistency or ‘corporate’
identity” (SEC [2007] 1742, 7). Therefore, a need is felt to “restructure and improve EUROPA” (SEC [2007] 1742, 6), namely in order to increase its traffic levels and become a reference for information as well as participation on EU issues.

Still, discussion on Europe is not limited to the confines of an institutional website. In these efforts to reach and engage new audience, one can find the establishment of the online discussion forum Debate Europe, the creation of blogs by Commissioners and Heads of Commission Representations as well as of EUTube, the EU channel on YouTube. The potential of wikis is also put under consideration, not only for webpages, but even at the beginning of discussion on policies. The second set of actions aims to overcome the fact that the Commission “is comparatively [to offline] absent from the online environment, its online activities being largely limited to the EUROPA website” (SEC [2007] 1742, 12). The identification of where debate on the EU is taking place, linking to it and monitoring its development are some of the proposals made.

A noteworthy change described in this strategy consisted in the fact that online participation became included in the authorisation given by the Commission for “staff to speak in public on professional matters,” namely “to explain EU policies and help rectify mistakes, and to redress negative publicity or speculation surrounding the EU and its activities (with relevant disclaimers)” (SEC [2007] 1742, 13). It is considered this implies an investment in training in Internet communication skills. Besides competency requirements, other concerns may arise, including the demands it would inevitably impose on the EU staff, as discussed above when this issue was addressed in OECD's approach on e-democracy.

Concerning both fields, EUROPA and outside EUROPA, this document ends with a statement that highlights the need for investment to achieve proposed goals: “all these actions to produce attractive content and keeping up with the latest state-of-the-art technology requires a further need to shift available communications resources to content development, the availability of collective Internet tools and appropriate training on Internet communication” (SEC [2007] 1742, 15).

In terms of concerns, these are downplayed in most of the documents analysed. There is no mention of possible challenges, such as privacy, security or legal issues, except in the i2010 reviews. In the Internet strategy communication, the only reference made is to the matter of content quality, stating that there is a need for some sort of regulation. Nevertheless,
even this is seen as solvable by itself, drawing from its “collective intelligence:” “the more people use a particular website, the more it is scrutinised, allowing for corrections and improvements, and the more popular it becomes” (SEC [2007] 1742, 4).

The belief in citizen empowerment through Web 2.0 applications is also present in Information Society policies. The eGovernment Action Plan states “ICT has great potential to involve large numbers of citizens in public debate and decision-making, from municipal to European level” (COM [2006] 173, 10). In this respect, the document points out the existence of “new forms of political expression and public debate such as blogs” (COM [2006] 173, 10), made possible through the Internet. In the 2007 review of i2010, it is declared that wider broadband adoption has had consequences as to the development of “innovative advanced services.” Music, movie distribution and online TV are areas that supposedly illustrate that the content market is under transformation.

In their analysis of future trends, they include, among others, web 2.0, social networking and user-created content. All part of “a new wave of innovation in networks and Internet,” it is said that “they will also extend the role of users as innovators” (COM [2007] 146, 9). According to this report “the traditional vision of the users will change in the information society” and the user is given a centrality of the utmost importance. Making an analogy with open source software and how it led to the development of collaborative processes, users are allegedly “using ICT to create and exchange their own content in innovative ways” (COM [2007] 146, 10). However, this review also points to a few challenges and possible “obstacles to the development of information society” (COM [2007] 146, 9): the fact that these “advanced services” require an investment in higher bandwidth, as well as issues such as net neutrality pricing, security and privacy. Inclusion continues to be a central concern, with the policies dedicated to it still seen as pertinent.

The following analysis of i2010 progress – Preparing Europe’s digital future i2010 Mid-Term Review – has a very positive outlook. Despite country variations in pace and remaining issues in respect to inclusion, it is claimed that Internet use has become regular for half the Europeans, almost all of which benefit from broadband. Which is not to say that in one year all issues with respect to inclusion were solved: “there remain large disparities in Internet use and digital literacy between the overall EU population and the various disadvantaged groups” (COM [2008] 199, 48).
“Internet use” is here considered to be a complex term and encompasses different types of practices. Although, once more, challenges are expected, namely in respect to content quality, information accuracy, privacy, protection of minors and the tension between profit-seekers and unauthorised use of content, the description bears many promises. The emphasis is again put on the possibilities offered by the prominence gained by users in communication processes and a connection is established between the rise of social networking and participation. The rapid take-up of user-created content is said to confirm “the Internet as a medium of two-way communication,” noting an 18% increase from 2006 to 2007 in participation in online forums (COM [2008] 199, 36). The list of content types is very comprehensive: it starts with video, followed by “books, photos and music to blogging on social network sites, social bookmarking, micro-blogging and product reviewing” (COM [2008] 199, 36), an enumeration similar to the one presented by the OECD in the 2007 report.

According to the mid-term review, this development is fostered by social networks both supported by advertising or with shared-revenue, “while at the same time further blurring the lines between private communication and publishing, between income generating activities and creative hobbies” (COM [2008] 199, 36). The EC itself aims to foster the distribution of a wide range of online content, not only through the Internet, but also through other technologies. At that time, there was not an official measurement of participation in social networks, however there were some estimates: these studies seemed to point to significant percentages, even if email and search practices continue to lead. Interestingly, a distinction is made between “usage” and “contribution,” and even if there were promising statistics referring to the latter (e.g. in terms of photo uploading), the former exceeds it still noticeably.

The numbers made available by the Eurostat referring to 2008 show in fact a very diverse Europe when it comes to uploading user-created content, as can be seen in figure 33:15

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15 According to its own website: “Eurostat is the statistical office of the European Union situated in Luxembourg. Its task is to provide the European Union with statistics at European level that enable comparisons between countries and regions” (Eurostat, 2011). The data are collected by national institutions following an European survey model. Besides the 27 countries of the European Union, the information on Norway, Iceland and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is also featured above.
Figure 33: Percentage of individuals aged 16-74 using the Internet for uploading self-created content to any website to be shared, in 2008. This map has been created automatically by Eurostat software according to the author's specifications for which Eurostat is not responsible.

Age, occupation and level of formal education have great weight in characterising the disparity in the countries' profiles of regular use of the Internet, which reveals a more general digital divide seems still to be very real (P. D. da Silva 2011). Despite this variation among EU countries, the European Commission places strong expectations on Web 2.0, for its capacity to foster creativity, its potential for economic gains, and also as a tool to promote political discussion that is horizontal, plural and in which citizens have greater power and initiative.

Going through the official statements here studied, the main challenge found does regard inclusion and the emergence of a digital divide, embodying the concerns as to a new form of segmentation that may lead to the exclusion of groups from the perceived benefits of information society – in particular, citizens already socially disadvantaged. It is often feared that this would also lead to the domination of political discussion by a minority with more developed skills for participation. Except for this aspect and some prudence in reviews, the EU presents an almost completely positive view on ICT use in action plans, strategies and policy frameworks, unlike other organisations such as the OECD that displays in its studies
more attentiveness to problematic issues (as can be seen in the very title of *Promise and Problems of E-Democracy: Challenges of Online Citizen Engagement*, 2003).

To sum up, information and communication technologies, in particular the Internet and more recently the social web (blogs, wikis, social networks and other content sharing platforms), are perceived by the EU as useful resources that should – or even have to – be employed in citizen engagement, although they are not regarded as a panacea for improving participation (an expression present in EU documents). Inclusion is the main concern, while other issues are not featured in the main defining documents, even if included in progress reports. This standpoint frames a very favourable institutional context for all online projects directed at fostering political discussion or involving citizens, at least in terms of official discourse, which will reflect on some aspects of the case here discussed.

**EUtube as a case study**

As was described above, besides the changes done in the Europa website, the European Commission, through Directorate General for Communication, decided it was also important to follow the citizens to where the discussion was supposedly taking place. And this meant going to the popular video platform YouTube.\(^{16}\)

According to *Participative web*, “more than 50 000 videos are uploaded every day,” some of which become viral (OECD 2007, 24).\(^ {17}\) Despite the existence of a dispersion of producers, these concentrate in only a few highly popular websites, as those dedicated to online video or social networking. As we have seen, YouTube is the leader in online video and is highly integrated in other websites (through the possibility of embedding its videos), even if it does not use its own social networking capabilities to the fullest.

As discussed in chapter III regarding politics on YouTube, since 2007, and unable to ignore the growing importance of online video, parliaments, presidents, prime-ministers, parties, mayors, supreme courts, royal houses, all joined the youtubing ranks. As before with websites, politicians, governments and institutions did indeed realize that to have a YouTube

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\(^{16}\) The general bet on audiovisual is not recent for the European Comission. In addition to online initiatives, the *Action Plan to Improve Communication Europe by the Commission (2005)* points to the importance of better exploring audiovisual media, also establishing a set of actions in this regard. *Communication Europe through audiovisual media* would be released in 2008, describing the specific strategy for this sector.

\(^{17}\) Despite these figures and the emphasis on “popularity,” the fact is that a significant percentage of videos seen is not made for strangers, quite the opposite, they are intended for one's family or close relations, as described by ethnographic studies of YouTube at the time (Wesch 2008).
channel had its benefits, as an unfiltered (by media professionals) way to publish information, as a tool for interaction, or simply because it is good public relations. Still, as with early websites, the portrait is not entirely positive. When government bodies first started going online, almost all websites were upgraded versions of the common institutional brochure; in respect to personal websites of members of parliament, studies indicated that the Internet was being used in suboptimal ways, meaning that the then new opportunities for communication were not being fully embraced (Zittel 2004). Similarly, by the end of the first decade of 2000, politicians and governments’ channels often resembled an archive for television-made material, using YouTube mainly for broadcasting purposes. I shall now discuss the case of EUTube (whose homepage can be seen in figure 34), bearing in mind this overall context and comparing it with other examples in Europe.

![YouTube screenshot](image-url)

Source: YouTube

*Figure 34: EUTube channel page. Screenshot taken on February 19, 2009.*

In October 2007, Commissioner Margot Wallström applauded the success of the English version of the EU Tube channel, launched on YouTube on June 29, 2007 (European Commission, 2007). According to this press release of the EC, it had “received over one million hits on its homepage and almost seven million video views since its launch.” The French and German channels were launched on the same year. The praising continued in official documents: “The recent creation of the dedicated EUTube channel on YouTube has
been a first, and successful, step in giving the Commission a higher profile in the Internet environment. EUTube has successfully reached out to a new audience and stimulated lively debate on the EU and the Commission's policies and activities” (SEC (2007)1742, 12).

In June 2009, the three versions of the channel corresponding to the EU's working languages were active, EUTube in English, with the tagline “Sharing the sights and sounds of Europe,” in French, “Une communauté de sons et d’images,” and in German, “Europa erleben in Bild und Ton.” In contrast, the EUROPA website has followed a different strategy by allowing users to access some of its areas in all 23 EU official languages (even if there is still a great deal of information only in English or English and one or two languages).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>EUTube</th>
<th>EUTubefr</th>
<th>EUTubede</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Videos</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views</td>
<td>2,417,514</td>
<td>219,856</td>
<td>159,778</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subscribers</td>
<td>9,220</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>29,069</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: YouTube

Figure 35: EUTube statistics for the English, French and German versions of the channel, in June 2009.

The English version has been since the beginning more dominant in content and in terms of user response (see figure 35), and therefore will be the centre of my analysis. When English is not the language directly spoken, videos are either dubbed or captioned, except in one case, “German favorite,” which refers to a popular video on the German channel. In some cases no language is spoken at all, mainly in shorter videos. In such instances there is only a few words in English with the name of the program, policy or awareness area.

A significant part of the videos were uploaded before the channel was launched (close to one fifth). The surges in uploading trends present in figure 36 correspond to three different periods, namely the one-year anniversary (featuring a retrospective of the videos uploaded to that point), the end of 2008 (even if on different issues, ten videos were uploaded on the same day), and a special series of 16 videos on climate change: “YOU control climate change.” The last peak coincided with the two-year anniversary, but this time there was no direct reference to the date.
Figure 36: Video uploading trend on EUTube, from June 2007 to June 2009 (mean value line is indicated).

Videos were sometimes uploaded in groups according to their theme and/or area of intervention of the EC. Besides the set on climate change just mentioned, this is the case of a series dedicated to changes in roaming regulation (“Receiving a call abroad,” “Receiving a call abroad” - different video, “Roaming prices slashed,” “Mobile roaming prices in Europe capped,” all uploaded on June 14, 2007, before the channel's launch and a change in legislation); or the “Travelling in Europe” series (“the euro,” “pet passports,” “driving licence and car insurance;” “fewer or no border controls,” “your mobile phone,” “your health insured abroad,” “shopping abroad,” “you have rights as an air passenger,” all uploaded on November 27, 2008), to name a couple of examples.

Studying all the videos uploaded between June 2007 and June 2009, and removing self-referring tags (eutube, europe, union, european, commission, eu), it becomes clear that there is a strong focus on environmental issues and climate change (frequency: climate – 37; change – 36; environment: 36), subjects that can be considered more than strictly European and that are less controversial in this region of the world. This emphasis becomes more apparent when a tag cloud based on frequency is created (figure 37).
In 2009, this topic had a strong presence in the agenda of many institutions and the media, since the United Nations Climate Change Conference would be taking place in Copenhagen the following December. Margot Wallström was directly involved in an initiative – the “Road to Copenhagen” – aiming to foster citizen participation in preparatory works, both online and offline, which had been launched November 2007.\(^{18}\) Her background as the former Environment Commissioner (1999-2004) is pointed out in the initiative's website and may help explain why the presence of such issues was so strong on EUTube (under her responsibility through the Directorate General Communication).

Regarding length, the first videos were apparently much longer than later ones. In 2008, the longest video has 04:04, excluding the repetition of the longest video in 2007 (exactly to mock its length), which had 29:57. The longest video in 2009 (up until June) was close to fifteen minutes, but it was an exception since most videos that year were under two minutes.\(^{19}\) However, a closer look shows that this is in a way deceiving. Although there are differences and a tendency for videos to be shorter, it is not so much that videos were significantly longer but that there was carelessness in their upload. The longest videos, like “Europe leads the fight against climate change” (13:43) or “Life Long Learning programme” (29:57), are actually half the size. The fact is that they repeat themselves, after a black screen,

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\(^{18}\) The other co-chairs were Gro Harlem Brundtland, former Prime Minister of Norway, UN Special Envoy on Climate Change; and Member of the Club of Madrid’s Global Leadership for Climate Action (GLCA) initiative; and Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland, Vice-President of the Club of Madrid and Member of the GLCA, as indicated in http://www.roahtocopenhagen.org.

\(^{19}\) The average length of a YouTube video was 04:12, according to the study carried out by Sysmos (2010) mentioned in Chapter II.
the second time round without any sound editing (meaning no narrator and dubbing, or music added).

All of the early videos uploaded to the EC’s channel were existing work and it is still not very clear which material has since been purposely made for EUTube. Most of the content follows the format of corporate videos, looking very similar to promotional messages.20 These videos seem to confirm studies that showed “many government-funded YouTube videos now serve as substitutes for numerically coded instructional booklets that were traditionally produced in print formats by official agencies” (Losh 2008, 112). Still, some videos resemble reports from the ground, giving a more “hands on” kind of feel, featuring technicians on the field, multiple languages, without music in the background or a title sequence. Throughout these two years of videos, the EC had to make some adjustments to the videos posted (probably as a general trend in the audiovisual content produced), which reflected on their length as pointed out above, but also on their overall style. As a result, there is an increase in the the number of short clips, television ads and other videos which follow such format. In addition, videos became more humorous and animation was used more often. The latter has the advantage of overcoming language barriers, since in some of them there is no spoken language, relying on the universal language of cartoons (an example is shown in figure 25, chapter III).

The series “YOU control climate change,” for instance, included 16 animations on YouTube: one was uploaded on May 25, 2009, whereas the remaining 15 were all uploaded on June 6, 2009.21 These 16 videos are part of a set featured on the website for the EC’s awareness campaign “You Control Climate Change!,” which had been launched in May 2006 by EC President José Manuel Barroso and Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas.22 They were submitted to the 15th International Environmental Film Festival, ENVIROFILM, in

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20 These videos are distinct from amateur content: “‘Corporate’ videos look good – like mainstream media – because they are made by professionals, are stolen from TV, or are re-cut movies. They express ideas about the products of mainstream culture, in the music-driven, quickly-edited, glossy, slogan-like vernacular of music videos, commercials, and comic” (Juhasz 2008, 136).

21 On the website, two other animated videos uploaded on EUTube appeared on the first page: “Everyone can save the planet” (June 21, 2007) and “Energy. Let's Save It!” (November 11, 2008). There was also a previous video called “You control climate change” uploaded two years before, in June 2007. It followed the same format as early videos on EUTube: a promotional video, not animated, and over eight minutes long.

22 No reason is mentioned why the Estonian, Italian, French, Lithuanian, and Swedish videos completing the series of 21 videos present on CHANGE website were not uploaded to YouTube. The only official languages not included were Gaelic and Maltese (languages of countries where English is also an official language). All teenagers studied at international schools in Brussels.
Slovakia, earning them an award (DG Environment 2009a). Framing the production of the video clips, it should be noted that in April that year the *White Paper Adapting to Climate Change* was published, and later in June 23-26 the EC’s *Green Week conference: act and adapt* was held.

Although the European Commission allows a Flash video preview both in the website and EUROPA’s Audiovisual Services, each corresponds to a separate upload, with its distinct player. The EC hence prefers to have these videos in multiple websites, instead of storing it only on YouTube, and making use of its embedding possibilities.

![YouTube Video](https://i.imgur.com/3Q5Q5Q.png)

*Figure 38: “YOU control climate change!” series, video featuring the English teenager. Screenshot taken on April 15, 2011.*

The description of each video reads “Teenagers from 21 EU Member States get animated about climate change,” the same sentence presenting the videos on the EC’s website dedicated to the issue of climate change, and redirects watchers to it. Despite being possible to add subtitles in multiple languages through Youtube (2008), the videos feature subtitles
only in English, except the one already in that language (the example in figure 38). 23 All videos are very short (between 23 and 28 seconds) and extremely similar: the teenager is introduced (first name, age, and nationality) to then share his/her tip “for tackling one of the greatest environmental challenges facing us today” (as also read in the description). These videos – described by the DG Environment as “funny, fresh and dynamic” (DG Environment 2009b) – draw their humour mostly from the quirkiness of real heads attached to cut out bodies, and the mixture of real life objects, patterned fabrics, and animated drawings. The English and Slovak teenage boys also end with a comic remark, connecting environment-friendly practices and romantic success. These videos are in fact the most seen and commented ones, and correspond to the first and the last video posted of this series. 24 The comments of both videos are mainly a discussion between viewers who argue “Global warming is a scam,” and accuse the EU of backing such ploy, and those who express their concern regarding climate change and support actions to prevent it.

Comparing it to other channels created by EU institutions, EUTube is different from, for example, the European Parliament channel. 25 The latter was created close to the 2009 elections and the first videos aimed at fostering participation in this electoral act. One of the strategies was to adopt a viral marketing approach, which was later considered to have been effective: “The viral videos were watched 500 000 times on YouTube, and millions of viewers saw them once they had been taken up by the TV channels” (DG Communication 2009). These “viral videos” refer to the “At the polling station” series, in which a scared woman, bank robbers and professional road racing cyclists all go to a polling station, despite their “pressing situations.” Although both the European Commission and external reports consider these videos were “well received on the Internet” and in other media (Gagatek 2010, 24), the 500 000 figure corresponds to the joint views of the three videos, of which the horror movie parody (the first posted) is responsible for over half of them. Slightly over 300 000 views is still far from the OECD's description of viral: “being viewed by more than one million persons in a relatively short time” (OECD 2007, 24). In these three campaign videos the

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23 In contrast, on the website the videos are subtitled according to the language chosen in the entry page.
24 Despite being the most seen and commented, they present low figures, the video featuring the English teenager had only received 27 comments and under 13500 views in the six months after being posted. The other videos either did not have any comments or did not even reach half a dozen comments.
25 If one searches “European Parliament” on YouTube, one may stumble upon another channel “europarl,” featuring clips from the European Parliament, which is actually run by critics of current EU policy.
designation “viral” seems to reflect a performative intent, rather than being descriptive (cf. discussion on viral videos in chapter III and IV). Several television spots in much more diverse languages than EUTube, including Catalan and Flemish, were also uploaded.

At around the same time as the European Parliament channel and also linked to the elections, YouTube launched “Questions for Europe,” in a partnership with Euronews, where YouTubers were asked to answer four questions and to submit their videos asking questions. Most of the videos in its gallery were uploaded in sets (notice the titles indicating a number, like “Questions for Europe 25,” in figure 39), not “user-generated,” or at least by individual citizens, and many are street interviews.

Figure 39: Questions for Europe channel page. Screenshot taken on March 03, 2011.

This lack of participation is not restricted to European Parliament elections. In 2009, Norwegian Prime-minister – running successfully for re-election, for the Arbeiderpartiet – Jens Stoltenberg’s contest calling for video responses seemed to have received but five contributions. Perhaps such reluctance to participation is due to a perception that this is but a simulation of a dialogue, since in an actual conversation the candidate cannot summarize or

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26 At least only five video responses could be found posted to “Bli med I konkurransen” [Join the competition], in March 2011.
pick between the citizens’ questions, and there are interruptions or interferences with his/her discourse. Therefore, because despite being an invitation for participation, the management of the process is entirely in the hands of the candidate, politician or political institution, their image “remains dialogical [dialogique] without being dialoguing [dialogale]. Dialogical because it integrates the other in his/her own discourse. But not dialoguing, since there is no actual exchange” (original emphasis, Yanoshevsky 2009, 63).

When directly prompted by European institutions to post videos, citizens did not respond in numbers to that call; on EUTube – where this was not requested of users in the videos on this sample – there are very few video responses to the videos uploaded on this channel (which is common on YouTube). Therefore, video conversation does not take place, at least as described and praised as specific of YouTube in chapter III and IV, and the “lively debate” praised by the Commissioner is restricted to comments. The most commented video on EUTube was unsurprisingly the most controversial one uploaded.

*Figure 40: Flagged warning for“Film lovers will love this.” Screenshot taken on April 11, 2011. Screenshots of the video itself can be seen in figure 12, chapter II.*

The video “Film lovers will love this” was the main responsible for the millions of views presented in December 2007, and though it did bring a lot of exposition to EUTube, the response was mainly very judgmental. Due to featuring sex scenes considered by many users as explicit, it was eventually flagged (figure 40). Anyone who tries to watch it finds the following message: “This content may contain content material flagged by YouTube's user community that may be inappropriate for some users. To view this video or group, please
THE POLITICS OF YOUTUBE

verify you are 18 or older by signing in or signing up,” preventing unregistered users to watch it.27 From Polish catholic families, to Euroceptic British Tories, many voices made known their discontent about this video (Smith 2007).28 Reading through the comments directly on YouTube, they appear to have been heavily moderated for a long time, given that several users posted comments claiming they were the first ones to do it: “WOW! Over 280 thousand views and I'm the first to comment ?????” They reflect the polarity of the discussion, and although there are some compliments in praise of a lighter approach, outrage is more visible, associating it with pornography and describing it as an example of “the EU squandering tax money.” The second most commented video does not have that many comments – 670 to over 2 000 in “Film lovers...” (April 2009). In “Greek Fires: European solidarity,” the issue is regional in scope, and the comments reflect that aspect: besides spam, they include theories about how the fires started, appreciation from Greeks users and sympathy from other users, discussions on who gave support, as well as some tension between Greek and Turkish users. The moderator makes a sole intervention replying to accusations of censorship by a user.

In the EUTube channel, I actually found the highest number of comments in the comment box of its channel page, counting 25 311 comment as of April 28, 2009. On a close analysis of a sample of the comments (10%), one could verify that comments were dominated by only a few users and characterized by forms of behaviour commonly designated as trolling and flaming, previously discussed while presenting my exploratory research. They consisted mainly of a chat-like exchange of insults or patronizing observations about each other's arguments. Although language reached a very strong level, going so far as “BOMB the eu/ BOMB people who support the eu,” the moderator seldom interfered (he did not in this particular case). In addition, the most frequent commentators were old users who had created new usernames recently, something they openly admitted or accused each other of doing.

This analysis confirmed initial findings: the existence of extremist behaviour, with

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27 Later in August 2011, this warning had changed to “[t]his video or group may contain content that is inappropriate for some users, as determined by the video uploader” (emphasis added). The latter part of the sentence linked directly to the YouTube Help entry “Age-Restricted Videos and Channels by Advertiser.” It reads (excerpt): “This age restriction is imposed by the uploader and is not a result of flags from YouTube's user community. Videos that have been proactively age-restricted by the uploader are, however, still subject to YouTube's Community Guidelines” (YouTube Help 2011).

28 In 2011, the Joventut Socialista de Catalunya tried to motivate young catalans to vote by posting “Votar és un plaer.” This video – which also resorted to humor and sexual innuendo – suffered heavy criticism from all political quarters and ended up receiving the same kind of media attention as “Film lovers...,” i.e. more focused on its controversial aspects than on its political message.
very few but highly active users, that range from Europhobic to Europhilic. In an exploratory analysis of 100 comments in the same channel made in November 2008, one could find the moderator defending himself in a direct answer to a poster, denying the deletion of comments, and the strong dominance of a few users. The most frequent commentator in this sample (with 40 out of 100 comments, all of them heavily anti-EU) was even mocked by others who wondered if he was in fact a group of people or if he lived on that forum. At the time of the second analysis, the two most active users were still among those who flooded the channel with comments.

This has given rise to complaints by those who feel pushed out of the discussion. In a comment to a post by Margot Walström (2009) where she discussed EUTube, a user complains about this very situation:

My personal experience with EUTube’s message board is that attracts the lowest type of person with little civility. I have been insulted and slandered and called the most vile names on that board. The level of intelligence is low- and closing the board would improve the decor of EUTube.

Nevertheless, another user argues that it may be a wrongful perception:

[addressing the first user], there are some nice people on EUTube. But to a certain extent, I would have to agree with you’re the language used. However, many of them have been there for a long time, and a lot of the “insults” are actual bantering between themselves. I must admit, sometimes newcomers - from what I have seen - have been heavy handedly “commented” on.

This reply is in line with previous studies on flaming in general – as highlighted in chapter III – and dedicated to controversy in the specific case case of YouTube. The latter pointed out that “flame wars are represented [by YouTubers] as part of the fun of participating in the social network,” and “can be thought of almost as a ludic event, and a source of some of the energy that drives the system” (Burgess and Green 2008, 14).

Nevertheless, the first comment in Walström's blog is indicative that one may assume that flaming and trolling have had some measure of success in “closing” discussion on the EUTube channel, in particular for new arrivals. Despite their policy against hate speech, to control this is difficult for an institution like the EC. The moderator seldom interferes and choosing not to publish certain comments would immediately lead to accusations of censorship, something his careful attitude does not prevent them from existing. When the
Commission changed in 2010, the EC seemed to change its attitude towards comments. The comment box on the front page was permanently removed, and some of the videos posted in the first months of office had their comments disabled, including videos promoting citizen participation like “Mads Mikkelsen – Let your voice be heard!,” as can be seen in figure 41.

![YouTube Video](https://i.imgur.com/9Q5GQ.png)

*Figure 41: “Mads Mikkelsen – let your voice be heard!,” video uploaded on EUTube with the comments disabled. Screenshot taken on March 2, 2011.*

Not allowing comments on videos is a very common practice on YouTube by politicians and political organisations: such is the case of the President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso's channel, but also of several others, including David Cameron (as his predecessor Gordon Brown). This lacks some coherence given that he was previously praised on his use of YouTube (see chapter IV). Moreover, Cameron promises discussion elsewhere by setting up “transparency comment thread for your feedback” at the official site of the Prime Minister's Office.

Notwithstanding the existence of “implicit rules that guide participation,” as pointed out by Strangelove, “[b]ad behaviour proliferates across YouTube's community” (2010, 136). Before YouTubers, bloggers had already been forced to face rowdy commentators, and would therefore “sometimes choose to disable this option [commenting], to prevent flaming, spam, and other unwanted effects,” while others would “permit comments but moderate them, by manually reviewing submitted comments before publishing them or allowing comments from

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29 DG Communication became the responsibility of Vice-President and Commissioner Viviane Reding for the period between 2010 and 2014.
trusted sources only” (Mishne and Glance 2006). However, comment management options have consequences, namely the reduction of “the overall potential volume of the commentsphere” (2006). Since YouTube's first years, YouTubers have been suspicious as to resorting to “corrective mechanisms,” due to their implications both to freedom of speech and to the access to meaningful criticism (Lange 2007a). In addition, moderating or banning comments is regarded as “counter to the ethos of openness that supposedly distinguishes participatory culture” (Burgess and Green 2009, 96). Similar government decisions to disable comments have been perceived as hindering democratic discussion, provoking “a flurry of video blog rants, parodies and re-posts of the videos” (Hess 2009, 412). Hence, what could have been “a clever move of bringing its message to the people, especially youth who frequently utilize new media,” turned into a strong negative response due to this lifted barrier between government agency and citizens, causing reactions such as “disbelief in the message, labels of propaganda, and unpacking of supposed truth claims of the videos” (Hess 2009, 414).

As mentioned in the beginning of this section, the use of this online video website has not lived up to the potential described in official reports. A great deal of online video content is repurposed from television, as is frequently observed in the case of the Berlusconi's government channel. In many cases, channels are little more than a collection of public appearances: that is very clear in the case of the Portuguese President or the British Royal House. Even if Cavaco Silva first addressed online viewers directly when the channel is launched (“Mensagem do Presidente sobre os novos canais”), and we are able to follow the preparations of a royal wedding in detail (“The Master's Department prepares for the Royal Wedding” among several others), we are still far from vast appropriation and reification of YouTube genres (c.f. Losh 2008).

The channel for Spain's PSOE brings together “videos on current events of PSOE and the socialist Government,” while featuring many of former Prime-Minister Zapatero's

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30 The case discussed in that study involved the US Office for National Drug Control Policy. As to the examples discussed in this dissertation, since the decision to disable comments was made after my period of analysis of EUTube videos, I was not able to witness what happened in real time. A search on Google did not retrieve any reactions to this decision, in fact the only reference to EUTube and disabling comments was a petition from 2007 at http://eutubelibre.wikidot.com/. This may lead us to conclude that disabling comments had already been attempted.

31 Given that Berlusconi also has ownership over the media which produced such content, it is not the same case as the common user resorting to television footage to promote his/her message; rather, it can be seen as efficient exploitation of the media empire's resources.
speeches. Despite the (albeit not entirely successful) good practices described above, the Arbeiderpartiet shares the same practice of mixing together different institutional roles: the party, the government and the person of the Prime Minister. In addition, their more creative videos were during the 2009 campaign period and were also posted on the same channel: besides the call for video already mentioned, there were experiments in story-telling and attempts at connecting distinct popular social web sites, by, for instance, asking on their YouTube channel for citizens to post questions on Twitter. After the campaign, the pattern of speeches and public appearances became more common. In turn, the channel on YouTube connected to Nicolas Sarkozy stopped being active after the 2007 campaign, and it was not replaced by a channel for the French Presidency. The last video is “Sarko Ho Ho,” featuring a song dedicated to Sarkozy, uploaded on May 2, 2007 (the second and decisive round was held on May 5 and 6).\footnote{Even during the presidential race, Sarkozy's video strategy seemed to draw inspirations from broadcasting, seeking to “project an image both formal and ‘objective’ of the candidate” (Yanoshevsky 2009, 61). Sarkozy's campaign website presented the video window as mimicking a news channel (“NSTV”), not offering any interactive tools, and in which the candidate assumed the character of a television presenter. However, there was also a different set of videos dedicated to answering vox pop questions, which displayed a more informal version of Sarkozy (through the choice of clothing, mainly, his body language did not agree) and intended to give the impression of dialogue. This appearance is deconstructed by the researcher: besides a microphone with the “NSTV” logo being present, questions and answers were not simultaneous, but edited together (2009, 62).} This description of the aftermath of elections reflects the trend identified in chapter III regarding the 2008 US elections (May 2010).

Despite high praise and hopes placed on Web 2.0 tools, the truth is that the most recent reports on e-participation conclude that their use “on government portals and websites is still at its infancy stage, with a small number of countries providing this service to its citizens” (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UN 2010, 88). We could consider this also points to a migration of governments and institutions from their websites, as the Commission states regarding their move beyond EUROPA. The European Commission recognises that resorting to YouTube to communicate with European citizens, rather than relying on an in-house technical infrastructure, does have its constraints, as some of the rules of interaction are determined by the online video company.

In EUTube's channel, citizens are given notice:
THE POLITICS OF YOUTUBE

The EUtube channel includes hyperlinks to some features and services of Youtube (Send message, Add comment, Share channel, Subscribe to EUtube's video,...) that are not owned or controlled by Europa. Europa has no control over, and assume no responsibility for, the content, privacy policies or practices of these services.

Access to these features and services is reserved to Youtube registered users. If you don't have an account, you can sign up for Youtube.

By doing so, you have to agree on Youtube Terms of Use, Google Terms of Service and Google Privacy Policy!

It is clear a website like YouTube still poses a communication challenge, and not just to the European Commission or the European Parliament. Institutional actors are still slowly trying to understand how to deal with the online environment, and with YouTube in particular. The main – and easiest – choice has been to treat it as both a distribution channel and an archive, largely neglecting the social web features enabled by the website (but which, as we have seen, have never been YouTube's strong point or emphasised) and undertaking little change to institutional culture.

Conclusion: Challenges in communicating Europe through online video

Comparing the EU's discourse regarding e-democracy with the view presented by the OECD, one finds the latter more cautious, contemplating social and legal challenges to come. However, even if they acknowledge that “the accuracy of content and acknowledgement of sources may not be guaranteed” (OECD 2007, 90), in respect to quality OECD is as the EU trusting in users' capacity for self-regulation and praises said “collective intelligence” (using the very term): “as users are free to choose and often rate content, sources of poor information may not draw many visits” (OECD 2007, 91), as defended by Lévy (2002). Despite one having a more balanced perspective than another, both organisations place strong expectations on Web 2.0 or participative web, from its capacity to foster creativity, its potential of economic exploitation, and also as a tool to promote political discussion that is horizontal, plural and in which citizens have greater power and initiative.

Upon empirical analysis, one verifies there are still barriers to online discussion fostered by institutions: first, participation numbers are low; second, those who do participate seem to stand in absolute opposite sides of the debate, pushing even further away users with moderate convictions, seeming to prove thesis of extreme behaviour online discussed in
chapter I. The findings here described revealed that the noise and disruption produced by flamers and trolls appear to be a big problem in terms of loss of trust in the system and pushing people away. Even if a closer look may find that behind many of the insults there is a peculiar kind of playfulness or may be “a marker of relationship closeness” (O’Sullivan and Flanagan 2003, 73), not all are willing to accept such a way to interact, especially newcomers unaware of previous interaction dynamics. When a few users are able to dominate comments, as in the case of EUTube’s channel comment box, many others may choose not to participate. And this will undoubtedly affect the diversity of contributions to the discussion.

As noted in this chapter, the option of interfering with comments, even if to control monopolisation by a few loud ones, is easily perceived as an attack on free speech. The question becomes which role should a moderator have: a participant, an animator, or – as it seems to be the case – a “policeman.” Coleman and Blumler remind us that “[f]or online discourse to work well, sensitive skills of moderation are needed,” and a very necessary moderation technique is to the ability to facilitate “discussions in ways that enable the voices to be heard of citizens who do not necessarily feel bold, articulate or firmly committed to a particular point of view” (2009, 174). Meaningful interaction may equally be hindered if European institutions limit their action to prompting discussion, instead of engaging in it, by replying to the contributions of citizens. In addition, the EC has enormous difficulty in not being perceived as manipulating public opinion, and escaping claims of producing citizen-funded propaganda.33

Akhil Gupta (1992) argued that a transnational organization like the European Commission had difficulties in cultivating an “imagined community” because, unlike nations, it did not have the media reach for its representation. In the twenty-first century some changes occurred, “there are new European audio-visual spaces – newspapers, television, Internet and English (maybe) as an eventually unavoidable first language – and new social movements and identity politics across borders” (Eriksen 2007, 32). On YouTube, the EU has primarily chosen a *lingua fraca* for the videos posted by its institutions: the EC has concentrated most of its efforts on the English version of its channel, whereas the European Parliament offers no

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33 Made with the declared purpose to unite Europe after the Second World War and “sell democracy” (Schulberg 2008) or just to “sell the Plan” and counter the action of the Communist Information Bureau (Machado 2007), the Marshall Plan films were similarly described. Their characterization as propaganda prevented these short films from being shown on US soil at the time.
other option. In his reflection on the EU, Habermas argues the necessity of a European public sphere, a position shared in the documents reviewed in this chapter, but his view is distinct from the actions followed to aid its constitution: “[t]he hierarchical notion of an overarching European public sphere with its own, predominantly English-speaking, media overlaying the national public spheres is misleading” (2009, 88). To overcome the EU's democratic deficit and the citizens' feeling of estrangement, the scholar claims “[t]he solution does not consist in constructing a supranational public sphere, but in transnationalizing the existing national public spheres. For the latter could become more responsive to one another without any need for drastic changes in the existing infra-structure” (original emphasis, 2009, 183).

Despite the EU’s efforts in trying to adapt to new media and follow new strategies, in cyberspace this institution has to comply with a set of rules which is not theirs, but part of online interaction. On the whole, the European Commission’s plight in dealing with YouTube is very similar to that of European national political actors. They have not been particularly creative in the content they upload, and features such as comments are not used in all their interactive potential: as has been observed about British political parties “[they] have jumped on the Web 2.0 bandwagon, but they are using the brakes and the reins to make their ride more comfortable” (N. A. Jackson and Lilleker 2009, 248), with consequences on their acceptance by citizens. As remarked by Strangelove, “[n]ew media practices typically change faster than institutionalized modes of representation” (2010, 157). Since skepticism concerning citizen participation has significant cultural roots, some transformations are still expectable with time. According to Gabriel Tarde (1989 [1893]), speech (parole) was first used to utter monologues, well before conversations were had: “the dialogue only came after, in compliance with the law according to which the unilateral always precedes reciprocity” (1989, 92). Perhaps video will follow the same pattern.

In addition, citizens seem to be extremely hard to win over even when they are presented with less “institutional” videos and in the few occasions – usually around electoral periods – in which their participation is directly requested through comments or video. The presence of official political institutions on YouTube is regarded an invasion of personal
While US politicians are allowed to seek inspiration in popular culture, a certain degree of formality — or respectability even — is somewhat expected from their European counterparts. Despite some compliments, one could find comments such as “Well, it seems our politicians don't take the vote serious either,” or “This spot does nothing than illustrate how stupid our politicians consider us citizens these days [sic]” or “That just shows how real issues are treated as a teenager's game” on the “viral videos” posted by the European Parliament to promote voting in the 2009 elections.

Nevertheless, formal videos are not very successful in capturing the attention of the YouTube audience, nor in defining a favourable image of politicians. Peter Burke notes that concerns regarding the image of power have a long history, “[i]mage management' may be a new phrase but it is not a new idea. Louis XIV, for example, used high heels and was not represented too close to his son because the Dauphin was taller” (2008, 73). Although twenty-first century politicians try to control the existing perception on them, “gotcha moments,” parodies and all forms of exposure of politicians' faults have a much wider circulation that sanctioned videos (Terblanche 2011; Yanoshevsky 2009).

As discussed in the conclusion of chapter III, there are several limitations to the contributions YouTube videos can make to a more deliberative model of democracy. However, can some forms of criticism — like remixes and parodies — contribute to the constitution of counterpublics? Or, rather, do they add to the fragmentation of the public sphere in a negative sense? In the next and final chapter, I will discuss the relation between humour and politics and how YouTubers respond to official discourse by creating satirical remixes, problematising the role these videos may have in fostering political discussion.

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34 Strangelove (2010) noted the same attitude towards the presence of celebrities on YouTube, describing the example of how Oprah's arrival to YouTube was interpreted as “YouTube selling out” and disrespecting its amateur base.

35 For instance, in the 2008 election cycle, Hillary Clinton posted in her channel a parody of the last episode of the television show The Sopranos to launch her campaign song. For more examples see chapter IV.
VI.

Remix and humour in the age of online video

In chapter IV, satire's historical relationship with politics was brought into focus, exploring how today's humorous criticism builds on that tradition. In the previous chapter, the lack of success of political communication strategies involving online video was tied to YouTubers' preference to mock politicians, instead of engaging with them on the latter's terms. For Michael Strangelove, YouTube is “a politically engaged and consequential community” as well as “a new global arena where public opinion is formed and expressed;” In his view, “[i]n amateur videos we find a new form of vernacular speech – speech through the production of original and appropriated images and words.” (2010, 156). Satire performed through remixing or appropriation, characteristic of culture jamming and other forms of intervention in media culture, is the focus of the analysis developed in this final chapter.

Before taking a closer look at instances in online video, demonstrating different levels of proficiency in remixing and political commitment, we start with a brief genealogy of political satire, from classical to Internet times. Politicians and politics have joined videogames, celebrities, and the web itself as the target of twenty-first century caricatures. In the first case studied in this chapter, the Hitler meme, the analysis of videos enabled us to understand that a strong subject was the relation between politics and the media, and how the character of Hitler was chosen to deflate politicians' constructed media image. In the second, by studying a particular channel dedicated to political remix, the goal is to demonstrate that there is in fact a tradition of video manipulation that inspires remix in online video, of which a big part is the subversion of media content to offer alternative narratives. Finally, one specific video is submitted to an in-depth analysis as an example of the work of a committed and knowledgable remodeler.

The realm of image, perhaps at the centre of the Internet's technological culture, is connected with decisive aspects of today's social structure of knowledge and play. It is timely to understand which part of “playing” is in fact an expressive practice with political significance, or a merely a deterrent from consequential political engagement. This chapter aims to discuss the relation between humour and politics, particularly in a media environment marked by the presence of user-generated video.

**Humour and politics: An ambiguous relation**

Humour and satire, although different in their sentimental dosage, have gone through times as if hand in hand, and the artists who use these weapons feel the need to observe the *comic* of things and people, through a kind of indirect tribute to Beauty since they criticize physical and social imbalances, maybe meaning to better correct them (Câmara 1982 [1912]).

*Conference on Humour and Satire presented by Leal da Cámara, caricaturist and an opposer to the Monarchy in Portugal, a year after returning from exile in 1911.*

Anton C. Zijderveld (1983) systematized a panoramic view over the issue of humour, by organising a special issue of the journal *Current Sociology*, dedicated to “The Sociology of Humour and Laughter.” In this review, the scholar distinguished four categories of humour and described how different types of meaning are played with in each: language, common-sense logic, emotional, and everyday life meanings. It is in this final category that we find parody, romance, parable, fable, as well as satire, caricature and cartoons, forms known for their use as vehicles for political messages. It was also in *The Practice of Everyday Life* that Michel de Certeau (1984) thought possible for tactics to be developed against the strategies deployed by the powerful.

Humour's historical presence in critique has been strongly associated with satire, leading to a special focus on satire, and political satire in particular, for the purpose of this study. When searching for “satire” in the latest issues of social sciences journals, alongside comments on authors such as Pope or Swift, today we are also likely to find references to *The Simpsons*, and, more recently, to *The Daily Show* as well as blogging. One may attribute this to satire's “unparalleled facility at cuckoo nesting in different media and genres old and new” (Quintero 2007, 9). Yet, the presence of humour in political debate is still often looked upon with mistrust in scientific approaches, while image, the increasingly preferred means of
expression of the digital age, has either been disregarded or mainly associated with
propaganda.

Researchers who have not shied away from studying humour recognize an affinity
with social sciences. Humour and laughter have been deemed “essential to human existence
and social life,” both otherwise unbearable (Zijderveld 1983, iv). Laughter is considered a
cultural phenomenon and “a social practice with its own codes, rituals, agents and theatrical
character” (Goff 1999, 41). Moreover, humour is an instrument for deconstructing society,
often looking upon areas that are otherwise sealed off. Some topics, it seems, we can only
discuss while laughing. Satire, in particular, “suggests progress and the betterment of society,
and it suggests that the arts can light the path of progress” (Colletta 2009, 860)

According to Bremmer and Roodenburg (1999), although the origin of the current
understanding of the term “humour” is merely traceable to the seventeenth century in
England, it describes a more ancient phenomenon. This account brings together different
perspectives as the dominant discourse on humour has itself undergone changes through
times: rhetoricians and philosophers, monks and theologians, writers of urban studies and
essayists, psychologists and sociologists, all have tackled the subject (1999, 7) – as well as
anthropologists, one should add. As discussed in chapter IV, it is regarded both as potentially
transgressive and inducing of conformity.

The genealogy of satire in particular is difficult to determine, since its own definition
poses a challenge to the day. However, the Greek satyr plays, the Roman Saturnalia festival
and satura, formal verse satire, are perceived as possible origins. The political character of
these traditions is viewed as rather different: the Greek comic theatre, a public event, “taught
the polis to laugh at itself” (Keane 2007, 37), while affording a diverse group a sense of
belonging to a community; Roman satire was written for a social elite of readers, and enjoyed
as a private experience, therefore outside “an institutional framework like the dramatic
festivals that permitted critical portrayals of society and politics” (2007, 41). Greek comedy,
like tragedy, was marked by a heritage privileging didacticism over aesthetics – even if the
latter gained more importance due to the influence of sophistic critique – as is exemplified by
aristophanic plays (M. de F. S. e Silva 1987, 58).

In medieval times, the distance to classical models and its occasional lack of explicit
identification, made the recognition of satire's voice difficult. Nonetheless, “[m]edieval poets
developed this new, totalizing kind of satire of the vices of society,” in which no-one escaped “a more deliberately comprehensive criticism” (Kendrick 2007, 54). Outside the literary world it is necessary to evoke the role of the jester in medieval courts, delivering his criticism sanctioned by the king. However, it should be noted that this was a controlled setting: the king's laughter discriminated and distinguished, and through this laughter society was structured (Goff 1999, 45).

The Renaissance brought several works that not only marked satire and literary history, but also history as a whole. In a time for questioning and challenging both society and art, for discovering new worlds, with or without travelling to far away locations, satire's appeal in the Renaissance was clear for those who found strong “opinions more easily digestible when spiced with humour, ridicule, or even abuse” (Blanchard 2007, 118). Satire was assumed to have a social function, one of exposure and revelation, following the didactic tradition of Classic comedy. Two centuries apart, Gil Vicente in Portugal (Viana 1972) and Molière in France (Goulbourne 2007) made their national audiences laugh out loud at their own society. And despite its Roman inspiration, Renaissance satire, such as that of Rabelais, had an ideological stance, chastising those contrary to the humanism it promoted and their negative values, namely medieval ideologies and institutions (Duval 2007, 72). This period bore witness to new techniques and forms of satire, such as the discrediting representative, where the satirized unwillingly perform their own criticism; and the paradoxical encomium, an ironic hyperbolic praise of the banal.

Both these devices bring to mind Erasmus' Praise of Folly, a work whose simplicity in style contrasts with its message, making comic and serious difficult to distinguish, while engaging the readers in “a sort of 'deep play' with their common sense and with the conventions that human beings accept so uncritically” (Blanchard 2007, 123). Such boundaries are thin, and their perception may lie in the eye of the beholder, given that “ambiguity is the essence of humour” (Zijderveld 1983, 23). Satire plays with the readers, and plays with itself, as in Cervantes' Viaje del Parnaso, where its practice and discussion are brought together. Other methods are also employed in satirical works, such as defamiliarization. In his comparison of men and animals, La Fontaine makes his criticism through the use of allegory, granting subtlety to his satire, increasing its ambiguity – the Fables suggest the readers a satirical comment, leaving them the possibility to judge the
saturised for themselves.

The eighteenth century is regarded as the most prolific historical period in satire, marked by diversity and creativity, and inhabited by some of the most influential authors. If its pervasiveness in most genres is undoubtedly very important to be noted, so is the broadening in scope from human weaknesses to the cruelty of human kind, now also focusing on social problems, religious conflict, and politics. As Erasmus in his satirical work (by mocking an epideictic oration or encomium in his Praise of Folly), Montesquieu and Voltaire also chose a common format at their time as a vehicle for their satire. First the Lettres persanes (Montesquieu), and later the Lettres philosophiques (Voltaire), both told their story as if describing a voyage. The former showed France through foreign eyes to its own inhabitants, while the latter recounted the author's experiences in England, which in some moments included a comparison with France (a not so favourable one to the second). And similarly to Cervantes, studies on Montesquieu also note a self-reflection on satire inscribed in his text (Goulbourne 2007, 154). Travelling is equally present in Jonathan Swift's work, a satire marked by two characteristics: first, that it is sometimes difficult to handle, due to the embedded darkness and madness of its protagonists; second, that it invites the participation of the reader. A sign this Irish author is still considered a master of satire is that to “call the work of a contemporary artist Swiftian, we signal surpassing criticism” (Boyle 2007, 211).

After this blooming period, the following century witnessed a fading away of satire, particularly in England. The main reasons for such a turn of events were associated to the rise of the novel and the development of a more markedly pluralistic public sphere than in continental Europe (Palmeri 2007, 362). Meanwhile, across the ocean, satire was growing and gaining relevance, propelled by the social, political and religious context of the New World, beginning in the eighteenth century and gaining momentum through the 1800s. Twain's late works are considered the culmination of this maturation. The British, the Puritans and newborn democratic institutions were easy targets, while abolition and woman's suffrage presented themselves as hot topics, begging to be addressed by satirists (Morris 2007).

As we approach contemporary times, again satire is revived, “invading and infecting every brand of twentieth-century fiction [...] especially dramatically in science fiction, fantasy, detective, and crime fiction” (Cunningham 2007, 402). Inspired by classical satire – both in format and in focus – 1900s' satirists voice a dystopian view of their reality and
perceived future, deconstructing modern utopias as well as favouring technology and the mechanical as satiric objects. Huxley and Orwell embodied the satirist as a cautionary prophet, realizing the shortcomings of utopian dreams of progress before their intellectual peers.

Humour in general, by playing with meanings, challenges our beliefs as well as what we hold for granted and stable, “causing the emergence of doubt as to the value of daily routines and giving rise to some confusion as to the very foundations of reality” (Zijderveld 1983, 9). In this, one can catch sight of the close ties between humour – including satire – and a genre such as fantasy, since the latter also “exists alongside the 'real', on either side of the dominant cultural axis, as a muted presence, a silenced imaginary other” (R. Jackson 1981, 180). Similarly to satire's social function, of “exposing fraudulence, shattering deceptive illusion, and shaking us from our complacency and indifference” (Quintero 2007, 4), fantasy is characterized as “subversive literature,” given that “structurally and semantically, the fantastic aims at dissolution of an order experienced as oppressive and insufficient” (R. Jackson 1981, 180). By violating dominant assumptions, subverting rules and convention considered normative (1981, 14) fantasy can be included in Fiske's (1989b) description of the process carried out by popular culture of “struggle over the meanings of social experience, of one's personhood and its relations to the social order and of the texts and commodities of that order” (1989b, 28). Satire is, in a way, the child of humour and fantasy, and acquires political strength from the dissident seeds existing in both.

Despite the strong literary character of satire, criticism has also been conveyed through music and the pictorial. These should be included in an accurate account, especially if it is done – as we are attempting to do – in order to form a background informing contemporary forms of satire.

Perhaps proving the ambiguous character of humour, a particular moment in a piece like Haydn's *Surprise Symphony* can be depicted both as humorous (Gilbert 1926, 43), or annoying (Brent-Smith 1927, 21). There is some agreement as to music's endowment with a particular kind of humour, namely what can be described as “mirth, merriment, or joviality” (original emphasis, Gilbert, 1926, 51), or defined as “wit” (Brent-Smith 1927, 22), even if its ability to cause laughter is not so consensual. The debate remains as to whether the humorist character of music is not mainly tied to the “associated literary ideas,” as for example in
comic opera or comic song (Gruneberg 1969, 122). However, it can be argued that “[t]he aesthetic expressiveness which results from a fusion of words and music is distinct from the expressiveness of either,” creating a new context and a new kind of work of art (1969, 125). It may be difficult to consider that music did not play a part in strengthening the powerful poems and skilled lyrics sung by activists both in authoritarian (Raposo 2007) and democratic (Rodnitzky 1999) regimes in the twentieth century.  

Satirists have also resorted to image for their criticizing purposes. Besides prior influences from medieval art, Dutch drawings and Reformation prints, a defining moment was the invention of caricature by the Baroque masters, which “represented a relaxation or escape, even a conscious rebellion, from the demands of 'serious' painting, but in particular of portraiture” (Paulson 2007, 308–9). In a reaction to the idealization present in the latter, caricature tried to cut man's hubris down to size, reminding him of his Lilliputian stature. In the 1700s, English artists started caricaturing politicians, turning the reaction to the constraint of formal portrait into “political satires, or graphic commentaries on political events” (2007, 312), in time, moving strictly from the heads to include the whole body. Satiric caricature distanced itself from portrait caricature for its moral stance, which, in turn, required the elaboration of context, the presentation of a dramatic situation.

While discussing his own art – and by no means a lower art by his account – Leal da Câmera (1982 [1912]) asserted “caricature is to the art of painting what the pamphlet is to literature” (1982, 22). After the French Revolution, caricature became a weapon, and those who wielded it started to suffer the same fate as the artists of words: prison. This potential was soon understood in the nineteenth century press, joining the satirical drawing to the critical spirit of the text, in an attack with varying degrees of subtlety (V. M. dos Santos 1982, 11). With advances in printing technology, caricatures and cartoons started having a stronger presence in the pages of newspapers (Tunç 2002, 48).

Underlying this account is a perspective that images are not restricted to the domain of propaganda, since “caricatures and cartoons made a fundamental contribution to political debate, demystifying power and encouraging the involvement of ordinary people with affairs of state” (Burke 2008, 79). And if in democratic states “political cartoonists have not hesitated

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2 Interestingly, in the USA, mid-twentieth century, a format commonly used for music – the long-playing album – was a success story for spreading social satire when television was still an inhospitable medium for such criticism (J. Gray, Jones, and Thompson 2009, 20).
to swing their pens like a battle-axe against injustice, lack of freedom or political corruption” (Tunç 2002, 47), their importance in despotic contexts may be even greater. There certainly are consequences: “political cartoonists’ unique power to stimulate the intellect and challenge official ideology is often considered a threat in many countries, and dealt with accordingly” (2002, 49).

Regarding electronic media, there is a growing body literature on television satirical programmes, and their influence over political opinion and engagement: from satirical puppet shows like Spitting Image in the UK (Meinhof and Smith 2000) or Les Guignols de l’info in France (Collovald and Neveu 1999), animated series like The Simpsons (J. Gray 2006), or South Park and Family Guy (Hughey and Muradi 2009), satirical programs in which the politicians participate in person (Coleman, Kuik, and Van Zoonen 2009) to The Daily Show and The Colbert Report (see chapter IV). Such influence is not consensually conceived as positive, yet some researchers hold that “while display and play create meaning without regard for real world consequences, inquiry and provocation work to contest meaning” (Morreale 2009, 107). Such contestation has political significance; particularly, it means reception is not entirely passive, though restricted by dominant impositions (see chapter I).

Jonathan Gray, Jeffrey P. Jones and Ethan Thompson (2009), compiling various works on television and satire, reflect on how satire – especially political satire – has conquered new ground on this medium after a long absence. Although suspicion has been raised concerning the end of the common shared experience of television viewing (Gandy 2001; Wolton 1999), the authors of Satire TV praise “the shift from network broadcasting, to cable narrowcasting,” considering it constituted the “enabling mechanism for these popular critiques of politics” (J. Gray, Jones, and Thompson 2009, 19). These authors note that in the USA “satire has not been around since the earliest years of television” (2009, 19), since 1950's and 1960's network executives mainly stayed away from satire, for fear it might be “too esoteric” for “mass audiences.”³ Cable channels, on the other hand, could choose to alienate part of the audience, and, consequently, of the advertisers. This liberated them from the shackles of the need to provide “mass entertainment,” allowing less consensual forms of humour.

A similar consideration has been made for the Internet. Years before Tim O'Reilly

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³ Satire still found its way to a US audience, namely through the above mentioned LP and magazines such as MAD.
made the expression web 2.0 famous, and user-generated content was the subject of official reports, Negroponte was already declaring we were moving “beyond demographics” (1995, 163–4). This founder of the MIT Media Lab argued that more than an intensification of narrowcasting, it was a question of personalization – the creation of the “Daily Me” discussed in chapter I. Whether political satire is unable to please a large audience, too demanding, or too offending, becomes even less important. Already enjoying a long existence in political and social life, political satire has allegedly been renewed by the new media environment, opening the doors to new opinion leaders (Crittenden, Hopkins, and Simmonds 2011). Political cartoons see their lives and their reach extended, technologically trapping politicians who become unable to smother 24-hour criticism (Terblanche 2011).

However, computer-mediated communication was not always considered a medium hospitable to humour, and at first there was little research on the subject: attention was eventually turned to humour due to its possible contribution to understanding group identity and solidarity, as well as individual identity (Baym 1995). Computer jokes, for instance, are said to induce a sense of community into computer users, since “comic texts transform the dilemmas of each agonizing user into a shared inter-subjective experience” (Shifman and Blondheim 2010, 1363). In countries like Russia, flash animation, shareable through email and hyperlinking, has embodied two long-standing traditions – the anekdot and graphic critique – to comment on social, political or moral life (Strukov 2007). In recent studies, online satire is presented as a way of bypassing state control of freedom of expression, together with other forms of coded speech drawn on by Chinese bloggers (Esarey and Qiang 2008), refining a national heritage of satirical comment and similarly to the protest songs of the twentieth century.

Animations and dramatizations have long been part of political campaigning. The difference brought by digital technologies is that voters started creating them to promote their ideas too. There are increasing claims that “satiric media texts have become part of (and a preoccupation of) mainstream political coverage, thereby making satirists legitimate players in serious political dialogue” (Day 2011, 1). Faced with a world of politics detached from their own world – “politics as usual” – irony became a rhetorical practice at the disposal of

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4 The Russian anekdot is “a short humorous oral story about an imaginary event with a punch line and characters that are familiar to Russian audiences, is a form of narrative that celebrates locality, concision and marginality” (Strukov 2007, 135).
citizens to express their views, and engage in dialogue with others, under the form of video
parodic satires.\footnote{Since its Roman times, it is believed “[s]atire performs its most
memorable work in its unexpected fusions of images, ideas and language that do not
seem naturally related” (Keane 2007, 50). However, even in laudatory analyses of the role
of the social web in opening up the spectrum of critical voices, the move to technolog-
based satire is not fully saluted. It is recognised that “political opinion leaders may
materialize based on technological expertise rather than based on political or social
knowledge” (Crittenden, Hopkins, and Simmons 2011, 179), and professional satirists are
urged to take up new media tools to keep political satire true to its intent.}
These modern day caricatures maintain one key characteristic – the said
gesture of deflating the issues and the people under satirical attack. Offering an alterna-
tive language for discussing political issues, the parodies are in stark contrast with the “politically
correct” forms of debates previously privileged.

The launching of YouTube in 2005 can be seen as a decisive moment towards
Negroponte's vision: as has been noted in chapter II, besides making watching video
considerably easier, its main contribution was to unprecedentedly lower the barriers to
uploading and distributing video, inviting each of us to “Broadcast Yourself.” And as pointed
out before, many YouTubers chose humour and remix as their languages of critique. Let us
now look at the first set of videos analysed in this respect.

\textbf{Nothing is safe from nazi fury}

Hitler is no stranger to satirical depictions: still during World War II, from the
performance by Chaplin in \textit{The Great Dictator} (1940) to cartoons, such as Disney's
\textit{Der Fuehrer's Face} (1943) or the Soviet \textit{Kino-Circus} (1942); and ever since, from comic books to
theatre, video games, film, cartoons, painting, TV shows, music, in short, all media and art
forms. Traceable to as far as 2006, it was \textit{Der Untergang}'s turn to provide material for a fast
growing meme, polemical, and with international versions, covering close to everything,
everyone, and everywhere. After six years, it is still possible to find new instances of the
“Hitler meme,” particularly in connection with current events, which makes it one of the most
prolific and lasting memes to date.

As discussed in the third chapter of this dissertation, when something becomes
highly popular and spreads quickly online, it is described as “viral.” In the case of online
video, according to Burgess, its specific dynamics “could be understood as involving the
spread of replicable ideas (expressed in performances and practices), via the processes of
Often virality is associated with “memes,” a term that pays tribute to Dawkins' concept of the cultural counterpart of the biological replicator, the gene. Several events and references have hence become the more or less lasting topic explored in status updates, tweets, blog posts, photoshopped images, and videos. Their fame builds and increases through the online version of word-of-mouth, namely email, forums, blogs, and the social web in general. Still, their popularity also benefits from being featured in trend analysers – and amplifiers – such as Boing Boing, Wired, Mashable, and commented on in the so-called traditional media, i.e., newspapers, magazines and television programs.

In the world of the Internet, and especially of online video, memes frequently offer a humorist take on the subject, and the Hitler meme corresponds to this profile. Shifman and Thelwall argue that “[t]he Internet, more than any previous medium, is suitable for large-scale distribution” (2009, 2568–9): the online meme has higher “copy-fidelity,” increased “fecundity,” and potentially enhanced “longevity” – all properties introduced by Dawkins in The Selfish Gene. Shifman (2011) calls YouTube in particular the “paradise for meme researchers,” since “[n]ot only did this website evolve as a central hub for meme diffusion, it also made the spread, variation and popularity of memes highly transparent” (original emphasis, 2011, 4).

In the case of the “Hitler meme” (also known as “Hitler's rant,” “Hitler finds out...”), a scene from the 2004 film Der Untergang (The Downfall in English) sees its original subtitles replaced by new ones, often concerning current events. This is distinct from vidding or fansubbing practices since this transformation of the original does not stem from the fan community: most users had little previous knowledge about the film. Despite following the tone and the main lines of action in the scene, the subtitles have little connection with the

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6 Shifman distinguishes memes from viral videos on the basis of a different structure of participation. This researcher defines “the memetic video [...] as a popular clip that lures extensive creative user engagement in the form of parody, pastiche, mash-ups or other derivative work. Such derivatives employ two main mechanisms in relating to the ‘original’ memetic video: imitation (parroting elements from a video) and remix (technologically-afforded re-editing of the video). ‘Memetic’ alludes to the act of participation through mimesis, a fundamental aspect of this video type” (original emphasis, Shifman 2011, 4).

7 Shifman highlights that her use of the meme is “mainly as an analytic tool,” following scholars “who employed the concept as a prism for shedding light on aspects of contemporary digital culture without embracing the whole set of implications and meanings ascribed to it over the years” (Shifman 2011, 3). This researcher and a colleague propose “a new Internet-base broad method, Web memetics, to analyse the distribution of such memes in time and space” (original emphasis, Shifman and Thelwall 2009, 2567).

8 “Vidding” consists of setting television or movie clips to music. Its origin can be traced to the creativity of dedicated Star Trek fans (Coppa 2008). “Fansubbing” is the translation and inclusion of subtitles by fans, and it has been linked to the expansion of Japanese animated cinema outside this country (González 2007).
actual ones – the film supplies the material, it offers a structure, but not the subject. Andrew Clay attributes the meme's longevity to “the ease with which the original subtitles can be replaced, and the adaptability of the scene’s narrative to the mapping of unrelated current events” (2011, 228). Der Untergang recounts Hitler's final days, locked in the Berlin bunker, in a highly praised interpretation by Bruno Ganz. Acclaimed by the critics, nominated and winner of several awards (including an Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film), this film reached a reasonable audience. It was nevertheless accused of offering too sympathetic an image of the dictator,humanizing him, a condemnation which, in contrast, is considered by others the work's strength.

To discuss this series of YouTube videos, we defined as the unit of analysis the video itself and its respective title. We also took into consideration the description provided by the creator (when available), and, in certain cases, other contextual elements also proved important (as has been noted in the Introduction and chapter IV). In order to form a sample, YouTube's search box was used by typing in “Untergang” and “parody.” Following theoretical reflections on parody, it could be argued YouTube videos are closer to the definition of “parodic satires,” since the methods typical of parody are employed, yet, the target is primarily extramural (Hutcheon 2000), as opposed to satirical parodies like The Daily Show, as proposed in chapter IV. We would like to reinforce that the film above all provides the material, even if the contrast between the dramatic tension of the original and the lightheartedness of most videos is arguably fundamental for this meme's popularity. The reason for preferring the term “parody” (instead of the theorisation “parodic satire,” or just simply, “satire” or “humour”) was twofold: first, YouTubers self-identify more with that term as opposed to “satire;” second, “parody” has a strong presence in discussions on online videos and politics (Jenkins 2006; 2009; Hess 2009; Tryon 2008). After that, we followed the links directing to “related videos” (in 2011, “suggested videos”) mocking the scene where Hitler is informed of the Russian military progress, provoking the realization of his impending defeat. Other videos were found through blogs or newspapers discussing the meme. Since the scene just described became the most famous excerpt from the film (despite others being also used), we restricted our search to this clip in particular.

The videos were chosen for analysis on the basis of diversity, in an attempt to form a thematic overview of the parodies. When enough videos illustrated the treatment of one
particular topic, as each new instance repeated common traits, and when no new topics were found, collection stopped. We therefore determined the size of the sample (51 videos, see Annex I) by analysing variations, and consequently concluding that we had achieved data saturation (Saumure and Given 2008).

The analysis of videos addressing other subjects notwithstanding, our focus is on videos mocking politicians, and political controversies (thus, these are over-represented, see Annex I). There are several instances in other languages, despite a predominance of English subtitles. To exemplify this, we selected videos with Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, French and Hebrew subtitles (translated to French). There are even more languages available (such as Croatian or Romanian), but we were restricted by our own limitation to understand their subtitles.

![Images of Usain Bolt and Hitler](image)

*Figure 42: Video “Usain Bolt Breaks 100m World Record and Hitler Reacts,” sequence of events in the Hitler meme: delivering the news, departure from the room (request and exit), Hitler’s outburst, the woman crying outside, Hitler’s dismay (sequence left to right, top to bottom). Screenshots taken on September 15, 2011.*
THE POLITICS OF YOUTUBE

In all parodic satires watched, the scene's action was followed thoroughly, namely the alternation on who is speaking and the defining moments (delivering the news, departure from the room, Hitler's outburst, the woman crying outside, Hitler’s dismay – as shown in figure 42). We venture the presumption that the dissonance created by the mixing together of a scene of such dramatic intensity with jocular subtitles is very effective in capturing the attention of video watchers and creators, regardless of their knowledge, interest or opinion as to the original work. The clashing of genres, tones, intentions and expectations is a common characteristic of remixes, especially when irony and a satirising disposition are present.

This part of the research faced a few of the challenges briefly referenced in the introduction to this dissertation. Given that during our data collection Constantin Film, the film's production company, requested YouTube to block content on copyright grounds, many videos became progressively unavailable while the database was being built (April 2010). However, some information about them could still be retrieved: title, views, duration and creator were still accessible in the “related videos” list; and we had already preserved some data through Zotero in an exploratory search. This blocking had happened before, which may indicate that even if the oldest video we found is from August 2006,⁹ there could have been earlier examples. This is corroborated by a discussion in the comment section regarding a previous version no longer available, precisely due to a copyright infringement claim. The videos reviewed in this chapter were uploaded between that date and the building of the database (however, there was only one instance from 2006 and another from 2007). As far as we can ascertain, most of videos which were made inaccessible in April 2010 have since been restored to YouTube, with added advertising – Constantin Film changed their strategy from blocking to monetising and tracking. The fact that the removal was partly reconsidered (Constantin Films still has 33 take-downs listed on YouTomb) did not, however, fully quell YouTuber's feeling of betrayal towards the video company.

We shall start by analysing the earliest example found, “Sim Heil: Der untersim.” The video survived different waves of take-down notices, perhaps by eluding software detection through Content ID (see chapter II). It ended up being removed in April 2010, even

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⁹ This video – “Sim Heil: Der untersim” – is also listed by the website “Know Your Meme” as the earliest example of the meme (Rocketboom 2009). Through the work of professional editors and research staff, as well as the contribution of “community members,” “Know Your Meme,” according to its own description, “is a site that researches and documents Internet memes and viral phenomena” (Cheezburger Inc n.d.).
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if it was not in the first ones targeted (we were still able to access it after news of these videos' removal was circulating online). Two reasons for its endurance may be the fact that this video includes a title sequence and is slightly longer than most instances (it starts earlier in the scene), not fully respecting copy fidelity. The original video that was the basis for this particular parodic satire featured English subtitles, whereas this version was made with Spanish subtitles. The creator of this version tried to re-upload the English one, but it was removed once again in December 2009 (according to YouTomb). Despite being online for a shorter period than its Spanish counterpart, it reached 194,870 views, while the former registered close to only a fourth of that number, 56,266 views, at the time of the data collection.

The joking subject is the demo of Microsoft's Flight Simulator X, a videogame that was to be launched later that year (October 2006). In all parodies watched – and this was not an exception – the scene's action was followed thoroughly, namely the alternation on who is speaking and the defining moments. Here, the character Hitler seems to represent himself, although he is never addressed as such directly: the title indicates a connection and in the beginning we see an officer describing him as “el jefe.” There are plenty of gaming references (other games, related abbreviations, hardware), and the world of film makes its presence through a jab at Harry Potter.

Mentioned in all descriptions of the Hitler meme, the most famous video is “Hitler gets banned from Xbox Live,” counting over four million views before being taken down, due to a threat from Constantin Film, which in turn had received a complaint from Microsoft (Clay 2011). Videogames are in fact a strong topic in these memes, which is not surprising given their strong presence on YouTube in general (“Gaming” is a category of videos in itself). Super Mario Bros (Nintendo), Gran Turismo 5 (Playstation 3) and Call of Duty 4 (cross-platform), all have their own Untergang parodies.

In these three cases, Hitler is clearly himself, even if treated anachronistically as being alive and a fan of video games. Unlike the first example described here, one can find historical references, such as to D Day or Eva Braun. The character is addressed directly as

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10 Deliberate action to prevent versions of the Hitler meme being affected by copyright controls includes “strategies such as ‘flipping’ or ‘mirroring’, which avoids Content ID blocking by reversing the image; creat[ing] multiple accounts in case of suspension; and provid[ing] detailed information on their channel regarding their fair use of copyright material” (Clay 2011, 231).
Hitler, and even mocked in his physical aspects: in “Hitler cant complete super mario bros...” the Hitler character digresses in a lament about his ears. Also in this video, the absurd association of the subtitles to the scene is a target, when Hitler states “I don't know why you were pointing at Berlin on the map.” In “Hitler's COD4 problem,” all the characters represent themselves (once again, an anachronistic representation, that is). The creator follows the original clip so closely that all name references – Steiner, Stalin and the German officers – are the same as in the film. Despite this proximity, the remaining content of the subtitles is completely unrelated to Der Untergang and very heavily knit with gaming references, only understandable by someone knowledgeable of this area.

Difficulty grasping the whole joke is fairly common in these parodies. This time referring to a classic board game, Risk, besides other pop culture references like David Hasselhoff (a US actor known for his wide success in Germany as a singer), the video mentions a “cross-dressing brit,” in a not-so-obvious allusion to Eddie Izzard. In “Hitler gets betrayed in a game of Risk” we can also find meta-references to the scene.

Celebrities have not escaped satirisation, and it is fairly easy to find parodies involving them. This is especially true when they are protagonists of events that were heavily covered by the media: from Michael Jackson (his death), to Cristian Ronaldo (changing teams), or Tony Romo and Jessica Simpson (break-up). The video involving Kanye West and Taylor Swift (the MTV Video Music Awards) not only portrays the celebrity world, but also makes reference to a second meme – Kanye's interruption – widely popular on the Internet (see chapter III for more crossovers of this meme). Once again this reflects a more general pattern in YouTube videos, where such events are quite video-worthy, and form a two-way relation between “old” and “new” media.

In some cases, celebrities are not themselves satirized, but employed as weapons against the Hitler character, as in “Hitler Finds Out Megan Fox rejected him,” or “Usain Bolt Breaks 100m World Record and Hitler Reacts.” In the latter, a parallel is established with the Berlin 1936 Olympics and Jesse Owens' victory, other current black personalities are named, and there is an allusion to Obama. Most of these videos were removed for copyright infringement.

Not only celebrities, but also contemporary cultural artefacts justify Hitler's outburst.

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11 This comedian mocked Hitler's defeat on the Russian front in his stand-up show by saying “Hitler never played Risk when he was a kid” (Dress to Kill, 1999).
Larger than life media franchises (such as Star Wars) were also fertile ground for mocking their respective fandom, more than the products themselves. The successful Disney series, Hannah Montana, also supplied an opportunity for such jokes, and for jocose commentary on today's American television. Similarly to “Hitler finds out Kanye West Disses Taylor Swift at the VMAs (Original),” the “Downfall of Grammar” is a crossing or joining of memes, where real nazis personify “grammar nazis.” In the computer world, the giants Apple and Microsoft – the trendy products of the one and the criticized operating system of the other – were an expectable source of inspiration for witty subtitles.

The Internet does not escape the mocking keyboard of YouTubers, which can be interpreted as connected with the sharing of experiences within a community, as we have seen regarding computer jokes. Common anguishes lived by Internet users are portrayed: Hitler is again banned, this time from the web service Yahoo Answers, he gets scammed on eBay, and has to deal with the closing of MSN Groups. Regarding the latter (“La Caida del grupo de MSN de Hitler - Gabito Grupos”), his maker's critical purpose is openly declared, in an explicit analogy, “[t]he impotence and despair of 'Great Adolfiyo' is a satire of what many people suffer for what happened in MSN.” It is the only video which calls itself a satire (with the description available at the time of our analysis), while five others claimed to be a parody, either in its title or description, or both.

YouTube equally became an object of ridicule. These videos target so-called YouTube celebrities, the partnership program, as well as the social media features such as subscribing, friending, or rating: Hitler is portrayed as a distraught user who is unable to achieve partner status, or a jealous vlogger looking for recognition. Filled with references to famous YouTube videos and other YouTubers, they are very much made for “insiders.” Someone who is not aware of how YouTube works, and does not recognize these people and videos, will have a hard time finding them laughable.

Self-reference even goes a little bit further, since the parodic satires themselves have received identical treatment, generating meta-memes, to invoke Shifman's (2011) terms. In the video “Hitler Hates 'Hitler Gets Banned' Parody Videos,” the Hitler character downplays their

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12 “Grammar nazis” are people who are overly concerned with language correctness, in particular in blog or forum posts, and online comments.

13 In the original, “[I]a impotencia y desesperación del 'Gran Adolfiyo,' es una sátira de lo que muchas personas sufren por lo sucedido en MSN.”
importance, using common remarks made about them, such as “the subtitles don't make sense.” The take-down order from Constantin Film was immediately picked up on by video makers and turned into another conjugation of the Hitler meme, perhaps one of the most political instances. Posted defiantly on YouTube, “Hitler reacts to the Hitler parodies being removed from YouTube” places heavy criticism on the film studio, on YouTube's acceptance of the copyright claim, and on the subsequent automatic take-down, by resorting to Content ID (see figure 43).

![YouTube](image)

Figure 43: The video “Hitler reacts to the Hitler parodies being removed from YouTube.” Screenshot taken on July 10, 2010.

The creator of this video argues that the parodies have helped Der Untergang gain more exposure, to a level it might have not reached otherwise. Moreover, in his view, the removal is non-compliant to the fair use doctrine. The option of moving to another platform is debunked since “YouTube is the de facto standard:” the YouTuber notes this website's prominence in online video, claiming its competitors are ignored both by copyright owners and Internet users, and therefore do not constitute a valid alternative. Constantin Film's decision to review its policy towards the Hitler meme, from blocking to monetisation, also would affect this video, much to the dismay of its creator (noted in an annotation that was added at a later time).

Constituting another battle of the war between copyright owners and YouTubers, and
given the popularity of this particular meme, across borders and interests, the take-down and this video in particular captured the attention of online activists and commentators. Nevertheless, the uploader of this video, despite anticipating the uproar of protest this situation would generate, was not very confident that it would cause a long-lasting effect on the balance between the protection of copyright and the right to satirise and remix: “Everyone's gonna get upset about how corporations can illegally take down parodies/ But tomorrow, they'll forget all about it and watch cat videos,” enunciating the prevailing derisive stereotype used to portray YouTube – and the Internet – as meaningless entertainment.

Although social commentary humour may be elusive on YouTube memes (Shifman 2011, 10), “Hitler reacts to the Hitler parodies being removed from YouTube” discusses a topic that ranks high in political discussion online, namely copyright, criticises YouTube and Google's relation with companies, while also tackling the question of the real worth of online political debate. Despite the YouTuber's low expectations as to the impact of his, less than three months after being uploaded, this video had already broken the five hundred thousand barrier. It should be brought to mind that the European Parliament only achieved a similar number in the combination of its three “viral videos,” also promoted on television. Two years later, its view count was just under one million. This duplication in views may indicate that, although it was slower to achieve such figure than what is considered to be a viral video, it continued to circulate online, steadily reaching a wider audience. It is videos as such as this that give some credit to the assumption that YouTube videos contribute to the constitution of counterpublics – together with the comments generated on YouTube, but also with the continuation of debate in external blogs and website – especially in response to the actions of powerful actors, like the content industries.

Can or should we consider these videos satirical works? Many of these parodic satires are completely nonsensical. Their only goal seems to be to caricature Hitler himself, exposing him to utter ridicule. From childish disappointments, as “hitler finds out there is no

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This was in fact how we came to learn about the take-downs: it merited comments from the activist group Open Video Alliance (josh 2010), high-traffic websites like Mashable (Axon 2010a), and even online coverage from broadcast media (Cooper 2010). Notice, in Figure 42, the indication of “As seen on boingboing.net,” an influential digital culture website. This feature is determined by the amount of traffic directed to the video from that address; its implications were discussed in chapter II.

Burgess and Green (2009) have called the attention to how YouTubers voiced a feeling of tiredness regarding another similar stereotype of YouTube videos they felt promoted the wrong idea about YouTube and was propagated by traditional media: the skateboard kid.
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Santa,” or “Hitler Loses his Teddy,” video-makers move on to more vicious tones, as Hitler has to deal with the murder of his unfaithful girlfriend by his own spies, or catches a sexually transmitted disease from someone he met in a club. Not all scorn of Hitler is based on fiction: despite also alluding to the sexual behaviour of the Führer and his officers, in “Hitler finds out his art sucks” the centre of the joke is part of his real biography, and one of his known personal failures – not fulfilling his artistic ambitions. In fact, most of them do not tackle “serious issues,” resembling child play, filled with silliness and invoking an upside-down world akin to the one described by Bakhtin (1984 [1965]). It is the pleasure of sharing a joke, where the joker is more of “an innocent homo ludens,” than a “homo homini lupus,” since “humour and laughter have their functionality in the fabric of social life, but they are just often playfully useless and senseless” (Zijderveld 1983, 57). But, beyond the nonsensical, is a “serious fun” approach being followed, as mentioned in the discussion on online parodies (Jenkins 2006)? Or are YouTube memes that deal with political issues doomed to be “unfunny and, and inevitably treat a complex issue simplistically” (Clay 2011, 228)?

From a literary approach, satire is broader than a normal literary genre. Satire is joined with irony as one of four narrative pregeneric elements of literature, mythoi or generic plots, alongside the romantic, the tragic, and the comic (Frye 2000, 162). Satire and irony both correspond to the “Mythos of Winter,” and one is distinguished from the other inasmuch as satire is considered to be “militant irony,” with clear moral norms and guiding standards. The more direct the attitude, the closer we are to satire, the more uncertain, the closer we are to irony. For the former to exist, Frye argues that it is required, on the one hand, “wit or humour founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque or the absurd,” and on the other, “an object of attack” (2000, 224). After what is described as a dramatic evolution during the eighteenth century, its reputedly golden era, satire is said to have “become a polymorphous and proteiform genre” (Goulbourne 2007, 159), and with time this seems to only have intensified. Unlike Roman times, we can no longer rely on a rigid format definition to guide us, when not even satire's status as a genre is consensual. Not restricted to one type of art, to one period, to one geographical location, “satire is merely the aesthetic manifestation of a universal urge so varied as to elude definition” (Test 1991, ix). For this author, satire is the blending of four elements, attack and humour, but also judgement and play, in infinite

16 Their absurd treatment of current events equally fits what can be described as “the empirically impossible or unlikely,” listed among the weapons the satirist draws from fantasy (Jemiellity 2007, 21).
variations.

Humour grounded in fantasy and play seem to be very present in the examples of the Hitler meme. Gamers and Internet users, for instance, seem to be laughing at themselves, engaging in a form of self-deprecating humour which may indicate a sense of common identity (Zijderveld 1983, 51). They understand each other, the allusions, the slang. Bordering on the disrespectful and anarchic, forms of comic excess weave multiple cross-references, in a use that is free, defiant, and reminiscent of culture jamming practices (Dery 2002; Cox 2010). Due to their very specific nature, such references share with many satirical subjects not being “always accessible or even clear to different audiences across place and across time” (Quintero 2007, 10). Misunderstandings may cause satire to be seen where it was not intended, or missed altogether (Pavlovskis-Petit 2007, 521). What is in fact satire is equally subject to debate: satire, parody and irony are often mistaken for one another, or considered to be equivalent (Kreuz and Roberts 1993; Hutcheon 2000).

Mainly concerned with the shortest-term, these videos directly address episodes or situations of the most ephemeral nature, and focused on everyday life, which has always supplied us with plenty of humorous material. Test tells us that it is in fact through here – through everyday life – that we can understand the core of satire. “Everybody at some time or other becomes angry at or indignant with people or events,” and either we bear with it, or we let our feelings out, namely by verbally attacking the reason for our anger (Test 1991, 2). As Bergson points out about comedy in his study Le rire. Essai sur la signification du comique, “the higher it rises, the more it approximates to life; in fact, there are scenes in real life so closely bordering on high-class comedy that the stage might adopt them without changing a single word” (1924, 61). Making, remixing, uploading and sharing online videos as ways of using technology in everyday life can be regarded as part of “an array of creative activities constituting the reproduction of the social actor with her relationships, knowledge and emotional well-being” (Bakardjieva 2005, 25). Perhaps we should bear in mind that, as the situationists put it, “boredom is always counter-revolutionary. Always” (original emphasis, C. Gray 1974, 44).
The Hitler meme and politics

The higher the moral standards someone has to uphold, the more of a target they are to the satirist. Speaking of the religious professions, Pollard states “affectation and hypocrisy are ready topics for him at any time,” and become even more appealing when those who fail have additional obligations in terms of behaviour (1970, 12). Politicians may well fit this profile and be more prone to attack and judgement through humour and play. While describing the ten life lessons one can learn from comedy, Morreall lists as number two: “[t]hink critically about authorities and institutions, especially ones that ask you to kill or die for honor” (2009, 142). He argues that since Aristophanes’ times political and military leaders have been comic butts, and “often portrayed as misleading people and causing harm under the guise of noble ideals like patriotism” (2009, 142).

In many videos “Hitler” personifies one of two distinct characters. On the one hand, an unnamed leader, who could be Hitler, or any authoritative figure perceived to have similar characteristics. On the other, the Führer himself, addressed directly as such, and at times with additional historical references framing the context. He is mocked as himself, alluding to his lack of skill in art, regretting his ears, or admitting his large ego. However, a third case can also be found: Hitler as a stand-in for a specific person from our current time.

This seems to affect politicians most of all. Due to the repercussions they may have, verbal attacks on the powerful may need to be disguised, and one possibility is to “mimic with slight exaggeration the manner of speaking, the tone of voice, what is said,” behind the person’s back (Test 1991, 3). The caricature of Hitler is carried out, first, by the original interpretation of Bruno Ganz, and then intensified by his placement in the realm of the utterly absurd. When it becomes a caricature of a politician it turns into a grotesque deformation, in which we recognize the abuses of power, political puppeteering or greediness for power and money, leading political life to cause laughter.

During the primaries for the 2008 US presidential elections, “Hillary's Downfall” illustrated this symbolic replacement, in which the Hitler character stood in for Hillary Clinton, generating controversy and contempt. In the same sense that Hillary Clinton had gained Big Brotheresque qualities in the “Vote Different” video, when she is represented as Hitler (see figure 44), a connection is established that leaves marks, and the same applies to all “victims” of the meme. Later on, Hitler became Obama in 'The White House Bunker:
Election Night 2009,” despite this only being implied and never directly said (unlike the previous one). Hitler equally filled unspecific Republican shoes, finding out about Sarah Palin quitting as governor of Alaska. Depicting a wished for resignation, Hitler became Gordon Brown (also in figure 44), surrounded by officers who made him aware of his unpopularity. In a sort of family portrait, Hitler embodied Sarkozy, while the other officers substituted French politicians with ties to the President, and the crying woman is identified as Carla Bruni.

Figure 44: Two examples of the Hitler meme in which Hitler embodies a contemporary politician: “Hillary's Downfall asdadafdasdasa” (on the left) and “Gordon Brown is informed that he should resign” (on the right). Screenshots taken on September 11, 2010.

At times, instead of politicians, other figures accused of despotic behaviour are targeted. In “Lock-out au Journal de Montréal,” the Hitler character represents Pierre Péladeau, a Canadian media owner, and founder of that newspaper. The officers and the crying woman act as doubles of other people linked to the confrontation between Péladeau and the worker's union. The video is part of the union's political action, directing people to their website. Besides opposing the founder's policies towards labour, it also criticizes current practices of using readers as a source of free content, as well as information control carried out by news media.

Politics is – as it has been in satire's history – a hot topic in Der Untergang parodies. The protagonists may vary, but one aspect is recurrent: the political influence of the media, and the politicians' concern regarding what is said about them. In “The Republican Downfall,” the Hitler character's response to bad media coverage is to order the burning of the newspapers, to which his officers reply that “the news is all over the Internet,” therefore beyond their control. Heavily filled with references to the Italian media landscape and
politics, “la fine di berlusconi?” portrays Hitler trying to find ways of creating distractions from news against Berlusconi. Here, once more ridicule is the weapon of choice. Accusations of censorship of a news program by the Portuguese Prime-minister, and the implication of such suspicions in the government elections of 2009 are discussed in “Bunker TVI.”

There are differences in reach of national political affairs, given the variations in international media coverage. Although both are the target of parodies, it is more probable that a non-French person understands the mocking of Sarkozy, than for someone outside Portugal to know the details of the affair involving the former Prime-minister Sócrates and a news anchor. This is evocative of Frye's assertion, “[t]o attack anything, writer and audience must agree on its undesirability, which means that the content of a great deal of satire founded on national hatreds, snobbery, prejudice, and personal pique goes out of date very quickly” (2000, 224). Furthermore, it places demands of awareness, mental participation, and knowledge on its audience, as reflecting the fact that “[s]atire is rarely a form of discourse with clear-cut or easily digestible meanings” (J. Gray, Jones, and Thompson 2009, 15).

I have shown how several examples described here, and not just related to politics, are so heavily knit with references that they are difficult to follow. As argued by the Web Editor of The Onion, it is hard to get a joke when you do not have any previous information about the target of satire (see chapter IV). Outsiders may find them amusing for being another instance of the meme, but the potential for laughing or criticism can only be fully grasped by those who know and understand the context. Perhaps one can speak of that “satisfying (although not particularly democratic) sense of inclusion of anyone perceptive enough to penetrate the secrets and concealed meanings of satiric allusions and ironies” (Rabb 2007, 580). A local will better understand why Hitler is complaining about the weather in Québec. However, some experiences are shared by people from distinct countries: one may not know exactly what the Prueba de Selección Universitaria in Chile entails, but national exams to apply for university are common worldwide. When anyone from a large city in Europe watches Hitler despair about paying for parking, the ordeal is recognisable and understood.

This last description concerns probably one of the most polemic videos linked to the Hitler meme: “Hitler is looking for a parking spot.” This video was no longer available at the time of the data collection, but we found a reposting of the Hebrew version, “Hitler cherche une place de parking,” with a second set of subtitles, in French. The latter was added through
YouTube's caption system, and not added previously to the upload, as it is customary. According to an Israeli newspaper, YouTube was contacted by the Centre of Organizations of Holocaust Survivors, requesting the video to be removed “due to its sensitivity” (Zilber 2009) – the video was eventually taken-down on a copyright claim by Constantin Films. In the “Talk Back” section of this article, however, there is not grave outrage about it: a few people are disturbed by the parody, but several others consider they have “bigger problems to solve” or that it is only a joke. Regardless of nationality, there have always been voices against the humorous use of the Hitler character in such videos. In the case of the 2008 US elections there were many people saying YouTubers were pushing it too far, as we have mentioned in connection with Hillary Clinton, and The New York Times news blog, The Lede, links the two parodies (Mackey 2009).

Anachronistically, Hitler is placed repeatedly in the twenty-first century, upset by the same things as the common man or in a struggle against his own image. Quality may vary, with a strong critical conscience or just for fun, more or less disturbing or polemic, these videos place Hitler in the role of Renaissance's discrediting representative, exposing himself, what or who he stands in for, in all their weaknesses. The parodies are not made to cause disgust, at least intentionally, but they may invoke pity on the pathetic figure.

In a statement for the New York magazine's online section “Vulture,” Oliver Hirschbiegel confessed being flattered by the derivative videos made out of his film. The director of Der Untergang seems to find them akin to his original intentions, despite the contrary tone, and is quoted saying: “The point of the film was to kick these terrible people off the throne that made them demons, making them real and their actions into reality” (Hirschbiegel cited in Rosenblum 2010). Video-makers may hence be said to follow the path defined by caricature, whose “focus is mainly on people in power, whom the caricaturist often tears from the pedestal they have been put on by others and by themselves” (Zijderveld 1983, 19), turning them into “unheroic fallible mortals” (Burke 2008, 79). However, it should be noted that “caricature, like wit, is always playing with fire, for just beyond its playfulness are anxieties that are all too real” (Paulson 2007, 316).

Does featuring the image of Hitler go too far? Is there a limit to satire – is there anything beyond its reach? Is ultimate cruelty untouchable? Perhaps not: “[s]atire flourishes especially in the run-up to and in the aftermath of the great dictators. Twentieth-century
fiction has been strongly on Juvenal's side” (Cunningham 2007, 400). Historically, randomly applying the label of “fascist” or “nazi” became a tool for delegitimizing certain political sectors or figures. The abuse of these accusations made them lose meaning and validity, turning them against the accusers for twisting the fundamental characteristics of Fascism and Nazism. The Nazi comparison was frequent online from early on (Godwin 1994), and this particular manipulation of Hitler triggered strong debate in a mailing list of Internet researchers (discussed in Leavitt 2010). The other side of the political spectrum has equally been targeted online in its own territory, specifically in the Chinese video website Tudou (although a few videos found their way to YouTube). Mao's Red Army Choir has been remixed into singing a variety of hits from the western music industry, from Michael Jackson to Lady Gaga, as well as themes from television shows, as illustrated by figure 45. “Messing with” media content is one of the forms of online political satire produced by the Chinese. Known as “egao,” it “is practiced on works that are popular or well-known, so as to make the act of cultural 'vandalism' humorous to a broader audience” (Esarey and Qiang 2008, 764). In the following section, the same can be verified in the videos posted in the channel “Subversive Remix Video,” as we see pop songs, television shows, news segments and advertising being manipulated into critical existence.

![Red Army Choir](image.png)

Figure 45: Example of a “Red Army Choir sings...” video on Tudou. In this case, it features the television theme song for the first animated series of “Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.” Screenshot taken on November 22, 2010.

17 This became such a common practice that it was used inside the Left among opposing sectors, even to groups and individuals who had no sympathy whatsoever for such regimes.
In his 1912 conference on political satire, Leal da Câmara (1982 [1912]) praised medieval caricaturists for their ability to overcome religious superstitions, even pure evil ones: the latter “created an infinity of devils and everyone was terrified. But the artists worked so well that by the end of the Middle Ages no-one took the devil seriously” (Câmara 1982, 22). Caricature hence operates in a “logic of desacralization” (Homem 2007, 747), in which “[s]atire does not exalt; it deflates,” and for this reason it can only deal with the transcendental by regarding it from his “own obliquely critical angle and through its own distorting mirror” (Pollard 1970, 7). All art, comic and tragic, takes on evil, and allows a reflection on values. Its ridicule and absolute trivialization may be what upsets critics in the iconic presence of Hitler in these videos, since being the target of satire is not new: from editorial cartoons to the powerful art works in photomontage by John Heartfield. Hitler himself seemed to deal with satire by facing it directly, supporting the compilation of his not so flattering depictions in the press – Hitler in der Karikatur der Welt [Hitler in the World’s Cartoons] and its follow-up Tat gegen Tinte [Facts versus Ink] – a task entrusted to Ernst Hanfstaengl, the then foreign press chief (Conradi 2006). Alongside the cartoons, it included comments, as well as statistics in the second volume, in an attempt to debunk the criticism made in the humorous images. Notwithstanding the commercial success of these compilations, it is not clear if it achieved its ends, because the cartoons and caricatures left a much stronger mark than Hanfstaengl's refutation efforts. As in this case, in which mockery trumps official discourse, even when politicians try to adopt a nonchalant attitude, in YouTube, gotcha moments and parodies are sought and watched, while speeches and public appearances are disregarded, unless they can become the target of a joke, a trend made evident in chapter V.

The apparent tolerance of political humour by the Nazi propaganda machine might be explained by “the awareness that humour is able to sublimate latent conflicts and thereby render them harmless,” operating “as an innocent outlet for hostile feelings” (Zijderveld 1983, 57). This tolerance also reflects the strength of the oppressor, and can only be sustained as long as that power is maintained. Czech jokes during this period are described simultaneously as “a harmless vent that allowed Czechs to continue working in factories while maintaining a

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18 Following similar arguments, the “Relief Theory” claims laughter releases the “excess steam” of the nervous system. After, focusing at length on the contributions given to this theory by Herbert Spencer and Sigmund Freud, Morreall declares that in his “overall assessment of the Relief Theory in its simple and complex forms is that it is based on an outdated hydraulic theory of the mind” (2009, 23).
vague sense of patriotism and integrity,” “a way of coping, staving off despair and attempting to come to terms with a world that lacked order and clarity,” as well as “an individual and localized 'resistance' quite different from the resistance portrayed by Czech patriots” (Bryan 2006, 148–9).

As discussed above, ambiguity is at the core of humour, and the “safety valve” metaphor used in this context seems to have the same characteristic for “it can satisfy both revolutionary and conservative moods,” producing rebellions and maintaining the status quo at the same time (Zijderveld 1983, 38). Even if this particular author does not fully subscribe the conservative view, he does not believe in a true revolutionary power of humour either. And he explains the twofold reason for this: “true humorists rarely join ideological movements. To the ideologically involved humour remains inscrutable and dubious” (1983, 42). And as Bryant points out, the effects of humour appear to only go so far: “[j]okes did not hasten the approach of Allied troops, disrupt the nazi war machine or save any Jews from destruction” (2006, 150–1).

Nonetheless, we should note once more that humorists, in particular cartoonists, do indeed play a game of tug-of-war with those in power, a very imbalanced game at times with serious consequences to the critics. In the conclusion of their comparative study about the media in democratic and nondemocratic regimes, Gunther and Mughan state “the contemporary political media [...] helped to sound the death knell of authoritarian or posttotalitarian regimes by fostering political pluralism, thereby helping to spread democracy” (2000, 444). Describing a series of examples as a backdrop to the Turkish case, Asli Tunç makes a similar claim in regard to satirical material, “the widespread use of editorial cartoons as a tool of resistance with major political and ideological implications plays a vital role in the democratization process” (2002, 50).

Despite this recognition of a positive contribute made by the media in nondemocratic contexts, paradoxically – in particular given technological development and rise in education levels – “within established democracies they have failed to live up to their potential to the improve the quality of democracy” (Gunther and Mughan 2000, 444). For these authors, media effects are mainly determined by the strategies and behaviour of political elites (which are the focus of their studies). In democracies, the tendency promoted by those elites led towards commercialization and “the dumbing down of the broadcast media,” which together
with the invention of the remote-control are said to have pushed viewers away from politics and towards entertainment, here understood as antithetical (Gunther and Mughan 2000, 445). Regarding online communication, Habermas noted that “although the Internet has a subversive effect on public spheres under authoritative regimes, at the same time the horizontal and informal networking of communications diminishes the achievements of traditional public spheres” (Habermas 2009, 53). Therefore, the democratic claims of computer-based communication seem hence to be restricted to specific contexts.

All of the videos discussed here were produced in democratic contexts, and one can hardly do a fair comparison between the issues addressed in these parodies and what was at stake during World War II. Having this in mind, what kind of role can YouTube parodic satires have?

It is probable some YouTubers had very little political motivation while making these videos, they were just participating in a funny meme, playing frivolously. Even in the case of the Czech jokes, this option is not discarded, since it is considered that ‘[o]ther jokesters might have had little or no regard for the fate of the national collective” (Bryant 2006, 148). In addition, the political mobilization of popular culture is mostly seen with contempt, as the already mentioned “dumbing down,” “[b]oth progressives and conservatives have displayed discomfort with the tone and content of popular culture” (Jenkins 2006, 283).

And yet, we have seen how Hitler's image has been widely used in popular culture to perform a political attack, and how the Führer himself felt obliged to publish a rebuttal to criticism made in a medium like editorial cartoons. In our analysis of videos featuring politicians, one of the issues we highlighted was the relation between media and politics. These short parodies point to the flaws of democratic societies, in particular the sometimes nebulous ties between politicians and journalists, reproaching them through laughter. In Bergson's words, that should be its function “[a]lways rather humiliating for the one against whom it is directed, laughter is, really and truly, a kind of social ‘ragging’” (Bergson 1924, 60). While “Gordon Brown” complains about unfavourable headlines and his involvement in controversies, in “Bunker TVI” the subject under discussion is the alleged control of media by the government. In “la fine di berlusconi?” mocking is focused on the attempts to deflect damaging news for the Italian Prime Minister. This far from flattering portrayal of politicians depicts them as mainly self-centred, with more concerns about their image – especially in the
media – than about their constituency.

In addition, although meme-making may seldom be instigated by political motivations, the denial of the possibility to partake in it is regarded as a political act that hinders YouTuber's cultural production and resistance capabilities. Take-down notices like the one issued by Constantin Films together with the consequent Content ID verification are regarded by YouTubers as indicators of YouTube's loss of its former community-driven ethos and a clear sign of co-optation.

Visual popular culture has a long history in becoming raw material for social and political critique, criticising itself in the process. This tradition in video making will be the topic of the next section, before the analysis of the work of a politically engaged and media savvy YouTuber.

**Subversive Remix Video**

As just argued in the last sections, Hitler has been the long subject of iconic mockery, and in moving images that is also the case. In politicalremix's channel, “Lambeth Walk: Nazi Style – by Charles Ridley (1941),” is described “as one of the first political remix videos.” This video shows a re-editing of Riefenstahl's well-known propaganda film, *Triumph of the Will*, synchronising German soldiers marching to the song “The Lambeth Walk,” from the 1937 popular musical *Me and My Girl*. As pointed out in the British National Archives regarding one of the multiple versions of this ancestor of satirical remixes,19 “the familiar music would certainly have tapped into the public consciousness at the time to enable everybody to share the joke” (Walsh n.d.).20 Even if part of the joke is somewhat lost on a more a contemporary audience, the contrast between image and sound, merriment and solemnity, was able to survive these decades.

In the YouTube video's description, the choice of this song in particular (also popular

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19 Many sources claim Charles Ridley of the British Ministry of Information as the responsible for this propaganda short (for instance, Bawden 1976; Aldgate and Richards 2007; Kerner 2011). Still, given that as pointed out in the YouTube's video description “the re-edit was distributed uncredited to newsreel companies in the US and UK,” many different versions were made: “Hitler Assumes Command” featured in UK's National Archives, for example, appears as being owned by the Crown and it is stated that “the provenance of this film is unclear” (Walsh n.d.).

20 In their description of special techniques to maximize the effect of propaganda, Jowett and O'Donnel explain how “[m]usic is an effective propaganda technique because it touches the emotions easily, suggests associations and past experiences, invites us to sing along, and embraces ideology in the lyrics” (Jowett and O'Donnell 2011, 304).
in Germany) was traced to the alleged hatred members of the Nazi party bore towards the respective dance, calling it “Jewish mischief and animalistic hopping,” as reported in US Media (The New York Times 1939). Moreover, the use of the very masterpiece of propaganda that aimed to portray an aura of greatness strengthened the desacralising attack. The ridicule to which it exposes the Nazi soldiers and officials, as well as Hitler himself, allows the establishment of a parallel between YouTube parodic satires and a work such as this: “[t]he appropriation of the Downfall is more in the spirit of The Lambeth Walk – Nazi Style than The Great Dictator” (Kerner 2011, 82).

Politicalremix's channel, entitled “Subversive Remix Video,” is connected to a previously existing blog.\textsuperscript{21} The latter is more active (more blog posts than videos uploaded), and besides indexing and safeguarding material, is dedicated to analysing and making current political remixes known as well as giving advise on how to make them (by including, for example, a list of “remixing tools,” namely free software, tools and resources). “Political Remix Video. Transforming Mass Media and Pop Culture” is run by Jonathan McIntosh, Elisa Kreisinger, ikat381, and Anita Sarkeesian. In the About section, these bloggers define political remix video (PRV) as “a genre of transformative DIY media production whereby creators critique power structures, deconstruct social myths and challenge dominate media messages through re-cutting and re-framing fragments of mainstream media and the popular culture.” While they associate political remixer activity with traditions such as \textit{détournement}, they distance it from video art or more academic commentary. The goal is to achieve the general public and thus “PRVs attempt to form an argument and convey a message in a familiar structure, using the framework as a vehicle to deliver subversive political messages.”

The YouTube channel includes videos that employed different forms of media manipulation from the 1940s to 2010 and is described as “[a]n archived collection of subversive remix video works that transform fragments of mass media pop culture to comment on politics, society, race, gender, sexuality and economics.” It hence aims to be an archive of remix and thereby show the continuity or the existing heritage inspiring remixing practices. In the blog, the most recent posts keep us updated on what is being done in remix at the moment, despite having previously featured the same videos in it.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{21} The first blog post was created on March 8, 2007, whereas politicalremix joined YouTube on February 4, 2009.

\textsuperscript{22} Videos here analysed were uploaded between February 5, 2009 and April 2, 2011. The uploading pattern is
“Lambeth Walk: Nazi Style – by Charles Ridley (1941)” does give us helpful insights to interpret remixes and video political satires in the early twenty-first century. This video uses techniques present in today’s video critiques. First, the mocking effect of the short is largely achieved by the juxtaposition of two seemingly incompatible and perhaps opposing genres, the musical and the epic propaganda film. Such contrast is intensified by the tone of each of the original sources, the ceremonious versus the playful, a confrontation won by the latter in the resulting mix. Second, the skilful use of cutting and editing effects, in which fast, slow and reverse motion as well as repetition allowed the creator to match movement and sound. The protagonists of *Triumph of the Will*, “an emotional production, engineered to work on the feelings and senses” (Salked 1996, 138), are hence made to dance, becoming Ridley’s unwilling puppets, increasing a perception of fragility of the Nazi machine.

Jumping over thirty years, we find three different excerpts from René Viénet’s “Peking Duck Soup” or “Chinois, encore un effort pour être revolutionnaire,” a 1977 film, described on YouTube as a “political *détournement* documentary.” This French director creates his video attack on the Chinese Communist Party and Mao Tse-Tung by following the situationist recipe of the subversive rearrangement of elements. Contributors to the Situationist International called for a new form of creativity, developed by everyone and not only an artistic elite, making everyday life passionate, rational and dramatic (C. Gray 1974), and transforming the real world, contaminated by the spectacle of capital turned image (Debord 2012 [1967]).

As in the first video analysed in this section, the most evident technique in the excerpts of “Peking Duck Soup” is the bringing together of different sources, that additionally correspond to different genres, conflicting with the viewers’ expectations and creating dissonance. For Viénet (1974), cinema was “the most modern and clearly the most flexible

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23 It is possible to find several excerpts and entire uploads on YouTube of Guy Debord’s 1973 film, *Société du Spectacle*, including with subtitles in different languages (English, Portuguese and Spanish were found). Due to YouTube’s length restrictions, the full version is each time divided in nine parts. *La Refutation* (1975) a reply to judgements made in *Société*, can also be found on this platform. The same applies to works inspired by or referring to it, as for example, a very current “Guy Debord calls the apple store,” in which audio from the website Audio Anarchy is illustrated by a diverse set of images presented in slideshow format.

24 Livingstone (1993) argues that each genre of programme corresponds to a different text-reader relationship, established under a specific contract between text and reader, which implies a respective set of expectations, functions, epistemology and communicative frame, and results in distinct types of involvement.
form of expression of our time” and situationists should take over “its most sophisticated, its most modern examples, which have escaped artistic ideology even more successfully than American grade 'B' movies: newsreels, trailers and, above all, ads” (1974, 103). While “The Lambeth Walk” presented cut and re-edited images of a single work, synchronised to the sound of its musical opposite, these three excerpts feature footage from newsreels, archives, kung fu films, advertising as well as filmed photographs and caricatures. Its sound component includes narration, original sound from the selected footage, and music. According to the “Peking Duck Soup [excerpt #2] - by René Viénet (1977)”’s description, a popular song from a Hong-Kong artist was also used in this work, tapping into shared references as in “The Lambeth Walk...” and the Chinese egao mentioned in the previous section.

Moving to the 1980s, we find two examples of the UK's scratch video scene uploaded in this channel. Once more, the description of “Death Valley Days: Secret Love - by Gorilla Tapes (1984)” and “Blue Monday - by The Duvet Brothers (1984)” supplies viewers with information regarding the historical background of the videos. It explains the particular context in which they were shown – “nightclub performances, at independent cinemas and through DIY distribution on VHS tapes” – and how their creators saw their work – “[s]ome scratch video artists called their work 'anti-art',” akin to Debord's anti-films. In scratch videos people “jammed, winged it and made it up as they went along,” and their legacy could later be seen on television, as “the grammar of editing and visual language have irredeemably changed” (G. Barber 1990, 123).

Both instances of scratch videos share one of their main subjects, conservative politics, and a strong criticism of Margaret Thatcher. Britain's then Prime-Minister was well known for supporting privatisation and corporations, and accused of promoting inequality due to those positions. They also have in common the techniques they employ: there is a mixture of distinct genres and media, from television to news shows, interviews, archive material and film, edited in slow motion, fast-forward or/and reverse. Yet again, the sound is part of the remixing labour. In the case of “Blue Monday...” only an altered version of the New Order hit makes up the soundtrack (besides a small introduction in the title sequence), whereas in “Death Valley Days...” different songs were integrated. However, their main difference lies in the use of humour: one is more vicious, closer to sarcastic satire, while the other can be seen as more tongue-in-cheek in their critique to Thatcher and her political action, and therefore
respecting the playful ways of ironic satire (Zijderveld 1983). In “Blue Monday...” most of the footage used is from demonstrations, whereas “Death Valley Days...” makes a mischievous insinuation about the relationship between Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, suggesting a love affair, while mocking Reagan's previous acting career.

In this channel, the 1990s videos include part of the work of an individual artist (Phil Patiris), clips from artist collectives (Emergency Broadcast Network – EBN, Paul Harvey Oswald – PHO, Negativland), and an interview to members of such a collective (Tape-Beatles). Starting with the excerpt of Patiris' work, the selection fell on the “culture jammed Exxon and GE ads” present in his “Iraq Campaign 91,” a 20-minute long collage of diverse television material. In this 1:52-clip the artist points his “own electromagnetic finger” (Patiris 2005) at the power of corporations, suggesting vested interests in the war and ownership control over the media. Here science fiction, news, advertising and sports coverage are edited together. Sound is remixed and repetition of the chorus is used for emphasis. The violence of war is not completely absent in the remaining minutes of “Iraq Campaign 91,” even if it is less evident in the excerpt chosen by politicalremix. However, in EBN's “Gulf War: The Air War [part 1] - by EBN (1991)” and “Gulf War: The Ground War [part 2] - by EBN (1991),” such violence is more at the centre of the political commentary, while the media coverage of the war is itself a strong target of this satire.

As in the previous videos, different genres and media – in this case news footage, entertainment shows, and cartoons – were edited together, only this time more special effects distorted the material. As an obviously “pretend” news network, it has its own logo, intermission image and captions noting how it is “unedited file footage,” “cleared lived by pool censors,” a “descrambled feed,” “unreleased” while simultaneously “digitally enhanced” and “dub.” Sound has a very important role: the fast pacing of the imagery is driven by strong rhythm, sometimes produced by a drum machine or kit, others by various weaponry. Politicians and newscasters see their speech altered to resemble rap music. As the Nazi had

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25 Patiris, EBN and Negativland are the object of an in-depth analysis by David Cox in his work on culture jamming (Cox 2010).

26 Patiris' political satire included many pop culture icons: for example, science fiction cult films (Star Trek – here shown, Star Wars and Dune), a reputed masterpiece of cinema (Lawrence of Arabia), as well as a very famous US soap opera, even outside its country (Dallas). However, films and television shows were not the only shared references present: close to the end the artist inserted footage from the infamous George Holliday's videotape of Rodney King being beaten down, mentioned in chapter IV as one of the instances of video being used as evidence of abuse.
danced pulled by Ridley's strings, George Bush Senior sings “We Will Rock You.” While in wil.i.am's video, a laudatory song was created from Obama's speech, here Bush's speech is mockingly turned into song. In these three videos the point was not limited to criticising the war. News professionals and stations are assigned as much responsibility for the spectacle of war – and more so for actively justifying it – as politicians. Therefore, media interpretations of current events and media messages are challenged, especially due to economic interests that may lie behind them (through sponsorship and ownership). It soon becomes a critique to mass media culture in general, for it “infects, replaces, and trivializes the reality, variety, and genuineness of life with a monolithic consumerist fantasy” (Patiris 2005).

Reminiscent of Carpenter's film They Live, marked by strong criticism on the promotion of consumption as the path to happiness and a prosperous society, “Watch Television - by EBN (1992),” “Greatest Taste Around - by Negativland (1997),” “Controlling Minds Want to Know - by PHO (1997)” and “Bless Your Car with Love - by PHO (1999)” face the viewer with a heavy satire on consumerism, television and the imagined world of advertising. Except for “Greatest Taste Around...,” since the remix video was specifically created for the respective single, once more a beat rushes and mashes up images together, and repetition is used to stress particular messages: the superfluity of the word “television” in US Vice President Dan Quayle's modified speech, the haunting loop of “Bless your Car with Love.” In this last case, the sweetness of the voice saying these words is in stark and disturbing contrast with the clips of car accidents accompanying it. In “Controlling Minds...” science fiction makes up a significant part of the images used, including dystopias such as Truffaut's Fahrenheit 451 (based on Bradbury's novel). For Mark Dery, examples of culture jamming such as these are

… an attempt to reverse and transgress the meaning of cultural codes whose primary aim is to persuade us to buy something or be someone [...] These cultural codes of purchasing are owned and controlled by corporations and states who fund them to extraordinarily high levels. The aim of these codes is to generate ways of life, forms of identity and human needs that serve their funders (Dery 2002, 102).
The colonisation of cultural codes means activism has to mobilise symbols, i.e. to engage in semiotic resistance, as Fiske would put it (1989b; 1989a), semiotic terrorism, in Dery's words (2002), or sign wars, to employ Cox's nomenclature (2010), “the wars in which the signs, symbols and emblems of power within our culture are being claimed by the population to be used for the purposes of expanding democracy and furthering freedom of expression” (2010, 3). As sustained in some of the interviews analysed in chapter IV regarding the work of satirists, the goal is to provide an alternative view, to reinterpret media messages, to reappropriate popular culture and corporate iconography: a resistance tactic in reaction to dominant strategies, to invoke de Certeau's conceptualisation.

Entering the new millennium we start to find different methods of remixing, even if the topics do not drastically change. Corporate power, politicians, war and the media remain the target of video satire. In “The Fellowship of the Ring of Free Trade - by St01en Collective (2002)” editing is used as in all the other remixes just described, however, the critique is done through the same method as the one used in the Downfall parodies – the adding of subtitles not related to the images of the film used in the video (Peter Jackson's The Fellowship of the Ring, the first of the Lord of the Rings trilogy, based on Tolkien's homonymous work). Positions on immigration policy are criticised through word-play, achieved through resorting to special effects: a being from outer space appears in a conference on illegal immigration in “John Ashcroft vs The Aliens - by Davy Force (2001).”

Following his father's footsteps, but now in a world where video remix became increasingly easier, George W. Bush is the target of several of the videos uploaded on this channel dedicated to “Subversive Remix Video.”30 Reminding us of “Death Valley Days...” with Reagan and Thatcher, “Read My Lips: Bush and Blair - by Johan Söderberg (2002)” brings us a love song featuring these two leaders and is part of a series of videos which “uses song lyrics to provide hilarious biting critiques of politicians.”

Using special effects, mixing genres (news footage and a children's show) and

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30 To exemplify his proneness to being video satirised, for instance, during the 2004 presidential campaign, George W. Bush was the object of a contest promoted by activist organisation MoveOn.org Civic Action, entitled “Bush in 30 seconds,” calling for homemade political ads against Bush. Two videos compared Bush and Hitler and were removed from the website, however, they became news-worthy a second time when his own campaign included them in a political ad (Shapiro 2004).
THE POLITICS OF YOUTUBE

betting on extreme ridicule, “State of the Union - by Bryan Boyce (2001)” caricatures Bush as a new born with destruction capabilities. “State of the Union... Not Good - by Edo Wilkins (2002)”, despite the similarities in the title, takes a different route. In this video “an alternative version of the yearly presidential address” is offered by editing the images from C-SPAN. In this dramatic transformation of his speech, George W. Bush tells the viewers he has been trained by the Al-Qaeda, that he is weak and materialistic, and asks people to join him in expressing fear and selfishness, among many other “statements.” Once more, the satirized is transformed into his own discrediting representative. In opposition to this openly evil version of the former president, in “Bush for Peace - by Sarah Christman & Jen Simmons (2003)” we find him committed to changing his ways. The speech announcing the invasion of Iraq in 2003 becomes instead the announcement of peace, together with a confession of how the USA have been until then a warmongering country.

The video “S-11 Redux: (Channel) Surfing the Apocalypse - by GNN (2002)” focuses on blaming Bush for the war efforts as well as the media for stressing fear and overexposing the threat of terrorism. Similarly to EBN's Gulf War videos, the editing together of how different news channels covered the conflict reveals the creation of a war rhetoric. These images are again joined to documentary, comedy, science fiction and even children's shows to deconstruct said rhetoric. The second part of the video, however, uses editing to demonstrate there is another discourse on the war, even if it is largely neglected.

In a previous video, the GNN – Guerrilla News Network – had already attacked media coverage by cutting “together footage from Ralph Nader speeches, the 1999 WTO protests in Seattle and nightly news broadcasts and set[ting] it to the beat of Beastie Boy Ad Rock's song 'Countdown'.” Here, as with the scratch videos in the 1980s and the works of collectives like EBN, music plays a vital role in setting the overall tone of the critique. Even if news media appear often as the target of satirical attacks, these networks themselves use remix for promotion and to show the accuracy of their work, as in “Tzipi Livni Gaza Remix - Al Jazeera English Bumper (2009),” where this station contrasts the account of the Israel defense minister Livni with images of destruction in Gaza. Here there is no “taken material,” since the rights to the footage also belong to the remixers.

Television in general is criticised, not just the news. In “Rampaging Footage - by Davy Force (2001)” images assume a wild animal existence, turning into the protagonist of a
parody of the “When Animals Attack” genre. In this type of programme, fear is the strongest emotion conveyed to the audience. In preparation for the increasingly rapid succession of clips from all kinds of television shows, the host carefully (and unwillingly) warns: “our final story is in a word disturbing. It proves that even footage can sometimes cause deadly harm. In this case the footage you are about to see goes on a rampage, killing one person and seriously injuring fifteen others […] and we remind you viewer discretion is advised.”

Racism and the offensive depiction in the media of certain groups within society similarly provide strong motivation for creating remixes. “George Bush Don't Like Black People - by The Black Lantern (2005)” is a mash-up criticising George W.'s actions during the rescue of Hurricane Katrina's survivors, and also the racist differential in the media analysis of what was happening on the ground (“when you see a black family, it says they're looting; when you see a white family, it says they're looking for food”). It brings together images from different sources, including photographs, and a Hip Hop song sampling a Kanye West hit, itself resorting to sampling. West was very vocal on his accusations of racism, and his statement “George Bush doesn't care about black people” became notorious as well as the title of the Legendary K. O.'s song featured in this video. By contrast, “When the Smoke Clearz - by GNN (2002)” launches an attack on a significant part of Hip Hop singers, probably the most famous ones worldwide, their ostentation of an impossible to attain luxurious life as well as the “multi-billion dollar” industry behind them. The glorification of crime, drugs and misogyny in their lyrics is the main accusation made by the slam poet singing in this video, while we watch excerpts from several music video clips.

Two videos are dedicated to other types of offensive depiction. “Planet of the Arabs - by Jackie Reem Salloum (2005)” is described as “a trailer-esque montage spectacle of Hollywood's relentless vilification and dehumanization of Arabs and Muslims,” illustrated by snippets from interviews, news footage, television programmes (including cartoons and children shows) and film. In its deconstruction of the stereotype of the Arab in US media, the video cites research on this topic, namely the book Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a

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31 Bush would later comment on this incident in his memoir, calling it “the lowest moment of his presidency,” according to The New York Times’ blog “The Caucus” (Baker 2010). Although seen as a rights advocate in this case, West has himself been accused of discrimination and misogyny (Reist 2010). A petition was launched against him, entitled “Prevent Official Release of Kanye West's Women-Hating 'Monster' video” (http://www.thepetitionsite.com/l/prevent-official-release-of-kanye-wests-women-hating-monster-video/). Feminists would later claim that petition forced MTV's arm into refusing to air it (Taylor 2011).
People, by Jack Shaheen, a Professor Emeritus of Mass Communication at Southern Illinois University. In turn, “The Real James Bond - by Veovisjohn (2009)” by editing and repeating clips from James Bond – played to the traditional James Bond music – evidences the existing misogyny in these films. This “visual critique” has been a casualty of the war between studios and remixers. The description of its upload to the Subversive Remix Video channel reads:

This remix video, like so many others, was removed from youtube due to a bogus copyright infringement claim by MGM that ignored the doctrine of fair use which protects critical and transformative works. We had an archived copy and so have re-uploaded it to YouTube for the world to once again see. We will defend it from further claims of "infringement" by copyright holders.

The dedication of this YouTube channel to the preservation of political remixes is expressed very clearly in the “Political Remix Video” blog post discussing “The Real James Bond...” It points out that “[o]ne of the major issues facing YouTube remix removals is that the comment threads, and discussions with in them, are lost,” a position akin to Hunt's (2007) addressed in chapter III. This concern with take-downs is also present in the description of the other videos they uploaded on the channel. In it, they display knowledge of the fair use doctrine and by it they try to guarantee their preservation online. All videos but a more recent one bear the following message in their description:

FAIR USE NOTICE: This critical and transformative remix video has been uploaded here for noncommercial educational and archival purposes. As such we believe it constitutes a fair use of any copyrighted material as provided for in section 107 of the US copyright law.

The reference to Fair Use in order to protect videos from take-down notices can be found in other videos on YouTube, especially parodies, such as The Downfall videos discussed above. Two of the remixes display Creative Commons licenses: “George Bush Don't Like Black People - by The Black Lantern (2005)” and “Bush for Peace - by Sarah Christman & Jen Simmons (2003).” Although both allow sharing provided the attribution of authorship is made (By), and that it does not have commercial purposes (NC), only the first one allows remixing since “Bush for Peace...” does not allow derivatives (ND). “George Bush

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32 The short Planet of the Arabs participated in the 2005 Sundance independent film festival, and the book Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People would inspire the following year a long-form documentary with the same title, supported by the Media Education Foundation, an organisation committed to the production and distribution of documentary films with a critical stance.
Don’t Like...” is clearly done by an advocate of a less strict copyright: it begins with a logo declaring “Artist supports filesharing WARNING! Free the art. Please distribute freely.”

Culture jammer Patiris responds to copyright claims in the following manner:

Well now... what all this comes under, quite simply, is the right of free expression. And the way that right is exercised, by myself and many others in this particular deconstructive niche, is bound to come up against the property rights (i.e. "intellectual") claimed by so many enormous corporations with enormous legal departments. When these rights come into conflict, which do you think should get priority in America, where Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness was originally written but then rejected as Life, Liberty, and Property? (original emphasis, Patiris 2005).

It is difficult to trace the actual legal limits of culture jamming, since they depend on the medium and form in question (Fitzgerald and O’Brien 2007). For culture jammers, the fact that to achieve transparency in media messages they resort to the same iconic material does not mean they are thieves: it is not stolen, it is “sampled (or appropriated, or found, or cited, different people use different verbs)” (Patiris 2005). “Sampling,” contends the artist, stems from previous cultural techniques present in different art forms. Sampling is linked to a influence of hip hop on popular culture and is more often used regarding music (Lessig 2008).

According to Carducci, “there is unquestionably a need to distinguish between culture jamming as an organized action perceived as an end in itself, and as an instrument of political action used by more conventionally defined social movements” (2006, 132). In his view, it is this connection to a larger purpose that carries its greatest potential. One could extend such argument to YouTube political remixes, namely by sustaining that their subversive power is greater when the stake is higher, as in the examples described in the following pages.

Donald Duck and Glenn Beck

The legitimacy of fair use is not consensual, particularly for the purpose of political commentary. “Insider video of Glenn Beck responding to Donald Duck remix (2010)” presents us a very outraged Glenn Beck, accusing the remixer of the “best well-made propaganda” he has ever seen, of being “yet another unbelievable attack.” Still, he claims, “it’s ok because the truth shall set you free.” For Beck, it is difficult to understand how a company like Walt Disney has allowed their cartoons to be “remixed and politicized for the
progressive left.”, under the guise of fair use. Walt Disney, the man, “hated the enemies of this country and the constitution, namely the communists, the socialists, the union organisers, dare I say it, the progressives.” Therefore, Beck implies the supposed permission to remix by the company goes against the founder's principles.

What video is Glenn Beck describing? It is “Donald Duck Meets Glenn Beck in Right Wing Radio Duck” created by Jonathan McIntosh, co-editor of the Political Remix Video blog and also responsible for the respective YouTube channel. This video was uploaded on McIntosh's YouTube channel, Rebellious Pixels (user rebelliouspixels), on October 2, 2010, and posted in his homonymous blog on the same day. Jonathan is well versed in making videos that capture the attention of a wide audience. His previous video “Buffy vs Edward: Twilight remixed” (see figure 13, chapter II), uploaded on June 19, 2009, had earned him the nomination for a Webby award in the Best Remix/Mashup Video category, over two millions of views, comments on blogs and online magazines (such as Wired UK), as well as mainstream media (for example, the LA Times, The New York Post or Vanity Fair).

He presents himself as “pop culture hacker, video remix artist, new media teacher and fair use activist,” a description mockingly read in “Insider video...” by Beck. As Citizentube interviewees commenting on satire and politics declared regarding their work, he also states that he transforms “fragments of mass media pop culture to tell alternative political, social and cultural stories.” McIntosh establishes a parallel between what he does and what hackers do, in his words “instead of computer code I hack television.” Literature on computer hacking describes it as “the act of taking a pre-existing system and bending it to serve a different end from that for which it was originally intended” (Dafermos and Söderberg 2009, 55). Sociological analysis of culture jamming equally establishes the parallel between this subversive activity and the “hacker ethos” (Carducci 2006).33 “[H]acking opens up technology to innovation and revision. For many hackers 'work', if done on a computer, means play,” Cox remarks, further adding “[t]his spirit of experimentation and play is at the very core of the culture jammer aesthetic” (2010, 24).

In the comment section of the video, Jonathan states it took him “about 3 months in total (working on it almost everyday) including collecting and cataloging all the clips” to make this video. It is different from a remix such as “Gesto de Manuel Pinho - Versão

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33 In his research on tactical media practices, Miguel Caetano (2006) linked culture jamming, hacktivism as well as artivism and open source journalism.
Desenhos Animados” (see figure 26, chapter III), also using cartoons, which was created and uploaded on the same day the event it satirises occurred.34 The first aims to be an argument in a wider and long-lasting discussion, the other more of a joke on the faux-pas of a particular politician, and is more dependent on the “nowness” of the situation and video. “Buffy vs Edward...” had already been a lengthy project, since it was put together over a 6-month period according to McIntosh.

The “Donald Duck Meets...” is very clearly the product of hard labour. Just looking at the sources used can tell us that. These seven minutes and forty-six seconds of remix include clips from forty-five different Disney cartoons (from the 1936 to 1961, and one from 1983)35 and audio from ten separate sources (cartoons, but also television and radio shows).36 In this case, the mixing of genres occurs not in the imagery used, but in the audio that has been added. Besides these excerpts, McIntosh created title cards that mimic those commonly found at the beginning and end of cartoons. The end title card has an annotation directing viewers to Glenn Beck's response, the video already mentioned, and under “The End” it has the name of McIntosh's website and the fair use notice, as seen in figure 46.

The video narrates the story of Donald Duck, unemployed, unable to find a job to replace the one he lost, and having to face a foreclosure notice due to missed payments on his mortgage. “As his frustration turns into despair Donald discovers a seemingly sympathetic voice coming from his radio named Glenn Beck,” McIntosh lets us know in the video's description. The “culture hacker” entices viewers to watch this mash-up of cartoons in order to find the answer as to whether Donald will fall victim or not of Beck's “increasingly paranoid and divisive rhetoric.”

34 During the annual State of the Nation debate held by the Portuguese Parliament, the Minister of Economy and Innovation (2005-2009) did an offensive gesture to a member of a party of the opposition. This action received a general strong negative reaction, and resulted in a formal apology from the Prime-Minister still during the debate, followed by the Minister's resignation on the same day, July 2, 2009. This video remixes footage of the polemic gesture, from the Portuguese Parliament's cable channel, and a Dutch-Japanese cartoon which ran on Portuguese television mainly during the 1990s.

35 The Political Remix blog dedicated a post in 2007 to a short video created by Eric Faden, Bucknell University, and distributed by the Media Education Foundation, which used several Disney cartoons to discuss copyright law and explain the fair use doctrine. Other blogposts show how Disney cartoons have been used to debate depictions of masculinity and race, environmental issues, and even how they can be subversively transformed to create a mash-up “in which Disney princesses liberate themselves from their own sexist movie representations.”

36 McIntosh refers to fifty cartoons being used in his website, however, only forty-five are listed both on the website and in the YouTube video's description.
Figure 46: Video “Donald Duck Meets Glenn Beck in Right Wing Radio Duck,” main moments of the narrative: Title card, Donald's troubled times, discovery of a sympathetic voice, Beck's racist remarks, Donald's confrontation with Beck, End title card (sequence left to right, top to bottom). Screenshots taken on December 14, 2011.

Speaking through anthropomorphic radios and machines, Glenn Beck's voice tells Donald the government has neglected him, communists and nazis roam the streets (“you have to think like a German Jew in 1934”), and that a dangerous and fearful time was approaching:

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37 When the Nazi comparison is made we see a clip of the cartoon Der Fuehrer's Face, previously mentioned.
“Black Panthers, ACORN, reparations, welfare, Jeremiah Wright, Van Jones, Obama himself, Al Qaeda, Iran, Islamic Jihadists, terrorists, Venezuela, immigration, Mexicans, refugees, drug lords, Hispanic groups, South America, illegal aliens, Mexico, the Chinese, everyone is coming”

To create the enumeration different excerpts of Glenn's programs were used, and it is possible to discern the cuts. After this, a more dreamy surrealistic scene starts with Donald Duck and a Mexican Disney character (Panchito Pistoles) while we still listen to Beck’s voice saying “drug lords, illegal aliens, Mexico,” followed by the promotion of his subscription show. Donald scraps his last pennies to pay for it and as he receives a package with a machine broadcasting Beck's paid show “Insider Extreme,” the story takes a turn. Now Beck is antagonizing Donald by shouting “Lazy slob that refuses to get off the couch and get a job.” Donald gets angry and shoots the machine with a rifle.“Good riddance” is Donald's final remark.

In comments, reaction to this video is heterogeneous: we find both praise and criticism. There are many compliments on the video that concern the quality of the remix, the use of classic Disney cartoons as well as the political critique:

What makes this such a triumph isn't merely the social commentary or the humor that comes from the unlikely juxtaposition -- both of which are great -- it's that you accomplished those things while staying true to the form and spirit of a Disney short of that era. This is as enjoyable for a hardcore animation fan as it is for a politically thoughtful person.

However, it is also possible to find a great deal of conflictual debate. First, between viewers who agree with McIntosh's perspective on Glenn Beck and believe the radio host is being accurately portrayed (“This is brilliant. Captures the spirit and message of that despicable, hypercritical, lying snake, Glenn Beck PERFECTLY!”), and those who absolutely disagree and accuse the remixer of manipulating Beck's statements (“Might be funny if rebelliospixels was able to represent Beck for what he actually believes rather than a made-up image”). There are often references to Beck mentioning this video on his show and to accusations he made about McIntosh and the remix (“My favorite thing ever is that Glenn Beck said that this cartoon got Federal funding”). This discussion soon broadens and turns into a more general argument on topics such as the Tea Party, right-wing vs left-wing politics, capitalism, and the bail-out issue involving Bush and Obama. The chain of comments
stemming from this video resembles much more a “conversation” or “lively debate” than main pattern on EUTube, especially on the channel's comment box (see chapter V).

The threat of take-down was also debated, as were the limits of fair use and if it applied to this work, or even if fair use is in fact fair for copyright owners. McIntosh often replies to commentators and this was one of the subjects of such interactions. In this example, the artist claims a take-down notice would work more to his advantage that the opposite: he seems to be counting on controversy to generate support and further the video's popularity:

User 1: "This transformative remix work constitutes a fair-use of any copyrighted material as provided for in section 107 of the US copyright law." Cute. Hey, at least it's a step-up from outright copyright infringement by those teenage dumbasses who post the work of others and figure "all characters belong to their respective copyright holders" will absolved them of all wrongdoing if posted in the description. That said, great job, even if it does hijack the work of the original creative artists.

rebelliouspixels @User 1: The fair use doctrine is not "cute" its a right under us copyright law that makes exceptions for transformative works intended for commentary, parody, critique and education. Its what the Daily Show does every-night for example. Many more creative projects fall under fair use than you might think (even many of the funny videos by those genius "teenage dumbasses" like lip-synced music videos etc). See the Center for Social Media to find out more on fair use & online video

User 2: While it's true that you are employing satire in your work here, strict fair use DOES NOT allow you to purloin 7:46 of Disney animation. You could reasonably get by with using much shorter snippets embedded at intervals in a longer piece (as does "The Daily Show", "Colbert Report", "The Onion" and countless other satirical broadcasts, as you've correctly pointed out). Disney is pretty protective of their branding and my guess is you'll be hearing from them very soon!

rebelliouspixels @User 2: Heres hoping! That would make this remix even more popular on the interwebs. But I know, and Disney knows, that I have a very strong fair use case and that any attempt at a DMCA takedown would ultimately fail and also result in much more media coverage. BTW there are short clips from 50 separate Disney cartoons, none lasting more than a few seconds.

In these comments we can find that professional satire like The Daily Show, The Colbert Report or The Onion are regarded as role models on how to use “borrowed images” to
perform criticism (see chapter IV, especially the respective interviews). Like what happened in the case of *Downfall* parodic satires, the possibility of receiving a take-down notice is perceived as real. However, this is not considered a threat, as the video remixer strongly believes in his fair use defence and actually thinks that any attempt to block his video would result in more popularity – he would be another YouTube martyr at the hands of a powerful corporation abusing copyright law. In terms of video responses, the numbers were low, as in previous examples in this dissertation: only five, and two of them were from McIntosh as rebelliouspixels and politicalremix. The latter were the “Glenn Beck gets 'Donald Ducked' - CBS Channel 5 Evening News” and “Insider video of Glenn...” The CBS's news story refers not only to the video itself, but also to Beck's response on his show. It includes an interview with McIntosh in his home, where he praises the possibilities of expressing one's opinion allowed by online media: “I like that I'm able to speak back at him, and that people are using remix, or YouTube, to talk back and there can be a larger voice for those of us who don't have a big radio or TV station.” Yet, here we see how the relation between said “new media” and “old media” greatly intersects.

The three other videos include: “Glenn Beck Responds To Donald,” a photomontage of a oddly grinning Beck with both hands tight-fisted around dollar bills with the American flag as backdrop, featuring the audio of Beck's radio show attacking the remix (the same as “Insider video of Glenn...”); “Day 9 of 'Mastering YouTube in Fifteen Days' by Jessica Kellgren-Hayes” strongly praises McIntosh (“the highly accomplished [vidder] Rebellious Pixels”) and characterises his work as a remixer, including a long review of the Donald Duck video (thorough description, sharing processes, reactions – videos and comments); and “Mickey Mouse Discovers the Government Cartoon Conspiracy Against Glenn Beck,” a remix done in response to Glenn Beck's outrage against McIntosh. This video brings together a small clip of a Mickey Mouse Cartoon with Beck's show on “Donald Duck Meets...” Presented as “[a] complete ripoff of Rebellious Pixels” Beck is an intimidating voice coming out from a radio and performing an enumeration of enemies, such as the one in the Donald Duck remix, that now includes McIntosh. It was created by iKat381, also a Subversive Remix Video blogger.

As to impact outside YouTube, the remixer posted links on his website to all kinds of coverage and discussion: Best Online Discussions (ranging from a blog on trends in animation
to one dedicated to feminist discussions), Press & Posts (including features in the blogs from
the Washington Post and TIME, the Huffington Post and Boing Boing, among various others),
and Tweets (from people with different profiles: Roger Ebert, Chicago Sun-Times
entertainment columnist; John Cusack, actor; and Bill O’Reilly, famous host of Fox’s talk
show The O’Reilly Factor). In the In-Depth item we find an interview with Henry Jenkins
about DIY Remix Video, posted in his blog Confessions of an Aca-Fan, a Digital Researcher
Profile Interview carried by a Robert W. Gehl, a New Media professor at the University of
Utah, and a link suggesting readers to “watch the dynamic HTML5 version with detailed
source annotations.”

Tim Berners-Lee elaborated the first proposal for the creation of the world wide web
– written in HTML (HyperText Markup Language) – in 1989. The establishment of the
HTML standard allowed the possibility for different browsers to interpreting the elements that
make up a web page, i.e. tags within angle brackets, to hence compose their content to be seen
or/and heard by the end user without displaying its structure. In the early 1990s, Andreesen
and Bina created the first browser that took full advantage of HTML: it was possible to
navigate by clicking with a mouse on hyperlinks (presented in a different colour), while text
and image were seamlessly integrated (Ceruzzi 2003). The Internet had become more visual
than ever before. In January 2008, the first W3C working draft was published for the fifth
major revision of HTML. HTML5 includes new elements that contribute to a more iconic-
based Web, namely the video element, among other alterations. The video element allows web
surfers to access video content without the need to resort to proprietary plugins such as the
flash player – previously mandatory for watching YouTube videos. McIntosh is a member of
the Open Video Alliance, “[a] coalition of organizations and individuals devoted to creating
and promoting free and open technologies, policies, and practices in online video” (OVA
2011), which hence has been very active in the promotion of HTML5 to replace closed
standards.

The version of “Donald Duck Meets...” linked in the In-Depth section was created
by resorting to an HTML5 framework known as Popcorn.js which allows dynamic links

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38 This document's goal was “to persuade CERN management that a global hypertext system was in CERN's
interests” (Berners-Lee 1989).

39 The W3C (World Wide Web Consortium) develops protocols and guidelines for the web, including the
discussion and definition of the evolving standards of HTML.
between web content and the particular video, in connection to the latter's timecode. As the video plays, the watcher can be directed in each specific point to a map, an photograph, a blog, a tweet, in short, any other online content or additional comments. In this case, McIntosh chose to point watchers to the source material of the remix (audio and video separately), Wikipedia entries related to the topics discussed on each segment of the video, as well as notes explaining both facts pertaining to what is said on the remix, and how it was produced. This last type of notes is particularly interesting given it deconstructs the creation process behind “Donald Duck Meets...”: it explains the existing manipulation of the visuals (for example, how some of writing featured on the cartoon was modified to fit the video's narrative), and clarifies McIntosh's reasoning while putting together the images and the audio.

![Figure 47: Presentation of the html5 video demo in the website Rebellious Pixels. Legend displayed: “(1) Displays the current visual clip info. (2) Displays the current audio clip info. (3) Displays relevant wikipedia articles. (4) Displays production and factual notes.” Red text carries an hyperlink to the original untampered content. Image posted by McIntosh (2011) on the Rebellious Pixels blog on January 31, 2011.](image)

HTML5 together with a framework like Popcorn.js hence provide context to what is being viewed. It is is very difficult to deny the modification this entails: the experience of watching “Donald Duck Meets...” on YouTube where the contextual elements are just the ones allowed by the platform (title, description, tags, comments, video responses and video

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40 Popcorn.js is part of the Mozilla Drumbeat Projects, a community with the motto “Connect. Share. Hack Everything.” These projects include regarding video Universal Subtitles (a tool enabling the crowdsourcing of subtitles), and Web Made Videos (an open video lab and production studio), among many others. These two are part of the list present in the section “Tools” of the Political Remix blog, to help make remix videos, namely by resorting to free software.
suggestions) is different from watching the same video within a framework that reveals the inner working of the remixing process, both technical and argumentative. Such wider contextualisation can be regarded as a further step towards the constitution of counterpublics that are more aware of the multiple facets of political and social challenges.

Remixing, however, has to deal with some restrictions in its critique, namely the fact that “constructing new meanings out of a database of video images is not the same as creating new sentences in spoken language,” and in this sense the original footage will never cease to affect the resulting remix, regardless of the proficiency of the YouTuber and how seamless is his work (Edwards and Tryon 2009). Andrew Clay critically addresses how content indeed affects us, as YouTube videos insinuate themselves into everyday life, instead of the opposite, a process that can be easily exploited and incorporated by corporate media:

In this respect, it might be more appropriate to refer to ‘content-generated users’ (CGU) than to ‘user-generated content’ (UGC). This term acknowledges the extent to which we are either made by, or make ourselves in, the processes of mediation, and sometimes within remixes of commercial culture. As engaged couples plan their wedding ceremonies as if they were music videos, and people use Downfall as a proxy for their own views of an issue, it is clear that we are made by the content, and adopt new technologies at the same time as we are transformed by them. We have always been CGU, and our mediation will always appear novel - although not always as joyfully and harmoniously as YouTube would have us believe (Clay 2011, 232).

Can subversion be fully successful if one depends strictly on images coded with dominant meanings?

Conclusion: Subversion, remix and humour

A society based on organised survival can only tolerate false, spectacular forms of play. But given the crisis of the spectacle, playfulness distorted in every imaginable way, is being reborn everywhere. From now on it has all the features of social upheaval and, beyond its negativity the foundations of a society of real participation can be detected. To play means to refuse leaders, to refuse self-sacrifice, to refuse roles, to embrace every form of self-realisation and to be utterly, painfully, honest with all one's friends. [...] Subversion is the only possible revolutionary use of the spiritual and material values distributed by consumer society: supersession's ultimate deterrent. (Vaneigem 1974, 145)
In humour, and satire as well, metaphor is often present. The cognitive value of the metaphor, in everyday life, in art, and even in science, is well established (Lakoff and Johnson 2003 [1980]). Positivist conceptions denying the character of knowledge to the sphere of connotation were called into question by hermeneutical criticism. A metaphor is in a way an image, it speaks to imagination. As with humour, an effort should currently be made to interpret the symbols and semantics conjured by images, that is, their cognitive value. The realm of image, perhaps at the centre of the Internet's technological culture, is equally connected with decisive aspects of today's social structure of knowledge and play. In the words of Peter Burke, “images are neither a reflection of social reality nor a system of signs without relation to social reality, but occupy a variety of positions in between these extremes” (2008, 183). As a result, they present a challenge for a sociological effort of knowledge, which has drifted apart from iconography as a fundamental source for the understanding of contemporary culture and its relations to social and political life (González García 1998).

Images are as much a constituent of social life as the meanings they suggest, even if directed at the eye and exposed to observation. Human beings interact with each other by seeing and being seen, turning sight into one of the most important senses in interaction (Simmel 1921). A visual sociological imagination can afford new opportunities for understanding social life, through studying all images, and not only the consensual iconic ones. In the twenty-first century, newspapers, television, films and the Internet display more and more forms of pictorial satire. Still, if humour and parodic satires' ideological status can be regarded as subversive and therefore revolutionary, it may also be perceived as palliating and conservative, allowing for moments of relief but no actual transformation. Which is the case in online video?

Drawing upon Michel de Certeau's analysis of the everyday life's practices, resistance can be regarded as lying “in small gestures immersed in the current daily life that despite their apparent triviality prove to be crucial in countering domination and instigating social change” (Bakardjieva 2005, 193). For van Dijck (2009), democratic culture is tied to the construction of individual and group identity, and “[c]itizenship has to do with belonging and participating in a public sphere inundated with media” (2009, 44). Citizens taking advantage of online video to expose the often murky relations between politicians, media companies (including online media) and corporations, can arguably be included in an alternative repertoire of
political participation, especially as a cause-oriented political action. Satirical remix challenges meaning, questions images, makes demands to the intellect. At the same time, it is at centre of the struggle between online gift economy and commodification. It also has serious limitations as to the creation of consensus: it pushes away outsiders that have a hard time understanding the references being alluded to; it exacerbates differences of opinion; it accuses, but seldom offers an alternative.

The political facets of online video are complex and often contradictory, and as this dissertation is being written and presented, the horizon of citizen empowerment remains uncertain. In the following pages, I will conclude this dissertation by elaborating on the main arguments discussed across all chapters, and thereby propose a few answers to the research questions presented in the Introduction.
Conclusion

The democratic potential of the web – and the social web in specific – is commonly associated with its capacity both to allow politicians to have direct conversations with citizens and to reach the disenfranchised (particularly, the youth), and to enhance the communication ability of citizens by giving them voice, and therefore levelling the playing field. The main cause of anxiety in this context derives from the possibility of the widening of divides which reflect inequalities in access, in skills, or in participation, that may reinforce previous discriminatory conditions. Even this concern does not question the overall social and political benefits of information technologies, since the issue is centred on the need to make them equitably available to everyone. Meanwhile, other sources of criticism are downplayed, especially in the official rhetoric promoting “Information Society” or exalting the democratic potential of “Web 2.0.” These challenges include barriers in institutional culture, populism, fragmentation of the public sphere, the transformation of citizenship into consumption, extremism and balkanisation, as well as several issues regarding the control over information, procedures and participants themselves.

The main objectives of this PhD research concerned, first, the perceptions of YouTube’s influence on political discussion, and, second, the diversity of practices carried out in this context by political organisations, politicians and citizens. Regarding the representations of the role of online video, these seem to follow suit and reproduce the same perceptions of the advantages democratic action could derive from the dissemination of ICT. Particularly due to its perceived informality and absence of mediation, online video distributed through websites like YouTube is regarded as bringing politicians and citizens closer together.

The predominance of entertainment formats (humour, animation, music) is connected to a perspective of the web in general as lighthearted and fitting to engage young people. It also contributes to the sense of an informal character of online video. The latter is described as the perfect medium to carry out conversations on political affairs. As a conveyer of political discussion across boundaries, YouTube bears the promise of enabling an international public sphere, while also participating in the building of a shared identity. With respect to
culture, online video is regarded as transformative of the cultural environment introducing new dominant actors, forms and dynamics. Unfortunately, from the critical observation and analysis of YouTube and its videos on political issues, these high hopes are not entirely justified both in top-down and bottom-up perspectives, falling short of their ambitions. In this conclusion I will address some of the key issues that were revealed prominent from the contrast between literature, official discourse and empirical observation.

A first major point to be made is that YouTube does not have an inherently civic or communitarian nature; rather it is a commercial website, treating the promotion of political topics and actors much the same way it treats the promotion of products. YouTube's mission is not democratisation of any kind, including of culture; rather this company's purpose is to generate profit. This income stems mainly from advertisements on videos, but also from other marketing strategies, either inspired by Google's experience or specific to the online video website. These promotional tools have an impact on the visibility of channels and videos, skewing their ability to reach a sizeable audience, as well as contribute to the dominance of mass-oriented formats.

YouTube's invitation to “Broadcast Yourself,” the analogies with television, chosen metrics and early statements regarding this video website seem to imply mass communication was always part of its design. Even if one recognises that there was an initial surge of openness, accessibility, creativity and experimentation on YouTube, driven by the community of YouTubers, a tendency developed for turning the website into a increasingly more closed system, in which YouTubers mainly replicate already tested models in order to try to achieve the same results as early YouTube celebrities – YouTubers who became famous on and off YouTube. Achieving success in online amateur video means almost exclusively to obtain commercial revenue and fame. The cultural or communicational contribution of online videos is, at best, an afterthought. An important part of YouTubers may start off as amateurs, but there is a tendency for professionalisation to soon become a goal, both in terms of competence in video-making and payment. Such state of affairs begs the question: what becomes of an amateur culture once it leaves a gift economy and privileges the commodification of its creations? A full response may not yet be available, but this turn towards the commercial side of the Internet has its political consequences.

“To go viral” turned into an obsessive goal, for amateurs and professionals alike.
Virality, however, is not only achieved exclusively through the promotion on YouTube. A spiral of popularity is created through cross-posting, often with a strong intervention from traditional media actors and, in the political case, campaign managers. Professionals did not remain for long in the sidelines of online video, despite their initial skepticism and antagonistic behaviour. The first years in which YouTube was faced with a cascade of lawsuits for copyright infringement and difficulties drawing ad money are behind us. Several key players of the content industries have embraced YouTube, either by posting their own content and preventing others from doing the same, or by leaving the task of uploading to YouTubers, and then tracking and monetising those videos. The partnership with YouTube became more solid as sophisticated tools facilitated the control over copyrighted material, while leaving the burden on YouTubers to prove they have the right to upload the videos. Even Viacom, once YouTube's legal nemesis, has complimented the video company in this respect. Software is blind to fair use claims, and even if a YouTuber can reply with a counter-notification and hence oblige the company to pay a closer look at the automatic copyright identification, these claims are expensive to defend if they reach the courts. Besides being highly prone to misuse (excessive or false claims), Content ID verification does not carry out a contextual analysis of the discussions brought about by the videos through comments or video responses to understand their cultural, social and political relevance.

Copyright holders, if they so wish, may appropriate videos, not only with their untouched content, but also transformative works or videos that partly feature copyrighted content (e.g. a song in the background). This capacity allows the extension of the tracking placed on YouTubers by content companies, and is integrated in metadata gathering processes linked to marketing strategies. These increasingly sophisticated forms of profiling – which have been enhanced in the case of YouTube, when its metadata was shared with Google's – evoke two concerns connected with information technologies, including the social web: the dangers of invasion of privacy and balkanisation. The former deepens fears of the extension of surveillance capabilities, from both companies and official authorities. The second contributes to the fragmentation of the public sphere and consequently endangers consensus building. YouTube directs us to what is the dominant online viewing behaviour – according to popularity metrics inside and outside the website – and to what is related to our previous activity patterns. By tailoring our video watching experience to what YouTube perceives as
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more adequate to us, we are sheltered from contrasting perspectives and even from issues we had no previous knowledge of or interest in.

Politics in YouTube have progressively changed, and one of these transformations was the inclusion of online video in government-citizen communication strategies. Politicians, governments and institutions started publicly acknowledging benefits in having a YouTube channel, including in policy documents. Such democratic advantages were attributed to shortening the distance from citizens, and ranged from being a direct way to publish information to enabling interaction, all this while following citizens to where they already were, instead of trying to draw them to official websites. However, the social web features enabled by the website have been largely neglected, leading to discrepancies between discourses praising online video as a communication medium and the actual practices by politicians, governments and organisations. It is possible to establish a few parallels with the debates and politics of e-democracy: despite a participatory rhetoric, practices are more closely tied to a narrow model of representative democracy. Decision-making procedures remain unaffected, while citizen input is controlled by restricting interaction on official channels, and, in a more extreme way, by censoring videos uploaded by YouTubers.

As had previously happened with websites, politicians resort to online video, and the social web in general, in the context of awareness campaigns and – especially – during elections. Even in this case, “political communication as usual” is carried out with little adaptation to the context. The main differentiation strategy is to make politics “more fun,” therefore assuming a more informal stance, to make politicians seem more approachable as well as to reach and engage young people. Despite this emphasis on informality and proximity, politicians rarely draw upon online video to engage in conversation with citizens: politicians present themselves as available for dialogue, but they seldom move on from the display of availability.

Outside electoral competition, the most frequent situation is an extension of institutional communication formats and the persistence of a broadcast pattern. Monologue instead of dialogue is therefore the standard form of communication through online video by the European Commission and a significant number of European politicians. When commentary – text or video – is allowed or even sought, politicians do not exchange views with YouTubers or react in any way to the online debate: questions are left unanswered, criticism unchallenged, there is no “back and forth.” Therefore, online video is not an alternative form of political communication creating a distinct paradigm from previous
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methods of reaching citizens. Initiatives like “Questions for Europe” take place in a highly controlled setting, even more than the model from which it drew inspiration, the CNN/YouTube Debates. Moreover, as with YouTubers and content companies, there is an obsession with making “viral videos,” a fixation with numbers, with how many views, share or likes a video achieves. Even if the videos reach those statistics due to controversy and heavy criticism, like in the case of “Film lovers will love this” or the more recent “Science: It's a girl thing!” (June 2012) – which received so many complaints the European Commission eventually decided to take it down – European officials still praise these videos, describing them as successful for generating audience and commentary. However, in politics there is such thing as bad publicity.

Contrasting with the sanctioned images of public appearances and speeches politicians upload to the web, “gotcha” or “macaca” moments and parodies seem to be able to reach a much wider audience. This points to some degree of change in the communicative balance between politicians and citizens, although one must not forget the existence of astroturfing and that embarrassing situations have always been attention grabbers, including in news media. It nevertheless confirms that online video has affected the control politicians have over their image – both in literal terms and regarding the impression that is left on citizens. A sign of the resulting need to control not only videos but also the discussion they may provoke is the common practice of disabling comments, therefore recognising that they may influence viewing or interpretation. A second, very concerning, sign that politicians have begun to take action in this regard is the increasing number of requests from governments to geographically block or take down specific videos. What raises more apprehensiveness is the fact that this trend is not restricted to dictatorships, as cybersecurity drives democratic governments to adopt a controlling attitude as well.

To politically engaged citizens, however, being forced to take down their videos or seeing them blocked is not the only concern. Privacy threats raised by YouTube's tracking of user behaviour are a particular source of apprehensiveness since it implies that to protest on this video website may not be entirely safe. Such fears are not without cause, as governments increasingly issue user data requests to companies like Google, in addition to removal requests. Activist organisations that migrated their activities from their own online infrastructure to websites like YouTube have faced major drawbacks, as these organisations see their actions constrained by blocking, take-down or tracking practices. This transition to
external websites was mainly caused by three different reasons. First, the features of the social web facilitated online publishing – be it text, sound, image or video, which means more people could contribute with content, and to the circulation of that content. Second, it eliminated maintenance costs tied, for example, to server hosting, dominion ownership or technical support. Third, like for politicians and companies, it meant “following the people,” that is, to take political discussion where people already were, instead of trying to pull them to specific outside locations, and hence attract a wider audience.

Political commentary is equally muffled by corporations due to their avidness to control the images and sound that often provide raw material for online video. YouTubers employ remixing and humour as methods of exposing the weaknesses of politicians and the political system, following the long-standing tradition of satirists, countering messages created in the context of institutional political communication. Remixing implies that not only the strategies of political actors are exposed, but also the inner workings of the media and the relation between the two. Through image manipulation, politicians and media actors are turned into their own discrediting representatives, participating in their own mockery. Humour therefore plays a role in twenty-first century political discussion, rather than merely diverting the attention of citizens from such matters. In this sense, satirical remixing may be regarded as a new form of participation, especially as cause-oriented political action, and contribute to the formation of counterpublics, bringing new vitality to democratic debate.

Deliberation is not easy, which explains why it is often argued that it may not be a feasible model to be fully adopted in our democracies: it needs highly informed citizens, willing to compromise and constantly engaged in political affairs. As to online satirical remixes' value in the promotion of more deliberative models of democracy, it is necessary to consider that emotions weigh in decision-making, including the political kind, and they may play an important role in both grabbing the attention of viewers and thus contribute to raising awareness on specific issues, and galvanising them to take part in political discussion. In addition, satirical remixing appeals not only to the emotional side of citizens, but also to the intellect. By breaking down official messages, satirical remixing becomes a lesson in media literacy and rhetoric: it exposes how political images – in the broad sense of the word – are produced, are arranged and can be manipulated. Moreover, the intertextual character of both satire and remix imposes high demands on video watchers, as to fully understand the
Notwithstanding its role in denouncing the flaws in the media, politicians, political institutions and political systems and triggering political discussion, there are limitations to satirical remix as a tactic for affecting the balance of power. Participation in political debate may be restricted to finger-pointing instead of looking for consensus building or offering proposals of the citizens' own making. Political satirical remix's contribution to discussion is hence grounded on a negative stance, in which an agreement may be reached on what is undesirable, but it seldom offers alternatives and may even heighten divergence. Satire excludes both those who do not agree with the critique and the ones that do not understand it, thereby reinforcing the above mentioned tendencies for balkanization. In addition, extreme positions are not only supported by the existence of echo chambers on YouTube, but also by excessively derisive criticism embedded in video. Still, in controversial matters, this turn towards severe and sometimes aggressive antagonism may develop in the discussion triggered by the video, in its own comments or video responses, as well as outside YouTube. Balkanisation and extremism contribute to an even more fragmented and polarised public sphere, one which moderate voices may find inhospitable for participation.

Highly derisive or nonsensical videos perform above all a safety valve function, and have reduced transformative consequences. Their focus of attention is only held until a new target of mockery comes along. Satirical remixes that appeal to knowledge of affairs, or even contribute to extending it, aim for a more permanent impact, that causes change in some way, even if only in terms of awareness. Like culture jamming in general, in order to be subversive political remixes must have a goal beyond the appropriation of images. In addition, such appropriation constricts criticism since dominant images may be able to carry over some of the dominant meanings embedded in them. Not only can the circulation of satirical remixes enable them be reframed and co-opted, on YouTube, they can turn from critique to generating profit, sometimes even for the benefit of the object of commentary. Uploading to YouTube leaves remixers and all participants in the resulting online discussion subject to the company's policies, with all the lack of control this implies. Mirroring the Janus nature of the Internet, the two worlds of YouTube, sharing in a gift economy and profit-seeking in a commodified environment, are in constant tension. The proposal of legal instruments like the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) and the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) shows there are
many interests in increasing restrictions in the creation and sharing of content which raise concerns regarding freedom of expression. Be that as it may, their failure in being approved due to public outrage, transmitted to politicians through the protest actions of many activist organisations as well as individual citizens, reveals that the restriction of online rights merits strong reactions and that lobbying by corporations finds some resistance in tipping the scale towards commodification. Whether this is only temporary and represents but a delay in a preset orientation, or if it is in fact a sign of significant changes in the economic, political, social and cultural system, remains to be seen. A few decades are a very short time period to achieve a clear perception of transformations over the long haul.

The creation, sharing and commenting of YouTube videos are carried out in the context of political discussion, but not always as expected – or desired – by politicians and political institutions. These forms of online participation, however, are constrained by the commercial environment in which they take place, weakening their subversive and transformative potential. Yet, we learn by playing, and the manipulation of media images has become part of the way we play with meaning and politics. If in Juvenal's time it may have been difficult not to write satire, in today's world, it is also hard not to sing, paint, film or remix it.
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ANNEX I

YouTube videos analysed in the dissertation (by date of upload)

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2011-05-12, Day 9 of 'Mastering YouTube in Fifteen Days' by Jessica Kellgren-Hayes
2011-07-11, Fair Use School: Response to YouTube's Copyright School
2011-07-16, Rules of Engagement | Old Spice Mano a Mano, OldSpice
2011-10-06, José Manuel Barroso's Live Interview, live streaming by YouTube
n.d., Contest 2/12/09
n.d., electronic republic
n.d., International Call in Sick Campaign
n.d., Japanese title: 超ぶっちゃけトーク】1/4 中山前大臣・ 独占インタビュー 【その真相とは？！】H20/10/02, uploaded bySakuraSoTV
n.d., Killer Chemtrails: The Shocking Truth
n.d., Nick Griffin - Euro MEP plans for BNP
n.d., Re: America: Sweet Freedom
n.d., Re: Transylvania: Sweet Freeblood
n.d., YouTube's Mass Censorship (S1959)
ANNEX II

Official documents analysed in the dissertation

European Union

COM documents: proposed legislation and other European Commission communications to the Council and/or the other institutions, and their preparatory papers (EU definition)


THE POLITICS OF YOUTUBE


SEC documents: internal documents associated with the decision-making process and the general operation of European Commission departments (EU definition)


Other official sources


The Politics of YouTube


Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development


Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations

